

According to the Home Improvement Research Institute, there were 4.6 million new bathrooms created in 2004, along with 8 million bathroom remodeling projects. Together they constituted \$23.5 billion in plumbing supplies, a figure that's expected to top \$26 billion in 2006. With so much plumbing activity on the home front, is it any wonder that hotels are scrambling to upgrade appearances when it comes to bathrooms?

POWER BATHROOMS

A HOTEL'S PIECE DE
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by Chris McBeath

Opus Hotel



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Hilton Hotel

Indeed, with the proliferation of home renovation and design shows, travellers have become so ensuite savvy that they expect a hotel bathroom to offer out of the ordinary, luxurious comforts. And conversely, when guests visit a quality bathroom, they want to infuse those ideas into their home environment.

Today bathrooms possess such alluring star power of their own, they've become a big competitive edge to keep guests coming back for more.

"The lines between commercial and residential are getting quite blurred," notes Diana Schrage, an interior designer at the Kohler Design Center, one of North America's leading providers of bath-ware. "Guests have come to expect a degree of innovation in upscale hotel bathrooms, and want them to have a more spa-like ambiance, with a touch of home."

Jean Kolb, Kohler's director of health, wellness and new products, agrees.

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In the new Immersion Suite Hotel where many of Kohler's products are test-driven, the bath is the pièce de resistance of the entire bedroom. "The whirlpool bath for two creates a very intimate atmosphere," says Ms Kolb. "Add chromotherapy, bathing by different coloured lights, and different styles of water treatment, and baths become a customized experience to suit your mood." Even the lavatory is given royal treatment. Kohler's Moxie Artist Edition lavatory features graded colour within its bowl as well as an eye-catching decorative apron of gemstones.



Hilton Hotel

Shower Power

The shower, too, is coming out of its closet-sized confines and evolving into a multi-purpose bathing experience. "Showers are very flexible. They can double as steam rooms, incorporate aromatherapy essences for a spa feeling, and sport a number of options for water delivery, with multi-function transfer valves and temperature control systems. Choices range from water tiles that can be placed on the ceiling or walls, to body sprays, and the ever popular shower roses," says Ms Schrage.

John Kuharchuk, from The Alchemy Group (which had a hand in designing the Westin Grand and the Opus hotels, among others), sees the bathroom as critical in how a property positions itself in the marketplace. "After the bed, a guest spends the most time in the bathroom," he notes, "so the bathroom has the opportunity to make a very definite statement of lasting value."

At the Adara Boutique Hotel, set to open in Whistler on December 15, showers are the bathrooms' focal point. Some of the elements in the Adara bathrooms reflect many new trends in bathroom design. "We eliminated the bathtub altogether in favour of a much larger shower

space, which in itself gives a sense of luxury,” says Mr. Kuharchuk. Larger showers and tubless bathrooms - a growing trend south of the border - also lend themselves to installing items such as teak benches and even fog-proof televisions, complete with waterproof remote controls. The surfaces, too, are another leading-edge feature, and are coordinated with the striking artwork of Brent Comber, a Whistler-based artist. Nearly everything found within Adara has been custom designed specifically for the hotel, and Comber’s influence flows into the bathrooms. “Photography of his alder bench is used for shower screens so there’s a real sense of continuity,” explains Mr. Kuharchuk. The countertops, made of engineered composite granite, keep within the tonal feel of the hotel, and were chosen “because the material retains its beauty and sheen for an exceptionally long time, and doesn’t require sealing.”

Geared to the corporate traveller, The Hilton Toronto has just refurbished its executive bathrooms, and these rooms are bathless like the Adara. “Business travellers prefer the efficiency of showers,” says Louise Dupont of the hotel’s design firm, Lemay Michaud. “With the extra space we’re able to equip that shower very well with multiple water options. Showers also have a cleaner, brighter appeal, and are much easier to maintain.”



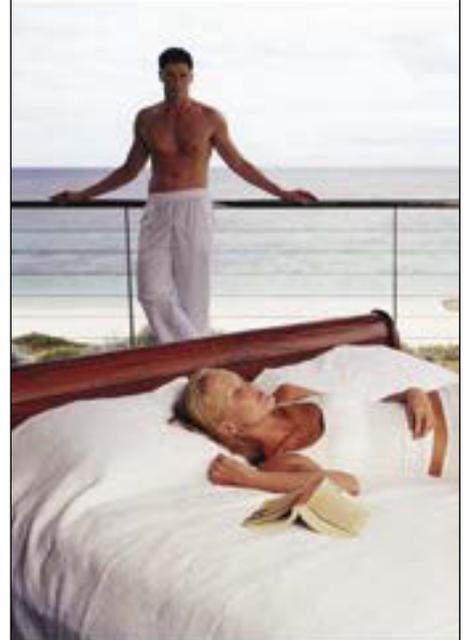
Tub Luxury

For now, however, the tub is holding its own and promises to be around for some time to come, albeit deeper, bigger, and increasingly

“The lines, shape and concept make it a very intimate and scintillating bathing experience.”



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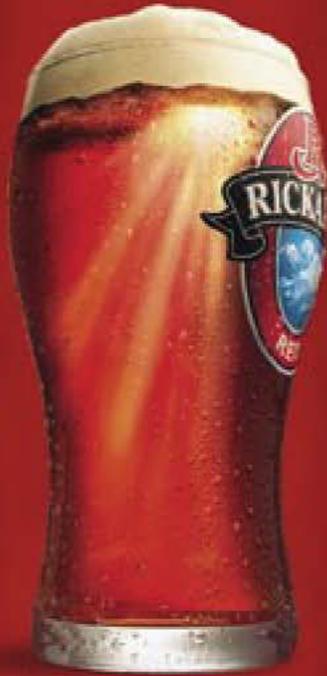
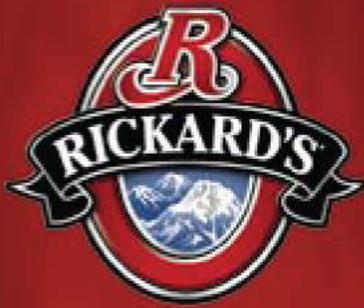
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A PINT OF GLORY

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Les Place D'armes

multi-functional. Jetted systems have given way to the gentler (and easier to maintain) aerated whirlpools, floor and ceiling filling tubs are replacing those fed by regular faucets, and stand alone claw-foot bath tubs are still very much in vogue. Most designers agree that if you have the space, make them the focal point of the room. This advice has resulted in many a bathtub moving into the bedroom itself. "Bath tubs are becoming a definite statement of luxury," says Ms Dupont, "and are a way of defining suites from regular rooms."

For New York based designer Alexandra Champalimaud, who was responsible for the recent renovation of both guestrooms and bathrooms at The Berkeley Hotel in London, the bath is the epitome of luxury. "We are all more sensitive to what constitutes an average versus a good product," she says. "Hollow sounding or shallow tubs simply don't add any guest benefit." Ms Champalimaud has, in fact, designed a tub that embodies the sensuality of bathing. The prototype is a curvaceous, semi-transparent tub, formed with an acrylic cast so that it can enjoy a freestanding position. "The lines, shape and concept make it a very intimate and scintillating bathing experience," she says. The translucent tub has generated a great deal of industry interest and she is currently looking for the "right hotel fit" to bring the tub to market.

Quick Fixes for Modest Dollars

As bathrooms acquire star status, hotellers are going to be hard pressed to live with the status quo. But if budget is an issue, there are decorating ideas that can help upgrade the feel of an outdated

bathroom. Interior Designer Meg Rodgers gave The Rittenhouse Hotel bathrooms a new look this year, and shares this advice: lower the towel racks by a couple of inches to make room for artwork or a decorative mirror, clear the countertops (especially important in small rooms) by getting the magnifying mirror onto the wall, look to wall-mounted rather than deck-mounted faucets, add a shelf above the toilet, use wallpaper and paint to warm the room, and if the ceiling is plain, add crown moldings.

Other ideas that can create a luxurious touch include accessorizing to complete a coordinated look while reducing clutter (e.g. wall-mounted toothbrush tumblers, and a generous use of towel bars, rings and robe hooks). Free standing furniture, such as cabinets and dresser-style vanities, help to create a living space with personal statement. Fog-free mirrors are fast becoming a necessity and fresh water, either bottled or dispensed, is a thoughtful gesture for brushing teeth, taking medicines or for the bedside.

As the purse strings loosen, consider bathroom mini bars that stock exclusive spa products of boutique purveyors such as Fresh, Sugar, and Philosophy over the ubiquitous Aveda and Crabtree products. Other extras include heated floors, towel racks, toilet seats, use of exotic woods such as walnuts in cabinetry, space-saving wall mounted lavatories, geometric, square vessels and hardware with larger, shallower bowls (watch for a trough-like pedestal with his/her faucets vs. dual sinks), and mix'n match controllable lighting that can add a romantic ambiance to the entire spa – uh, bath experience. ☛

IF YOU CAN SAY YES TO TWO OR MORE OF THESE ITEMS, IT'S TIME FOR A BATHROOM REFIT

1. Are there cracks or is the finish coming off tubs and/or sinks?
2. Does the bathroom still use fluorescent strip lighting?
3. Are the mirrors plate glass?
4. Does the bathroom have laminate vanity counter tops, or cultured marble counter tops with integral sinks?
5. Are the floor tiles smaller than 6 inches by 6 inches?
6. Is there tarnished brightwork i.e. metal parts or fixtures made bright by polishing?

A SPRINKLING OF IDEAS AT WORK

- Le Place D'Armes Hotel in Montreal recently underwent a \$21 million expansion, and now takes up three adjoining 19th century historic buildings. Believing the bathroom to be the most overlooked hotel experience, owners created executive suite bathrooms that vary in size from 95 to 120 square feet, and include flat screen TV, large glassed-in showers, and turbo-jet soaking tubs.



- The new skyloft bathrooms at the MGM Grand, Las Vegas, feature spacious (4'x10') "immersion chambers" with waterfalls, steam, rain showers and a breathtaking view of Las Vegas. A television has been placed within the bathroom mirror and Infinity-edge soaking tubs feature a "champagne bubbles" massage as well as a 32-inch LCD monitor.

- As part of its upcoming \$35 million transformation, Sofitel Los Angeles is upgrading bathrooms with large soaking tubs with televisions, and oversized rain showers enclosed by switchlite glass panels. Switchlite is a device that allows the user to frost the glass at the turn of a switch, providing total privacy for the person inside the shower stall, while still enabling him to see outside.

- Fairmont Hotels & Resorts has partnered recently with exclusive London perfumer Miller Harris to revitalize its bathroom products. Two different, truly unisex product lines are being introduced: Citron Citron for city centre guests, and Fleur du Matin for resort guests. Each hotel line includes fragrant body lotion, body wash, soap, shampoo, conditioner and bubble bath. The complete range will be available in Fairmont stores in early 2006.

- Shutters on the Beach, Santa Monica has morphed its website into a smart opportunity that showcases the property with a button-friendly inter-activity that lets users see, and purchase, the details of its bathroom accessories and other products. It's a simplified version of the full-on marketing approach of Westin's Heavenly Bath program.

- Capitalizing on the indigenous trend, at the Ikal del Mar Resort, Playa del Carmen, the bathrooms are infused with a traditional Mayan theme. Designs incorporate elements of curves and circles that the Mayans believed promoted the good circulation of energy. Mirrors and windows are curved, and even the round basins are positioned in the middle of the bathroom.

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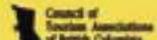
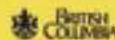


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