

## Bath Style



*Hotter, faster: in addition to full-body coverage, steam showers and multi-head units are offering bathers more warm water on impact. The addition of a fireplace brings serenity and eliminates those pesky, seemingly unavoidable post-shower chills. Image courtesy Kohler*

### Turn Up the Heat

Add warmth to your bathroom with fires, tiles and toasty towel bars. It's the hot thing to do.

By Sally  
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Seattle resident Amely Wurmbrand is redoing her bathroom, and one thing is clear: it's getting a radiant-heated floor.

"They are absolutely a necessity now," says Wurmbrand, who works as an interior designer. "Tile is not being covered up with carpets, and it's very cold on the feet. It's no longer fashionable to put area rugs down, so everyone is putting heat in their floors."

Wurmbrand is right, and it's not just floors. Everything from heated towel warmers to toilet seats to fireplaces are showing up in bathrooms.

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“There is so much time spent in the bathroom,” says do-it-yourself home improvement expert Barbara Kavovit, whose new book, “Invest in Your Nest” (Rodale Books, 2006), has an entire chapter on enhancing the bathroom. “It’s where you get ready for a date, where you bathe the kids, where you relax. Plus, the more bathrooms you have, and the better they are, the more value your home has.”

The bathroom must be comfortable – after all, it’s the place where lots of people think or read. Historically, playwright Edmond Rostand wrote much of “Cyrano de Bergerac” in the bathroom. President Lyndon B. Johnson ordered assistants to stand by and take dictation as he performed his toilet routine. And The Fonz motioned towards the men’s room when he invited visitors to “step into my office” on Happy Days.

HGTV recently launched a new weekly series, I Want That! Baths, which focuses on everything from flat-panel TVs embedded in bathroom mirrors to diamond-encrusted basins that put the “bling” in the bathroom.

So it makes sense that some of the following hot trends are taking off.

- *Heated floors.* Heated floors can provide the main source of heat in a home, a concept in use since ancient times; the Romans used heated floors in bathhouses. They work through a hydronic floor-heating system that warms the floors with hot water running through tubes beneath it. You’ll pay a lot to install such a system, which can include the tubes embedded in concrete, a boiler to heat the water and controls to manage the temperature. In the long run, this type of heated flooring is cheaper to run than electric floor heating, which is less expensive to install but costs more to operate. Save money by just putting a strip in front of the vanity, or outside the shower. Systems cost about \$500 for a standard bathroom, measuring nine and a half feet by six feet, without installation.
- *Towel warmers.* These are like racks that heat up. “It’s kind of like having your own spa staff there to warm your towel for you,” says Jeffrey Haines, an interior designer in New Jersey. “Not only will they dry up wet towels, but they’re great if you’re in a humid environment because they freshen up those towels very quickly.” Heated towel warmers will sell for \$55 to \$130, depending on variety. For those who want serious warmth, warming drawers commonly used in kitchens are migrating to the bath, as well.
- *Fireplaces.* The second most popular place to put a fireplace now is in the bathroom. “We’re really seeing a lot of these,” says David O’Neil, president of Renaissance Tile and Bath, Atlanta. “It can be as elaborate as a French chateau fireplace or as simple as a Craftsman fireplace. People think, ‘It’s the end of the day, I’m going to have a glass of wine, sit in the tub and look at the stars.’ Having the warmth of the fireplace is part of that feeling.”

- *Steam showers.* This is a trend that's especially inspired by spas, by the idea of spending as much time in the bathroom as possible. After getting steam installed in your shower, you push a button and out comes the heat. Sometimes, essential oils can be used so that the steam joins with aromatherapy.
- *Heated bathtubs.* Tired of holding your back off the wall of the tub because it's still cold and the water hasn't heated it up? Now you can buy bathtubs that come with in-line heaters to prevent the cold occurrence. Since bathtubs are no longer made of cast iron, heat doesn't stay in as long. The change in technology has caused manufacturers to install more heat.
- *Heated toilet seats.* This one caused the most contention among our experts. Wurmbrand, for example, says she's never had a request for one and thinks they're useless. "This is just one invention I don't understand," she says. "I don't find plastic toilet seats to be uncomfortable. I think this is just one more bell and whistle."

But O'Neil says his luxury bath store is selling them and that he swears by the one he has in his home. "It's just like the heated seats in some cars," he says. "Once you experience it, you have to have it."

- *Warmer showers, faster.* Delta's H2Okinetic Technology is a shower system that was designed to control water delivery to completely envelop the bather. Its use of thermal dynamics and technology that creates larger droplets makes the entire shower warmer. Delta Faucet Company's Brizo brand also is working on a remote control shower, where a person can turn on the shower and adjust the temperature of the water from anywhere in their home so the water is the perfect temperature when they are ready to step in.

These are just some of the many hot trends, reminding us that the bathroom is the most private room in the home. "When you're in your most intimate space in your house, you want heat," says Tamra Fleming, president of Architect Your Life in Seattle. "Heat makes energy flow. It's the need for people to feel comfortable in their lives and in their homes."