

BATHROOM MAKEOVER



BEFORE

Bathroom renovations can be very expensive, but a small-change makeover can make a big difference. **BY KEVIN FARRELL**

A BATHROOM KEEPS PACE

This bathroom was probably the latest and greatest in the '70s. It's had a few makeovers along the way and needs another now. You won't be able to tell easily from the pictures, but the white tiles conceal some ghastly old tiles with a pattern and colour that some past tenant clearly couldn't abide. According to the owner, a tenant had the new tiles laid over the old ones so that she could tolerate going into the bathroom. More about that shortly.

At some stage a tenant had a cupboard fitted under the cantilevered vanity unit. Fair enough too, because a bathroom can become quite cluttered with, well, makeover items of another sort entirely. The trouble is that this cupboard had no base (kickboard) so the doors swung just a few millimetres from the floor. This can hurt toes big time!

The only other upgrade was the removal of the original wallpaper. I found some of it behind the light fitting and access cover – and can totally understand why it's disappeared.

MONEY PITS

Bathrooms can swallow tonnes of money, depending on how carried-away you get. If you want to change the room layout or replace baths, showers and toilets with others of a different size or shape you're going to spend-up pretty big. You'll also have to take the bathroom offline (disconnect the water and maybe the power too). This is a major disruption to a home, even if you have other bathrooms available.

A full bathroom renovation takes quite some time, as some items can't be rushed. Waterproofing, most importantly, must have sufficient time to cure properly or it just won't work.

Each item in the bathroom has the potential to blow your budget. The trick with a full renovation is to select a theme that you can afford and stick with it – don't ratchet-up the quality of any one item because you'll find that you'll have to do the same with many others.



AFTER

A viable alternative is a makeover. This way you leave as many of the costly items in place as possible and go for a new look and functionality with aesthetic items.

BATHS AND SHOWERS

The big, big question to answer is, can you leave the bath and/or shower where they are? If so, breathe a big sigh of relief because you're still in the makeover zone – you haven't moved into renovation territory. Ripping out and replacing these items usually leads

to major work in the plumbing and tiling departments, and a major renovation of your bank account too.

The owner of our bathroom insists that a bath is an asset in a rental apartment, and who am I to argue? I'm rather partial to a bath myself. It's a lucky thing that it can stay, because we can stick to the low-cost makeover plan.

Generally speaking, a bath is a bath – so even if it's currently looking a little worn, or it's a disgusting shade of '50s pink or '70s green – it can be a '00s fashion item without massive expense or disruption.



Leave it alone if it's in good condition and a colour you like, but if chips, scratches, or stains are bothering you, the bath can be refinished. There are DIY products available (such as White Knight's Bath Paint) that can produce good results. If you decide to do it yourself, just make sure that you follow the manufacturer's instructions to the letter.

We chose a professionally applied finish by Thermoglaze because it's incredibly durable and backed-up by a 15-year guarantee. Naturally, it's a beautifully glossy surface that's probably even better than the original glaze. Thermoglaze applied the finish in a single day and even used the same material to finish the panel that we fitted to hide the surface-mounted plumbing behind the vanity and toilet cistern.

Their technician masked everything in the bathroom with a special static-cling masking material, and then spray-finished the bath and panel to produce a smooth 'factory' finish. He also set up a ventilator to remove fumes from the bathroom. Check the service and product range at www.thermoglaze.com.au

Shower-bases, on the other hand, vary considerably in shape, size and type. If it's not leaking, and looks okay, leave it be. Simply check any visible joint sealants for adhesion and degradation. Remove and replace any sealant that isn't working, but be sure to select one that's specially made for

wet areas – they have special mould inhibitors that will keep the sealant good-looking and flexible for the longest time. Some are even paintable, if you need them to be.

If the shower base is sound but worn or unattractive it may be refinished in the same way as a bath.

Leaky showers are a big deal. They can cause serious damage to the structure of your home over time. If you suspect a leak, have a licensed plumber or leak-repair specialist check it out. It might be a leak in a plumbing fitting, or it may be a failed waterproofing membrane. Either way, don't ignore the problem because your home's structure will be rotting, rusting, degrading and attracting termites and mould until it's fixed.

TILES AND WATERPROOFING

The next question is, can you live with your tiles? If you can, leave them – even if you hate the pattern or colour, you may be able to leave the tiles in place and either tile over them or paint them – yes, paint them.

Now before you rush out to the shed to grab the leftover acrylic from your last paint job, understand that tiles should be painted with materials formulated for the purpose. There are several on the market, including White Knight Tile and Laminate paint. It's quite easy to use, looks great, and is quite durable,

as long as you follow the manufacturer's instructions to the letter. It's not a magic bullet though, because it's not recommended for floors or benchtop surfaces. This is where you can get the Thermoglaze guys in again, because their product is recommended for floors (it's probably the only one that is!). They have a range of colours, including some that look like stone. Have a look at their range at www.thermoglaze.com.au

The next choice is to tile over the existing tiles, as is the case with our bathroom. As you can see, it's a legitimate exercise as these tiles have been in place for nearly a decade – and believe me they're tough to remove! The downside to a tile-over is the added thickness under and around doors, around taps, and around shower screens.

Several adhesives are suitable for tiling over existing tiles: RLA Flex 2-part; Unibond; and Tilebond Off-White (with Uniflex Additive). Lay and grout them as you would on any other surface but think carefully about how you'll finish edges, such as skirting tiles, because they'll now stand out from the wall 12mm or more, showing two layers of tile. You can use plaster to form a smooth top edge and conceal the tile edges, or use a timber or plastic moulding.

One tricky problem encountered with this bathroom was the gaps left in the tiles after the old shower screen was removed. I tried everywhere, in vain, to get matching tiles so decided on a novel solution. I glued aluminium sections into the gaps: 12mm channel into a narrow gap; and a combination of angle and flat to dress a missing corner. Selley's Pro Series Polyurethane Adhesive and Sealant was the go for this tricky job. There aren't too many adhesives that will fix metal to tiles and stand up to a lifetime of steam, water and cleaning products. I used its sister product (sealant only) to seal and dress the gaps between metal and tiles. As always, I achieved a neat straight line by using masking tape along both edges.



If you don't like the metallic look, an alternative would be a strip of feature tiles.

TOILETS

If your old toilet pan and cistern look dated, you can update relatively cheaply. We replaced our old model with a sleek water-efficient model from Bathroom & Kitchen Supplies. At a cost of \$300 the Skew pan and Avon cistern made a huge difference to the look and comfort of this bathroom, and will save precious water (and money!) for a very long time to come. Check out other models on www.bathroomandkitchen.com.au or at a Mitre 10 MEGA store if there's one near you.

If your toilet looks and works fine, but only has a single full-flush function, consider installing a 'Retro Flush'. See page XX. You can also replace the seat at modest cost to help give the bathroom a new look and feel. You'll find many to choose from in the bathroom or plumbing section of your local Mitre 10.

VANITY AND STORAGE

In most bathrooms the vanity unit is the only piece of furniture in the room. It's a focal point for anyone that walks in. We decided to make a bold statement with this vanity from Bathroom & Kitchen Supplies. The Arvex Ellisse Open Vanity Unit features a one-piece top and bowl made from a single piece of 12mm glass. It's amazing how many people walk into this bathroom and say "Ooow...wow...nice..." Then run their fingers over the smooth glass top. They generally can't resist 'popping' the drain plug several times either. The open shelves are functional, allowing plenty of storage for items that you like to display.

Of course, in anyone's bathroom there'll be a few items that you don't want to display to visitors. These are stored out of view – but right at hand – in our shaving cabinet. There are many off-the-shelf varieties available or you can make your own (as we did). See page XX.

Naturally, an open vanity isn't everyone's cup of tea, so I've included a few choices for you to drool over. There are many available that conceal your bathroom goodies. Check out www.bathroomandkitchen.com.au or www.mitre10mega.com.au

LAUNDRY FACILITIES

If you have laundry equipment in your bathroom you can display it or conceal it. Concealing it can create a neater appearance, but restrict access, create dark areas, make the room feel cluttered and small, restrict ventilation and make cleaning difficult. If you decide on concealment choose door designs carefully so that you don't make it difficult to move in the bathroom or block access to other things.

LIGHTING AND VENTILATION

Ventilation in this bathroom was already good, but an inspection of the steel duct (hidden inside the bulkhead) revealed years of built-up dust stuck to the bottom. Although a tedious and difficult job to clean

up, it's a good idea to remove organic matter like this for health reasons; it can also be a fire hazard if your clothes drier is directly connected to a duct.

The old light fitting was removed and replaced with four flush-fitting halogen lamps. These direct light where it's needed – down onto the vanity and generally through the bathroom. These were bought off the shelf in our local Mitre 10 store.

Our electrician suggested some smart ways that these lights could be switched to save power and money, so that's our next project. The issue is that the extractor fan and lights are switched together. This is fine most of the time, but what about when the drier is on? In that case the fan must be on to remove the hot moisture-laden air, but the lights are just wasting energy. HPM supplies some special timer switches for this purpose, and the electrician is writing the article for you right now. Keep an eye out for it in our Spring issue.

RAILS, DISHES AND SHELVES

Old towel rails and soap dishes can look very daggy indeed, and date a room terribly. We went for bargain-priced Basix rails from Mitre 10. They matched our white theme well, look stylish and, most importantly, are robust enough to handle any tenant's needs.

One difficulty we faced was that the old soap dish had been tiled around, so that when it was removed there was an ugly hole in the tiles. Fortunately, this is where the rail was to mount for the new showerhead, so an aluminium plate was cut, dressed and glued in position with Selley's new Pro Series polyurethane adhesive and sealant.

The new showerhead has its own integrated soap dish, so there was no need to buy and fasten a new one.

SEALANTS AND PAINT

Colours are a matter of choice, of course, but there are other things to consider with bathroom paint. Don't paint everything with a high gloss just because you believe that's the only way to avoid mould. You'll need to stir in an anti-mould agent (such as the Flood Company's Mould Killer), which will work in any paint. Go for satin or low-sheen paints, as you would elsewhere in your home, because they're better for disguising flaws in the surfaces of your walls and ceilings.

Carefully check existing sealants and gap fillers. Are they discoloured by mould, peeling, separating from surfaces, hardened or shrunken? If so, carefully remove them and replace with a sealant specifically designed for wet areas, such as No More Gaps – Bathroom or Selleys Silicone Sealant – Wet Area.

Removing old sealant can be tedious and difficult, but I've found a good method: Carefully cut away the bulk of the sealant with a very sharp utility knife (don't nick surfaces, and cut away from your body), then use Selleys Silicone Remover to soften the remaining old sealant. It can then easily be scraped away. Clean up with metho before applying your new sealant.

TAPS AND SHOWERHEADS

You'd be amazed at just how many tap fittings there are in a typical bathroom. Ours has a set for the bath, a set for the shower, a set for the vanity, a set for the washing machine and one for the toilet cistern – nine taps in total, two spouts and one showerhead.

We chose chrome Basix tapware from our local Mitre 10 store and coupled it with Methven's Futura Rail Shower. The Futura was ideal for this bathroom because it allowed the shower to easily be repositioned to the wall at the end of the bath – so that

TIPS



- Seal between tap bodies and the tiles with a wet-area sealant. This will help to prevent water leaking inside the wall if a leak develops in the tap.
- If you have a bathroom or toilet that you rarely use, you should regularly flush toilets, sinks, baths, showers and floor wastes with clean water. Sometimes the water in the traps can become putrid and smelly, or worse – sometimes the trap dries out and opens the air in the room direct to the sewer. The new water will remove bad water and re-seal the sewer.
- To work effectively, your exhaust fan must be able to draw an adequate supply of air into and through the bathroom. A 300mm fan has an inlet area of 0.07 square metres, so if the only vent available is the gap under the door, you'll need a gap of at least 9mm. The bigger the better, without getting ridiculous.



the shower stream points along the bath instead of across it. A rail shower makes this possible because it has a flexible line to the showerhead. You can only reposition fixed shower roses by removing tiles and chasing (chopping a groove for) a new water pipe into the wall, which is expensive and messy.

The Futura Shower Rail is topped off with a SatinJet Hand Shower. This model, like others in Methven's range, have a special rubber rose with paired jets that make a fine spray that feels great. This hand shower can be switched between normal and an adjustable massaging pulse spray. The rubber rose is also very easy to unblock. Simply wiggle it with the shower running, and if that doesn't work you can unscrew it and clean it with an old toothbrush.

Of course, the other advantages of rail showers are adjustable heights (so dad doesn't have to

get down on his knees to wash his hair, and so little Johnny actually gets wet), and a detachable showerhead for washing kids' hair in the bath.

Select your own on www.methven.biz or at your local Mitre 10.

TRADES

Once you've decided on your overall bathroom design consult with your chosen tradespeople to work out the steps. You might, for example, need to disconnect water from one part or another of the bathroom in stages. There might even be some periods when you'll be showering at the neighbour's or brushing your teeth in the kitchen sink.

It's important for everyone's safety and health that you use licensed plumbers and electricians for this work. ●



MAKE A SHAVING CABINET

If an off-the-shelf cabinet doesn't fit your space – make your own. **BY KEVIN FARRELL**

There are several shaving cabinets available, but if they won't fit your available space you can easily make your own. There are many ways to do it, but this is possibly the quickest and easiest.

Sliding mirror doors are an ideal choice because they won't knock things off the vanity when you open the doors. Hinged mirror doors can also be tricky to deal with, depending on the hinge system you choose. We chose a Cowdroy track system because it's so good-looking, durable and easy to work with. There are several designs available, so check them out on www.cowdroy.com.au

STEPS

1. Measure up the space. The critical dimensions are width and height. Don't make the cabinet a tight fit between vanity and ceiling because you'll need a few millimetres for manoeuvring it into place. You'll also find that buildings are never straight and square. Our cabinet was constructed to be about 100mm short of the ceiling to allow removal of an access panel for maintenance of the extractor fan.
2. The ends should run the full height, so their length is exactly the same as your overall height measurement. Our ends are 900mm. The top and bottom are the overall width minus the thickness of the ends. Our top and bottom are 970mm (1002mm less 32mm for the ends).
3. The cabinet depth can be whatever you like, but shaving cabinets are generally quite shallow. Ours is 100mm.
4. Cutting is ideally done by a cut-to-order service because melamine-surfaced boards chip when cut with anything but a special scribing saw. If you really want to do it yourself, try a circular saw to cut the parts slightly oversize, and then an electric plane or router to trim to size, giving you clean sharp edges.
5. If you wish to fit a backing panel you'll need to rebate the ends so that the edges of the backing aren't visible. It's not necessary to rebate the top and bottom, just reduce their width by the thickness of the backing. Our cabinet has no backing. Fixing rails are fitted so that the cabinet can be fixed securely to the wall.
6. Finish all edges that'll be seen when the cabinet is in place. Iron-on vinyl is easiest but glue-on edging is also suitable.
7. Measure and order your door tracks, mirror doors and glass shelves. Mirror doors should be ordered only when you're absolutely sure of the required measurements, as the thickness is crucial for some tracks. Edges should be polished and a finger grip ground into one edge of each mirror.
8. Glass shelves are ideal because they sag very little, occupy practically no space and allow light through. They should be 'arrised' (sharp edges ground off) or polished on all edges.
9. Screw-fix the fixing rails to the inside back edge of the top and bottom, then mark and drill dowel holes for fixing to the ends. Dowels are ideal because no fasteners will be visible on the outside of the cabinet. Alternatively, use biscuit joints if you have the equipment.
10. Mark the dowel holes on the ends and carefully drill them. Use depth-stops on the drill bit to ensure you drill the correct depth in each piece (not right through the ends!). Dowel-pops are a great way to accurately mark the ends.
11. Glue the cabinet together with an exterior grade PVA or a polyurethane adhesive (this adheres to melamine). When the parts are assembled, check for square by measuring the diagonals – they should be exactly the same. If you don't have long clamps you can use a ratchet strap (used for tying loads on trailers and roof racks) around the whole cabinet.
12. When the glue has cured, screw the door tracks into position at the front edge of the top and bottom. Now the cabinet may be fixed to the wall. Use three screws in each fixing rail for masonry walls. Plastic wall plugs will be sufficient. For stud walls screw into each stud.
13. Fit rollers to the glass doors (if your tracks require them). Fit the doors by lifting them into the top track then sitting the rollers onto the bottom track (back door first).
14. Clean up and stock up the cabinet. ●



FACT FILE

- Cabinet:** MDF (High Moisture Resistant) with white melamine finish
- Mirror:** 6mm moisture resistant
- Glass shelves:** 6mm
- Tracks:** Cowdroy Showcase Runner system