





# GIVE ME SANCTUARY

Today's bathrooms combine outstanding design and technological innovation to create spa-like oases

BY SUSAN KELLY



Photo courtesy of Canaroma Bath & Tile

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**BATHROOMS ARE BIG—LITERALLY.** Not only is it increasingly essential to create a show-stopping, elegant oasis, but architects and home builders are allocating more space than ever to these spa-like rooms.

“As life gets more complicated, a place where we can be unplugged, away from emails and phone calls, becomes even more important,” says Glen Peloso, principal at Glen Peloso Interiors.

In past decades the space devoted to the bathroom was relatively small, says this expert who has appeared as featured designer on *W Network's Take This House and Sell It!* Now Peloso finds it's not uncommon for a homeowner to sacrifice half of a spare bedroom in the name of a master bath expansion project.

It takes extra square footage, after all, to accommodate the standalone spa tub, separate glass-enclosed shower, plus enough storage to ensure uncluttered enjoyment—the minimum accoutrements of today's bathrooms.

“The experience of going to a spa is no longer exotic,” says Peloso. Spas were once a vacation splurge, but urban spas have brought the experience to our doorsteps, making the joys of heat and steam close to hand. “It was a logical next step to want to recreate some of that experience in our own homes.” And thanks to new technologies and installation techniques, we can.

Design experts say that personalizing the bathroom is the biggest bathroom trend today. Yet how to do that when the vogue is toward streamlined and contemporary bathrooms? “Modern décor by nature relies on natural materials to add warmth and personality and textural interest to the design,” says Francesco Di Sarra, founder and president of Capoferro, which specializes in the design and project management of architectural homes.

What's in: Di Sarra's clients are moving away from floor and wall tiles to slabs of marble or limestone. When cut and reassembled in the bath, it gives the impression of uninterrupted flow of rock face and allows the full effect of any natural veining. Wood for flooring and even walls is a growing trend, with the adventurous going for zebra wood, with walnut, cherry and ebony also strong contenders. ✎

*“The overall trend is to have clean, uncomplicated lines, adding textural interest with the wood finish.”*



Photo courtesy of Neff Kitchens

Di Sarra's clients are also experimenting with shower enclosures made of two-way mirror. The person in the shower can easily see out into the room, while anyone entering the bathroom will see only his silhouette. Wall-mounted mirrors may conceal televisions or LED lighting installed behind them, until they are turned on and shine through. “It keeps the technology hidden but also allows, say, a gentleman to see himself while shaving and catching the latest televised business or sports news out of the corner of his eye,” says Di Sarra.

The cool elegance of Carrara marble is “hot, hot, hot,” says Pauline Nowak, principal at Neff Kitchens and Custom Cabinetry. It is in strong demand for everything from the bathroom sink and countertops to floor and wall tiles.

Carrera marble was once associated only with traditional interiors, but contemporary applications for this stone are more inventive and prevalent than before—understandable, given that marble comes in shades of grey, which continues its dominance as the go-to neutral colour. And, if you move into quartz countertops or tiles, or a swank new European laminate, there are also many shades of grey to choose from. “When used in bath décor, any grey will have a warm undertone,” says Nowak, “and, conversely, warm colours such as beige or cream with a slight grey undertone are what is new and modern.”

Textured wood for bathroom cabinetry, especially cut oak and walnut is becoming very important. So is liming, which gives a bleached, almost whitewashed finish to wood while letting the natural tone come through. “The overall trend is to have clean, uncomplicated lines,” she says, “adding textural interest with the wood finish.”



Photos by Philip Castleton  
Styling by Laurie Clark  
Courtesy of Capoferro

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*Photo by Simon Burn, SDB Images  
Courtesy of Glen Peloso Interiors*

#### ON-THE-WALL STYLE

One important trend is on rather than off the wall: “Floating fixtures – that is, wall-mounted toilet, sink, vanity or shower column – seem to be the hottest trend now,” says Pierre Descoteaux, chief executive officer of PierDeco Design. “Elevating fixtures and cabinetry makes the floor appear to go on forever, and the look is clean and very contemporary.”

A combination of plumbing run discreetly behind walls plus sophisticated mounting mechanisms makes this trend possible, creating a design revolution. Among the many floating options at PierDeco: designer Antonio Bullo’s KAPA or SHIFT lines of fixtures, all wall-mounted, for Plavisdesign.

Another trend is fixtures that have multiple functions yet keep the mechanisms hidden. Some shower heads have embedded LED lights with a range of colours for those who are into chromotherapy, scented oils for a little aromatherapy, and built-in speakers for music from personalized playlists.



*Photo courtesy of Andros Kitchen & Bath Designs*



*Photos courtesy of Canaroma Bath & Tile*



PierDeco’s AquaMassage shower column provides everything from an overhead rain shower head to massaging jets for aching back muscles, all in one sleekly designed unit. “When my adult son moved out, this shower column is the one thing he said he couldn’t live without,” Descoteaux says.

His offspring is not alone in a fascination with high-tech and multifunction bathroom fixtures, according to Anthony Gaudio, general manager of Amati Canada, specialists in this area. “There are more options than ever to help create an in-home tropical oasis,” he says.

Many toilets today can be programmed for each user, remembering their preferences in streaming music, seat temperature, and whether or not they use the integrated bidet and massage function. The Regio toilet by Inax even opens and shuts the seat automatically – no more his-her argument-inducing habits – and, in the dark, the bowl is illuminated with a soft, guiding light. ☞

You may not need or want all those features. But even the simplest shower these days will have a programmable control panel. “It allows you to personalize your shower so that it remembers, say, that the lady of the house prefers a gentle mist while her husband goes for a drenching rain,” Gaudio says. “Inset into the wall, it can also help control water flow for those who are concerned with conservation.”

Beyond gadgetry, everyone is splashing out more for custom touches for the bathroom, says Anastasia Rentzos, a certified kitchen and bathroom designer with Andros Kitchen & Bath Designs. “Unique taps are in high demand,” she says. “People want all the added touches to be distinctive.” And chrome is the metal of choice to add some extra shine to taps, soap dishes and other finishing flourishes.

Another way to carve distinctive style: wall niches. It could be as simple as cutting an inset into a shower wall to instantly eliminate the clutter that is anathema to contemporary design. Easy to install, the niche helps keep products in their place. The typical size is 14 inches x 14 inches, but many people opt for a custom size.

Niches may be any shape, from round to rectangular. They can hold sculptures or other decorative objects, or open shelving for more storage. “Because they leave the flat plane of the wall surface intact, they help create a feeling of spaciousness,” says Rentzos.



Photos courtesy of Canaroma Bath & Tile



Photo by Brandon Barré  
Courtesy of Projekt Home

Photo courtesy of The Gracious Living Centre



Photo courtesy of Canaroma Bath & Tile

When it comes to tiling the whole bathroom, more homeowners are willing to go for the bold in their colour choices, according to Chad Wright, sales manager of The Tile Store. They gravitate towards his wall displays of glass mosaic tiles in lime green, vibrant orange or cobalt blue. “They no longer talk themselves out of it and into a safe neutral palette, worrying about resale value,” he says. “They’re more interested in going with what they really like, with what makes them happy.”

They’re going big when it comes to floor tiles, with 18 x 36 inches and 12 x 24 inches now standard, and many tiles now come in 36 inches or larger. This approach is especially appropriate for contemporary bathroom design, since the larger the tile the fewer the seams, making a less-interrupted sweep of colour and texture. “Even in smaller washrooms, large-format tiles are becoming the norm,” Wright says. “The floor must be prepared perfectly, though. It’s very important to get the right contractor.”

All in all, when it comes to the modern bathroom, it seems living large is the best revenge.