

Bathroom gets transformed with luxury touches

BY MARY HELLMAN JAMES
Copley News Service

Bathrooms, once the most utilitarian rooms in the house, are today are among the most luxe. Whirlpool tubs, steam showers and other luxuries have made them in-home spas and relaxing retreats.

Now, designers and furniture makers are raising the bar on bath decor. They are furnishing guest and master baths just as they would a living room — with custom, stylish furniture.

"The bathroom is the final frontier of home decorating and the ultimate setting for personal retreat and rejuvenation," said Kim Shaver, director of marketing and communications for Hooker Furniture.

"Designer cabinets are a way to add warmth, style and personality so that the room is not just functional, but beautiful."

Two years ago, Hooker pioneered this trend with a collection of designer sink cabinets that draw on classic furniture styles from regency to cottage. The Virginia company has recently added coordinated linen armoires to the collec-

tion. Prices range from \$749 to \$1,799. (You can view the complete line on Hooker's Web site, www.hookerfurniture.com.)

"These pieces are very practical," Shaver said. "The designer sink cabinets are ready to install — the sink is there, the faucets and the plumbing hookups. Plus we build in plenty of storage. For example, our linen armoire has deep drawers for towels and a drawer for jewelry. That's where most women put on their jewelry, isn't it?"

In the interim, other furniture manufacturers have introduced their own lines for the bath, ranging from Pulaski's hand-painted back of a toilet to Stanley's youth bed and bath storage bench and Bassett's Provencal French-style vanity with a hand-painted hen and rooster.

Sales of these ready-to-install pieces in a variety of finishes have soared, according to the American Furniture Manufacturers Association, an industry trade group.

"These pieces not only bring style and personality, they are highly functional

for the limited space they occupy," said Jackie Hirschhaut, AFMA vice president.

The trend in bath furniture is consumer driven, said Amity Krause, project designer with Expo Design Center's San Diego store.

"In my experience, this goes back to clients who fell in love with a piece of antique furniture and wanted to use it to give a bath real atmosphere," she said. "They would take a beautiful dresser or buffet, add a vessel sink to create a one-of-a-kind look."

"Now we're seeing a demand for more decorative furnishings, with more detail, distinctive details. Clients are giving their baths a lot of attention."

Any style bathroom cabinet can be accessorized for a furniture look with the simple addition of feet.

Bun feet on an antiqued white cabinet can give a French Country look, for example," Krause said. "Plus by using cabinets, you're not limited to an antique look. You can do contemporary as well."

Expo also carries an exclusive line of furniture-look vanities by Pegasus, in

styles ranging from Asian to Old World and today's popular Island looks. These solid wood pieces include modern storage such as slide-out shelves and carousels and can be topped with the sink and counter tops of your choice.

Vanity prices, depending on size and finish, range from \$900 to \$1,300.

Companion mirrors from \$200 to \$350 also are available.

"Another line I'd mention is Omega because they have a selection of bath cabinets in a lot of styles," Krause said, who has been designing kitchens and baths for a decade. "Using pieces like these enable us to make a bathroom feel comfortable, rather than a cold, forgotten functional space."

As demand for bath furniture continues to grow, expect more high style and consumer-friendly details, said Hooker Furniture's Kim Shaver. "Our newest designer sink cabinets have under-mounted sinks, which are very popular right now," she said. "There also is a pull-out stepping stool for kids so that they are able to reach the sink."



CNS Photo courtesy of Hooker Furniture

Hooker Furniture's growing line of bathroom furniture includes vanities and linen armoires in a variety of styles with fine details.

Make room

With the big kids off to college and out of the way, it's time to pay some attention to the younger ones. What better way to give kids some attention than to refurbish their rooms?

Bedrooms are very important in the psyche of kids and teenagers — in a survey conducted by Rust-Oleum (the paint people), 36 percent of the boys questioned

and 42 percent of the girls said they consider their bedrooms to be their "personal getaways."

Girls wanted a look that was bold and colorful (51 percent) or heavy on "flower power" (21 percent). Boys wanted a sports theme (42 percent). And what did the parents in this survey want? Sixty-one percent said that having more money to buy high-quality materials was crucial.

Rust-Oleum offers some

tips on how to accomplish all these goals. For instance: In a girl's room, an eclectic group of furniture can look "charmingly color coordinated when painted the same shade ... Using one main color unifies styles of furniture and accessories."

In a boys' room, paint a wall with (Rust-Oleum's) chalkboard paint, turning the entire wall into a chalkboard. Add a child-size picnic table for a place to play games. (CNS)

Dinner and TV?

If you like to watch reality TV or news while you're eating, LG Electronics has got a deal for you.

The consumer products manufacturer makes a side-by-side refrigerator that has a cable-ready, 13.5 inch television screen in its right door (along with an FM radio, two speakers and a TV tuner).

"The kitchen is fast

becoming the family room for today's consumers and dinner is the one meal the entire family tends to spend together," said Simon Kang, president of the home appliance division of LG Electronics.

"With LG's new TV refrigerator, families can prepare and enjoy dinner without missing their favorite news and entertainment shows."

In addition to giving families the wonderful opportunity of vegging out in

front of the TV while eating their veggies, the refrigerator also features a multi-function digital LCD display that allows consumers to change the temperature in the refrigerator and freezer; an ice maker; and a water dispenser.

The refrigerator is 26 cubic feet, available in black and titanium finishes, and has curved aluminum handles. The suggested retail price is between \$3,000 and \$3,200. (CNS)

On call 24/7

When things start going wrong with your house, don't you wish you had a resident handyman — someone always there to answer your questions?

Consumer Reports is keeping a virtual handyman on call 24/7 at the magazine's Internet arm. The free Home Improvement Guide has information about repairs, remodeling and projects both indoors and outdoors. It presents a problem and offers possible causes, such as drip edges for a leaky roof.

For the free guide, go to www.consumerreports.org. Type "home improvement guide" in the search area.

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Toilet trivia

OK, women, it's not our imagination — men actually do leave the toilet seat up more than we do.

According to a survey conducted by the plumbing fixtures company, Kohler, only 66 percent of the men questioned said they put the toilet seat down, compared to 74 percent of the women surveyed.

Other points of interest discovered in the survey:

- 27 percent of 1,000 adults surveyed claimed to have experienced a toilet clog every month.

- Some 57 percent of the respondents had toilets more than 10 years old in their homes, installed prior to the release of most high-efficiency toilets.

- Those who live in the West have the newest toilets, 56 percent are less than 10 years old, while in the Northeast, 23 percent are older than 20 years old.

- And 40 percent of Americans age 65 and older are more likely to clean their toilets more than six times per month.

For more, log on to www.kohler.com. (CNS)

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