

Homeowners might want to think about the future when renovating bathrooms

By Alyson Ward | February 1, 2016 | Updated: February 1, 2016 11:25pm

2



Photo: Chuck Williams

IMAGE 1 OF 10

This master bathroom in The Woodlands used to have a built-in Jacuzzi tub. When the owners remodeled, they replaced it with a walk-through shower and a sleek freestanding tub.

When Janice and Cooper Aqrawi remodeled their Katy home, they practically gutted the Jack and Jill bathroom upstairs. To complement the new tile floors and granite counters, they initially wanted to replace the standard-issue bathtub with a walk-in shower, something modern and sleek.

Their contractor talked them out of it. Eliminating the bathtub, he said, would diminish the home's resale value.

"Let's say we sell (the house) and somebody else wants it for their two kids," Janice Aqrawi said. They began to worry that not having a tub in that space might make their home unattractive to a large group of potential buyers.

"I said, 'You know what, that's a really good point,' " she said. "Might as well not mess with it."

The Aqrawis, who use the Jack and Jill as a guest bathroom, decided to install a "regular old bathtub," Janice Aqrawi said - an updated version of what had been there since the house was built in 1999.

TRANSLATOR

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That's always been conventional wisdom, a gold rule of real estate: Keep your bathtub, or you'll have trouble when you want to sell the house. But increasingly, homeowners are doing exactly what the Aqrawis considered: They're ditching their standard-issue tubs and replacing them with all manner of spa-like showers.

Every year, bathroom remodels consistently are one of the top two home renovation projects, according to the National Association of Home Builders. (Kitchen renovations are the other.) While 15 or 20 years ago, a jetted, Jacuzzi-style garden tub was the ultimate luxury, trends have now turned toward swanky showers - walk-in and walk-through models with waterfall shower heads and wall-mounted body sprayers.

The options are ever more glamorous: Steam showers. Showers with recessed lighting and wall drains. Showers with frameless glass doors - or no doors at all.

And it's not just high-end homes that are getting the full spa treatment, says Greg Moore, whose Houston company, Re-Bath, renovates bathrooms. Even middle-class homeowners are ripping out their old tubs.

A lot of Moore's clients want to replace their builder-grade tub/shower combos. "Almost every single tract home has that," Moore said - a tub, a pony wall and a shower stall in the corner. "A lot of people are wiping that out and going with giant walk-in showers."

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And why not? "I think people like the spa feel," Moore said. "They're upgrading to body sprayers and rainfall shower heads, and they want to be able to just walk in."

If there's enough space, homeowners will sometimes add a freestanding bathtub, too - but that's not always the case, said interior designer Pamela O'Brien of Pamela Hope Designs.

"A lot of people, they may have plenty of money and plenty of space," she said. "But they're doing a big double shower, steam shower, much larger shower - and no tub at all."

So are bathtubs over, or are they still a crucial feature? If you're remodeling, should you still hesitate to toss the tub?

No. And yes. The key, real estate and remodeling pros say, is to consider a few key factors: Your situation, your surroundings and your future.

Think about how you live. If you have pets or young children, you probably want to keep the tub in at least one bathroom. After all, if you're bathing a dog or a small child, a bathtub still makes sense.

If your children are past the bath-taking age, you have more flexibility, but think ahead: Are there grandchildren in your future? If so, keep a tub in the house, even if it's in a guest bath.

Think about where you live. Eliminating bathtubs won't necessarily affect the resale value of your home. "I think it all depends on location," said Mike Mahlstedt, a Houston Realtor. "Different neighborhoods, for the most part, attract different demographics."

A tub will be far more important in a neighborhood that attracts young families. But that doesn't mean you have to give up your dreams of a walk-in shower. It's fine to eliminate the tub in the master bathroom, no matter where you are - just make sure you have another bathtub in the house.

"If you have the capability and you have more than one bath, I would definitely not eliminate two bathtubs," Mahlstedt said. "At least have a secondary (room) with a tub."

The Aqrawis got it right: Their 3 1/2-year-old son doesn't use the Jack-and-Jill guest bath, but in the future, another family might want to use the space to bathe children. Keeping a standard tub there was the right decision.

Meanwhile, though, if you live in a neighborhood with one-bedroom condos that appeal to young, single professionals, a tub might not be so crucial. "If you're under 1,000 square feet, a one-bedroom/one-bathroom (condo), I don't think it's as big a deal," Mahlstedt said.

Think about a layout that makes sense. If you want to hang onto a bathtub, think strategically about where it might make sense. How do you use your house? Sure, you might decide to keep a tub tucked away in an upstairs guest bath. But will it meet your needs - and the needs of future residents - if the lone bathtub is hard to reach, in a seldom-used corner of the second floor?

Consider your own future in the home. Do you want to stay there as you age? If so, a first-floor bathroom might be the ideal space for a walk-in shower, O'Brien said. A first-floor shower could be accessed with a walker or used with a seat, and the bathtubs upstairs could remain.

If you're not planning to sell anytime soon, don't worry about it. The fact is, a lot of us just aren't bath-takers, so don't overthink this.

"We've done tons of homes where the tub part is nothing more than a storage unit," Moore said - no one's using it, and like the exercise bike in the bedroom, it becomes a catch-all for clutter. That's when he tells people, "You're not using this tub. Let's get rid of it."

And plenty of potential buyers are shower-takers, too. "You might be eliminating some" buyers, Moore says. "But you're opening up a whole other group of buyers who say, 'I like this. This bathroom's more like a spa.'"

After all, he said, unless you're moving soon, it's best not to make a renovation with resale value in mind. If you don't like bathtubs, you really don't have to have one.

"This is where you live," Moore said. "Are you going to design this for somebody else, or are

you going to design it for yourself?"



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