



Photo: Coles Hairston

This master bath, designed by architect Winn Wittman and builder Gary Robinson, reflects the transformation of the bath into a private refuge, complete with a Kos tub from Inex and a serene view.

SAFE

Soothing baths that maximize space, storage and relaxation are in greater demand than ever, designers note.

at

HOME

By John Filippelli

Much like baseball players, consumers want nothing more than to be safe at home. And nowhere is this more evident than in the master bath, according to bath designers interviewed by *KBDN*, who recently shared their insights into trends in master bath remodeling.

“We’re all looking to alleviate stress and we all interact with the space differently,” says Kim Lavacot of Seattle, WA-based Bennet

Lavacot Architecture.

For that reason, style trends vary widely right now, with consumers seeking everything from cozy, zen-like spaces to spacious bath havens that mimic favorite travel destinations or spas.

Jennifer Allison of the San Pedro, CA-based Jennifer Allison Design states: “My clients ask for five-star bathrooms like they see in salons and upscale locales.”

By contrast, Winn Wittman, AIA of Austin, TX-based Winn Wittman

Photo: Aaron Humphrey

Architecture, says his clients favor baths that offer a very private, refuge-like feel.

Gender can also impact bath preferences; designers interviewed note that women are often drawn to comfortable baths with soothing color schemes, well organized grooming stations and soaking tubs, while men often favor high technology and luxe products such as overhead rain showers.

But if there's one commonality, it's that everyone wants a master bath that is soothing and enjoyable to spend time in, and one that maximizes relaxation and storage – without breaking the bank.

SUBTLE STYLES

If the kitchen is the heart of the home, then the master bath is the soul. That means it's critical to incorporate personal styles, sounds and sensations that comfort and soothe.

Elaine Williamson, ASID, LEED AP and principal for Dallas, TX-based Elaine Williamson Designs notes: "Clients want a space that reflects their needs, desires and



Above: This master bath, designed by Jennifer Allison, features all of the comforts of a luxury spa, including a soaking tub and natural materials, complemented by quiet, relaxing colors.

personal tastes. Therefore, we continue to design baths of all styles, rather than focusing on one particular trend."

Lavacot sees a trend toward traditional styling in her market, and notes: "Traditional is never going away, and it's beautiful if it's well done. Plus, there is something intrinsically comforting about traditional styling."

Sound also plays a role in the bath environment, whether it's through the use of piped-in music, soothing water sculptures or simply the absence of noise.

Allison favors the latter, noting: "There needs to be no noise in these spaces in order to create a more relaxing, spa-like feeling."

NATURAL SELECTION

Designers agree that choosing the right materials is the most crucial step in creating a soothing environment. And nature-inspired materials continue to be a big part of that trend.

"I use a lot of natural materials – stone, wood, glass – and I add as much natural light as possible with windows and skylights," offers Lavacot.

According to Williamson, "Glass countertops are also becoming far more mainstream, although they are used in moderation as dictated by the project budget."

Bruce Pinsler, president of Lincolnwood, IL-based Galaxie Construction adds: "Granite continues to be very popular and it has come down in price. Meanwhile

the large size porcelain tiles are durable, closely resemble natural stone, are low maintenance, have less grout lines and are affordable."

Allison adds that Calcutta Gold marble is particularly popular right now because "you can spin it traditional and contemporary, and you can get it in mosaic, tile and glass decos." She adds that limestone is also popular, mainly because it lends itself toward both modern and rustic, Old World looks.

When it comes to color choices, palettes range from clean and bright to soft and neutral.

Lavacot states: "I adore white marble and always select white fixtures."

"The colors I see range from bright white to shocking apple green," adds Williamson.

According to Pinsler, overall color hues are leaning toward neutral tones, with pastels becoming more passé. He says: "Neutral colors are best for resale value. People like to make a fashion statement with their color choices without taking a risk."

TOUCH OF GOLD

Hardware finishes can offer a sense of serenity if chosen to blend well with the overall feel of the space.

"What I'm seeing is some silver, plus brushed or polished nickel, chrome or stainless colors. Quiet, relaxing colors are in," says Allison.

Williamson adds: "Antique brass and even antique gold are being used on everything from drapery rods to fixtures to cabinet knobs.



Designed by Wittman and Robinson, this bath features CaesarStone countertops, agate floor tile and cabinetry from Cabinet Solutions for a clean, streamlined look.

Photo: Coles Hairston



Images Courtesy of ElaineWilliamsonDesign.com



This elegant master suite features one of Elaine Williamson's signature techniques, which is to wrap a tub surround in wood in order to add visual weight and soften the abundance of tile found in many master baths.

The reflective surface of brass adds warmth, glow and movement to a space and is perfect in a bathroom with a fireplace."

Pinsler adds: "The most popular finish [we're seeing] is oil-rubbed bronze, with pewter as a close second." He also notes that most customers prefer a contrast between the hardware and cabinet finishes, such as dark hardware on a light cabinet.

Williamson adds: "Finding that perfect faucet for a specific design aesthetic has gotten much easier, too. Due to increased demand, many manufacturers are now designing beautiful and reasonably priced faucetry with most offered in a dizzying array of finishes."

She concludes: "With this wider selection comes more ability to match popular cabinet finishes like hand-painted antique and flooring materials like cork or pearl tiles."

GREEN HORIZONS

Another interesting aspect of current bath trends is the growing focus on green principles.

Williamson notes: "Our clients are now opting for sustainable materials manufactured in a responsible manner, as well as [products that help them] reduce their own water, electricity and gas consumption."

She continues: "Bathrooms are a key space for conservation

practices, and homeowners are jumping in with both feet. Everyone is looking to save the planet and lower utility expenses."

To this end, she says that tankless water heaters, pre-programmed thermostatic controllers, low-consumption toilets, motion-sensor lighting and water-restricting showerheads are just some of the ways clients are reducing their footprints.

Pinsler adds: "People are seeking real value for their remodeling dollars and are focusing more on function than luxury right now. I anticipate that eco-conscious products will rise in popularity once the economy comes back."

SOAK IN STYLE

Many clients are also opting for spaces that harken back to a relaxing vacation, and that is affecting the interaction with water, says Williamson.

"We're installing more steam showers, body sprays and rain showerheads. These items provide the type of relaxation and pampering clients in today's marketplace are demanding," she says.

Pinsler also sees demand for soaker tubs because "they are therapeutic and very sanitary, less complicated to install and maintain and lower in cost [than whirlpools]. Homeowners are also choosing larger showers. So when we

remodel, most customers request that we eliminate the whirlpool and install a soaker tub, and then enlarge the shower," he says.

He adds: "In some cases, customers prefer a larger shower and no tub at all, but I continue to recommend keeping a tub for resale value. And, if the customer has small children, a tub is a must."

Allison states: "Steam showers offer a quick way for busy people with busy lifestyles to pamper themselves. And I am still seeing air jet [tubs] being incorporated."

Pinsler notes: "Hand-held showerheads for personal use are inexpensive and practical products. Plus, the shower area can be rinsed down to help keep it clean."

"Another trend is toward integration of faucets into fixtures and walls, ceilings, floors and other architectural elements," adds Wittman.

STORAGE SOLUTIONS

Storage also continues to play an important role in the master bath as space remains at a premium in many baths. Additionally, better storage and organizational features help diminish clutter, which allows for a more spa-like space.

Pinsler explains: "Storage is extremely important and everyone wants more. We have added cabinets to the walls where there were none before. Roll-out trays, hampers and linen storage are high on the list of wants."

"Storage is always an issue for homeowners and designers," adds Lavacot. "I try to never have a vanity touch the floor, so I give up some storage options there. But if I can sink in some hidden medicine cabinets behind mirrors, I do."

While storage is important, aesthetics continue to play a key role in vanities as well, with the furniture look – albeit a more scaled down version than in years' past – still very much en vogue.

To that end, Pinsler notes: "We're taking basic cabinets and vanities and adding feet and fluted columns to make them look like furniture."

Adds Allison: "I build all of my vanities custom and get inspiration from furniture looks. Customization allows you to maximize space and tweak finishes."

"We are mixing styles, and one of the ways we do this is by adding a vanity that has a furniture look and quality to it," says Williamson.

"Whether it be the more traditional piece mixed with a slightly contemporary tile backsplash or vice-versa, the look is intoxicating."

She notes that when adding a furniture-esque vanity, it's nice to wrap the tub surround in wood, as this adds visual weight to the room and helps soften the abundance of tile seen in many bathrooms.

Pinsler states that his firm will even add fillers and crown moldings around cabinets and mirrors to give them an elegant, furniture-like appearance. "This is a less expensive alternative," he suggests.

Williamson notes: "While cabinetry choices are varied, no matter the material or finish, it's become quite popular to trim and/or mould the cabinets themselves for added weight and volume. This treatment 'dresses up' and adds to the perceived value of the cabinetry, particularly when a client purchases stock."

SMART CHOICES

According to Williamson, the trend toward integrated technology in the master bath is growing strong.

"Entertainment amenities such as in-wall iPod players and televisions (sometimes behind the bathroom mirror) are quite popular," she says. "I've noticed 'morning kitchens' being added to the bath that include an under-counter refrigerator, microwave and built-in coffee maker. These are being included with increasing frequency in bathrooms of both new construction and remodels."

Pinsler, however, disputes this: "I see customers moving away from high-tech gadgets in the bath due to the economy and tight budgets. People are sticking to the basics, such as common recessed can lighting, rather than overspending on high-priced products and accessories."

However, even those on a budget often choose some affordable, higher-tech luxuries.

For instance, Lavacot says: "I will specify heated floors in almost every bathroom I design because they are reasonably priced and make the space so comfortable."

Williamson concludes: "We have installed several heated bathroom floors this year, with a few flowing right into the master suite for added luxury. Many homeowners who have chosen to scale down on square footage are ramping up such amenities." **KBDN**