

Owners pour cash into bathroom renovations

By Susan Wittman
Special to The Washington Examiner

Washington-area homeowners are spending more on bathroom renovations, paralleling a national trend. The number of bath and kitchen remodeling projects nationwide jumped 17 percent over the past two years, with bathrooms overtaking kitchens as the most popular project in 2009, according to a survey by the National Association of Home Builders.

That echoes a December survey by Better Homes and Gardens that found 31 percent of Americans want to remodel their baths, compared with 25 percent who target kitchens.

"By far, the No. 1 job today is baths, followed by kitchens, followed by good-size additions," said Joe Normandy, executive director of the National Association of the Remodeling Industry's Metro DC Chapter. "In all our member meetings, the extent of bathroom remodeling is the No. 1 topic of conversation. There is not an appreciable difference in the number of bath and kitchen renovations, but people are pouring a lot more money into bathrooms."

Normandy said recent declines in home values are keeping sellers from entering the market. Instead, they are remodeling, doing bathrooms first and kitchens second.

"A lot of people in this area already did their kitchens, and the work is not that appreciably old at this point," he added.

In the Washington area, they are spending more to jazz up not only master baths but every bathroom in the house, said Sean Ganey, architect and project leader at **BOWA**, a remodeling firm in Tyson's Corner.

Inside the Beltway, where space is at a premium and condo rules can limit options, Ganey said standard tubs are coming out and showers with multiple shower heads are going in.

"People want a contemporary, Zen-like, spaliqe ambiance, with

clean, Japanese-style lines," he said. "It works better for small spaces."

Ganey said projects include covering walls, floors and ceilings with stone tiles for a high-end feel with a practical edge. Showers generate steam, causing dry wall to peel and bubble. Watertight stone or tile eases worries about mildew or mold.

Also popular — ripping out cast-iron radiators and embedding radiant heat in floors and showers. This "gives the same dry heat without losing floor space and transforms the chilly hard stone," Ganey added.

Beyond the Beltway, especially in Northern Virginia and Montgomery County, homes are larger, and Country French or English Manor style is in demand. The more spacious rooms in some of these houses make it possible to install elaborate storage and relocate plumbing — enabling homeowners to carve out space for soaking tubs as well as separate showers, said Armin Bondoc, senior project designer for D.C.-based Landis Construction.

Despite stylistic differences along the Beltway divide, contemporary is becoming more popular in the region. Ganey and Bondoc noted traditional style projects once made up 75 percent of projects, but the percentage now is 50-50.

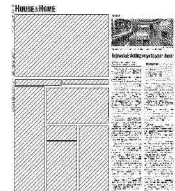
Natural materials like stone, granite and porcelain, or ceramic tiles that resemble stone, are in. Tiles are larger and textural.

"With less grout lines, the eye perceives a larger space and cleaner look," Bondoc said.

Traditional clients prefer subway or small mosaic tile.

Antique bronze and polished brass fixtures are out. Chrome and polished nickel, which enhance dark wood and stone, have made a "surprising" comeback, Ganey said.

Porcelain tile planks resembling wood bring the warmth of wood into the bath. Transoms, high windows, frosted glass doors and second-story skylights make bathrooms lighter, brighter and airy.





PHOTOS COURTESY BOWA

The number of bath remodeling projects nationwide jumped 17 percent over the past two years, making it the most popular project.



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