It's Only Natural

Natural materials have been cleverly used to incorporate texture and tone into an otherwise neutral colour palette in this spectacular family bathroom. Timber is by far the stand-out element with a combination of reclaimed messmate and cedar seamlessly incorporating to bring warmth to the room.

The stunning, slim-line vanity with solid timber construction was an achievement in itself. In consultation with the plumber, computer aided design was used to plan the vanity to the millimetre—this was necessary to ensure plumbing components could be installed while endeavouring to maximise storage—three shallow drawers run the length of the vanity-top. Clad in reclaimed solid timber, a finger grip beneath the drawer front was included to remove the requirement for handles.

Above the vanity, a full-wall mirror with carefully planned penetrations for lighting and wall-hung tapware reflects the open showering zone. A full length storage niche services the shower and bath area and is coupled with recessed LED lighting which highlights the stunning wall tiles.

An open shelving unit, fitted with power points provides point-of-use storage for electrical appliances at the vanity. For convenience, a magnifying mirror was installed here and it can be retracted when not in use. Additional storage is available with a full height cabinet at the bathroom entry. The streamlined look is preserved with touch opening doors. The finer details within the joinery are not overlooked—the cabinet has a low-gloss two-pack finish and is fitted with brass shelf supports. The drawer hardware is powder coated black and black colourboard was used in the carcass construction. The owners are absolutely thrilled.

- Nev Hargreaves, Hargreaves Joinery, VIC.
Balance can be difficult to achieve in bathrooms without a few tricks up your sleeve.

Using the principles of scale and proportion, designers can create or minimise points of emphasis. If a bathroom is out of scale or oddly proportioned, it will create a point of emphasis (focal point) that can be used to advantage (e.g. to draw attention to a particular feature) if you are clever about the layout. Most well-designed rooms have several elements that make them so, including the right scale and proportion. They will also have a sense of symmetry.

Scale and Proportion
A clear understanding of scale and proportion and their relationship with one another is essential in design. Scale refers to the overall size of the bathroom, while proportion refers to relative size of the fixtures within the room (e.g. an oversize bathtub may look out of proportion in a very small bathroom). Standard design rules will often be disregarded where scale might be affected—for example in a small space, the usual convention of grouping three pendant lights together may result in the space being overcrowded, and so only two lights will be specified.

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Proportion evaluates the relationship between parts (fixtures) of a whole (the bathroom). It pertains to the design of objects, such as cabinetry, and their placement in the bathroom layout. The size of the wall and floor tiles should also be considered in relation to the size of the room. It is important when designing a bathroom to get the proportion just right. To do this, take a close look at the scale of the room as this will influence the size and colour of fixtures and finishes that are chosen. In a small bathroom, smaller fittings and fixtures will present a better design aesthetic. In a large bathroom, bold patterns and grand fixtures will be visually appealing.

Balance is not always about symmetry. Balance can also be created by having other elements that offer balance to elevation. For instance in this bathroom, we have an open space to the left of the vanity. To establish a balanced design aesthetic we created the open boxes to the right hand side. The differing elements are connected and grounded by the offset benchtop and the carefully selected materials.
Natural Light

Natural light is restful for the eye and enters the bathroom from windows or skylights. Most bathrooms have at least some access to natural light (although a windowless bathroom is not unheard of) and bathroom designers need to take this into account. Clever lighting design will make the most of what natural light is available and make it work within the overall lighting plan for the room. However, as levels of natural light vary throughout the day and at different times of the year, it cannot be relied upon as the main light source in a bathroom.

Skylights and roof windows are popular means of introducing natural light into windowless or dim rooms. Before specifying modifications that involve the roof, arrange for the home to be examined by a licensed building contractor to ensure any planned construction alterations will be within the client’s budget.
A bathroom renovation brings a new set of challenges for designers. Often, a compromise has to be struck—while the relocation of plumbing, drainage and electrical services can be costly, don’t be bound to the old layout for the sake of a few dollars. Helen Tadello of Sugar Designs says: ‘designers should not constrain themselves to the existing footprint unless budget is the absolute driving factor. Think outside of the box. If you can steal a little bit of room from another space next to the bathroom to fit in a freestanding bath or a double shower then explore the potential and create a little bit of opulence for your client.’

In the past, a small area of a house plan would have been designated for the bathroom and the space planned to fit the basic fixtures (basin, shower, bath and toilet) with not much additional thought given to the functionality of the design. Today, you may be asked to include any combination of fixtures, often in multiples. As well, these days more space is set aside for bathrooms in new homes and, with fixtures now coming to market in all shapes and dimensions, there is no such thing as ‘standard’ bathroom sizing. That said, in any design, functionality not fixtures, should be the dominant consideration and determining factor for the final layout.

Initially, you should examine the space carefully and try to envisage how the activity centres will perform on a day-to-day basis. If it looks like the desired layout will interrupt the function and flow of a bathroom, don’t be afraid to revisit this with your client as they may need to reconsider the wish-list for an overall better design. To this end, it can be useful to ask your client to rank their inclusions from most to least important. Many clients will be unrealistic about how much will fit in their new bathroom before functionality is compromised. It will save a lot of time if you understand which items are non-negotiable from the outset. Computerised design programs will assist you when presenting layout options to demonstrate to your client and explain why a particular layout is more suitable than another.

In any layout, understanding the bathroom activity centres is the key principle for a good design. The following basic layouts can be applied to most bathrooms and are a good starting point.

### Traditional
A traditional bathroom layout has the doorway, shower, bath and vanity each occupying a corner with not much room to move in between. The toilet is housed in an adjacent cubicle. In a small space (1.5m x 2.5m), this layout would have limited storage opportunities for even the most creative designer and would be best suited to a single user. For improved functionality exclude the bathtub, use a shower over-bath design or increase space by removing the dividing toilet wall.

### One-wall
The one-wall is the simplest of layouts and is well suited to a long, narrow room. Fixtures are all set along one wall with all plumbing placed in close proximity, keeping those costs to a minimum. A half-height nib wall can be used to ‘hide’ the toilet and provide additional privacy. Placing the toilet discreetly behind the vanity unit on the one-wall layout hides it from view from the entrance door.

### Galley
A galley-style layout with fixtures on opposing walls is common where two entries are required (such as in a combined bathroom/ensuite). Generally the bathtub and toilet are located to one side with the vanity, shower and storage on the other. The minimum recommended walkway through a galley bathroom is 900mm. In a walk-through layout, an open shower is not recommended because of the safety issues presented by water splashing across the thoroughfare. If the space is small, a dual-access bathroom will limit design options and designers should ask their clients to reconsider whether the additional doorway is absolutely necessary.

**Galley-style layout has walk-through either end of this luxury master ensuite. The defining element is the striking mosaic profile of David which clads an entire wall.**

Don’t be afraid to ask your client to reconsider their wish-list if you believe the design will be compromised by trying to fit everything in.

### Design Tip
If you have the luxury of designing a bathroom in a large space, experiment with different layout options, such as moving the doorway away from the corner, to provide a better design aesthetic.
In this digital age there is a vast array of products and programs to suit a range of needs. When used properly, digital technology can have a positive impact on any number of businesses, including those of bathroom designers and specialists.

Digital technology can help you to:
- improve your designs
- enhance client communication
- increase sales
- reduce errors
- improve margins
- save time

Digital technology can be used for a variety of functions, such as:
- marketing
- sales
- digital site measure
- design
- manufacturing and construction specifications
- project management
- digital photography.

The first step in digitising your business is to decide what function you need. Do you need to reach more potential clients with online marketing? Could your business benefit from more streamlined project management and coordination of tradespeople? Once you have established this you will be able to assess available products and programs and choose one that is the right fit for your business.

There is currently no single program that is able to provide for every requirement across a bathroom specialist’s business. If you have a clear idea about what you are seeking to manage and the features you will need, you will be able to confidently assess the potential of the programs that are available on the market.

When selecting a program there are many factors that must be considered, including:
- Is it difficult to learn and use? (It is supposed to make your life easier.)
- What is the upfront and ongoing outlay? Will your existing hardware require replacement? Can you purchase add-on features later to spread your investment?
- How much upfront and ongoing training is included? Is customer support provided online, over the phone, or face-to-face?
- Can the program be customised to suit your business? Can it calculate GST (or not) per contractor?
- How many users and devices (tablets, laptops, desktops, smart phones) will it integrate? Will it grow with your business?
- How frequent are software updates available?
- Will your internet provider be able to provide sufficient data transfer to run the programs?
- Does the supplier provide a free trial period to road-test the program?

Remember to canvas the opinions of your team when assessing hardware and software, as they may have specific requirements in their area that you may not have considered.

At the end of the day you get what you pay for: free online software is usually missing key functions (for example, the ability to print designs) or may be ‘clunky’ to use. Take the time to research the best packages that can be used as a whole-of-business tool. Digital technology is a long-term investment for your business.

Marketing
Most bathroom specialists will use some form of advertising to maintain or increase their businesses’ work flow. The uptake of digital technology by consumers has meant that marketing your business online is more cost-effective and has greater reach than ever before.

If your website is difficult to navigate or the pages and images take too long to open, users will lose interest and move on.

Website
Your website is a full-colour brochure that contains important information about you and your business. It’s available day and night and, unlike printed brochures, can be instantly updated. Ensure your website is kept up-to-date by reviewing it regularly. As a minimum, websites should be updated every three months at the changing of the season. Also include testimonials from happy clients; these are invaluable for your business.

Presenting your work through colour photo galleries online will always draw an audience. Galleries should also be updated regularly to keep them fresh and interesting to return visitors. If you don’t have a website, there are a number of companies that will set up a basic site with limited functionality for a reasonable price.
The Client Interview

In order to produce an acceptable design solution, as the bathroom designer you should interview the client, if possible, in a face-to-face meeting, to ensure that you are comfortable and fully understand the desired outcome before commencing work.

Important information about the clients, such as the way in which they use their bathroom, their lifestyle, personal tastes etc., can be captured in general conversation and notes should be taken. The Client Interview Form (Appendix 1, page 294) can be used as a checklist to ensure important details are not overlooked.

Listening carefully and asking questions are the two most important parts of the initial design briefing.

Some designers provide clients with an interview form to be completed before the initial meeting so they have time to consider the project, their ideas and their responses. It is important to keep in mind that homeowners may have a different understanding of dimensions and will often overestimate their space requirements in a bathroom. At the same time, most will tend to underestimate the costs involved to achieve the desired result. It is up to you to advise the client not only with regard to the design, new products and colour trends, but also what is necessary for functionality without exceeding the budget. While the final design may not include everything on the wish-list, it must meet the users’ needs.

Questions should cover the following areas:

- site information and location
- ideas for the new bathroom—likes and dislikes
- lifestyle factors
- fixtures and fittings—required and desired
- colour scheme, style and desired look and feel
- any special features or accents
- individual needs and storage requirements
- the budget.

Collecting the information required may take several discussions. Clients should be encouraged to collect images and examples of bathrooms they like and explain what they like about them—this will provide a good starting point to ascertain their taste and preferences.

If your client has gathered images of bathrooms, ask what it is they find appealing. It may be a small detail; for example, the placement or style of a tap or an interesting lighting feature, a colour or texture and materials used. Conversely, determining what your client does not like is also an important part of this process.

Include questions on colour preferences, materials and the type of fixtures favoured. It can also be helpful to ask your client to rank their list of desired inclusions from most to least important. The budget may not cover every item on the wish-list; however, once you know the client’s priorities you can endeavour to include as much as the budget will bear.

Visit the site of the project early in the process or as part of the client meeting if possible. If the project is a renovation, it is important to clearly understand the connections to the room—both indoors and outdoors. An unused adjacent space may offer the extra floor space you are looking for or there may be an opportunity to make the most of an impressive view from a window. Perhaps there is a wardrobe in the adjoining room which can be used to insert the vanity.

For a new home project, where the canvas is usually blank, the designer may have the option to adjust window heights or door placements to help achieve the best design to suit the client’s brief. Be creative, armed with a comprehensive understanding of the client’s needs and by thinking outside the box you can create a bathroom design that exceeds expectations.

I often ask my clients what they don’t like about their current bathroom,” says designer Angela Gianakis from Outside Square South Australia. ‘The most common complaint is that they’re tripping over each other; it’s too small. People want the feeling of more space in the bathroom and—particularly for ensuites—they want extras like double vanities so two people can be in there at the same time. Other priorities, Angela adds ‘are the desire for luxury, privacy and storage—people want somewhere to escape.’

It is critical that site inspections are conducted for an existing house to identify the presence or potential presence of asbestos prior to any construction work being carried out. Homes that were built before 1987 may have building materials that contain asbestos in the bathroom and laundry (most common areas), and/or in the walls and ceilings. Don’t rely on hearsay to ascertain if asbestos is present or not. In some states and territories it is mandatory that all workers who may come in contact with asbestos be provided with awareness training. In all states and territories it is a requirement to be licensed to conduct asbestos removal work where the area exceeds 10 square metres. If you are in any doubt, please contact your local HIA office for further information and advice from the HIA Building Services team on 1300 650 620.

Randall Morrison from Bathrooms Are Us recommends designers carry out asbestos testing prior to commencing any design work—demolition costs can jump more than tenfold where asbestos management and removal is required and its presence call spell the end of a project. Randall warns that designers should be aware that asbestos and products containing asbestos were not banned throughout Australia until 2004.

What is the look and feel your client is wanting to create?
GUIDE TO BATHROOM PLANNING & DESIGN