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## CHOICES

# There's no end to bathroom add-ons

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Luxury continues to shape today's bathroom design, as hot tubs, fancier showers, rustic stone tile and high-end fixtures rule the day.

As busy home buyers look for a personal retreat, they are increasingly using their creativity in the master bathroom. Many are modeling their bathrooms after hotels and resorts, adding luxurious steam showers, multiple shower heads and a bubbling whirlpool tub for relaxation. The result is a mini-spa experience any time of day or night.

"People are still spending a lot of money on upgrades for the master bath," said Peggy Holloway, design counselor for Ferris Homes. "That's where they start their day and end their day."

If space allows, most buyers are adding both a shower and bathtub. The large soaking or whirlpool tub becomes one focal point in the room and is adjacent to the shower stall. While the shower stall is considered the more functional area, it still is equipped with fancy body sprays and designer tile.

Others are focusing all the attention on the bathtub.

"Bathtubs are no longer being shoved in the corner," Holloway said. "They're in the middle of the room and are a focal point."

The tub might have a rich wood base that is rectangular. Or some "free-floating" bathtubs are modeled after the old fashioned claw-foot tubs found in vintage homes.

The claw-foot bathtubs often are paired with a decorative faucet mounted from the wall, while the more contemporary bathtubs have a sleek faucet mounted on the tub deck.

These bathtub and shower areas also are being accented with large vanities, often with furniture detailing. While a single, 24- or 36-inch vanity might have sufficed years ago, it is seen as too limiting today.

Many people are looking for larger vanities for storage and ease of use. The vanities often are accented with vertical molding, distressed finishes and furniture-styled legs. Many bathroom vanities are 60



inches wide and may be topped with a granite or marble slab.

"It seems like a necessity," said Carmelo Buttitta, sales manager for Keating Development. "People are looking for a double vanity because you have a lot of husbands and wives getting ready together in the bathroom."

Accordingly, a popular layout provides a "his" and "her" bathroom design, which offers private space for each person.

The floor also is a place to showcase luxury, whether the surface is limestone, granite or marble, or perhaps a tile that resembles stone. Many porcelain tiles do a good job of mimicking the character found in natural stone. There also are tiles that resemble wood.

"With porcelain tile, you can get an oak look, a bamboo look or a weathered walnut," Holloway said. "It's just a different look and a great alternative to hardwood floors."

Once all the components are in place, it's time to add in some technology. The same flat-screen televisions and surround sound that have taken over the family room and basement are being added in the master bathroom.

Some buyers add a large television above a whirlpool tub or have a small one added on a shelf that can be seen from the shower. Surround sound then is piped into the bathroom through a few well-placed speakers.

The finishing touch for many luxury bathrooms comes in the form of heat flowing under the floor. Those who cringe at the thought of walking onto cold tiles after a hot shower can crank up the heat before turning on the water.

Radiant heating can be installed under many floor surfaces and is added when the floor is built. It can be connected to a boiler and run off the main heating system or can employ an electric mat placed under the floor. With either method, the homeowner can turn on the heat as needed to take the chill out of those early spring mornings.

"The electric mat is meant for a small area, like one bathroom," said Curtis Perlman, project manager for Empeco Custom Builders.

A larger, hydronic system connects to the boiler, he said, "and, for cost purposes, we recommend homeowners do several rooms."

With hydronic heat, the floor will remain cold unless the boiler is running. Those who want heated floors during the spring or summer months might prefer electric heating, which can be turned on any time.

As the master bathroom becomes more luxurious, the overall spa environment continues to grow. Some extend their pampering beyond the bathroom into an adjacent sitting area or workout room.

"People are building these bathrooms where they can have a workout room around the corner," said Donna Stembridge, a vice president and owner of Stembridge Builders Inc. "The room is big enough for a treadmill and bicycle and they can jump right into the shower after working out."

With all this luxury around the house, why go on vacation?

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