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Peaceful Retreats

The latest bedroom and bathroom designs are streamlined and serene | By Jane Hodges



COURTESY: PULTE HOMES

Calm, cool and collected are three key themes that have emerged in bedroom and bathroom design this year. As Americans ease their way out of a recession, they're transitioning away from repair-driven home projects and focusing on the fun stuff— aesthetic changes and additions. Since many people have spent the last few years working hard and saving money, they're ready to cultivate an oasis of comfort in the rooms where they rest, relax and groom. ■ “People are nesting right now,” says Jason Ball, owner of Portland, Oregon-based Jason Ball Interiors. ■ “Streamlined” and “serene” are two adjectives that are topping clients’ wish lists, according to design experts. Busy homeowners want functional bedrooms and bathrooms that are easy to organize. Yet they also desire rooms with a soothing decor that creates a comfortable ambiance. ■ While many homeowners are still spending conservatively, for the most part, on their remodeling and design efforts, they can feel confident about making well-conceived improvements to their homes, says Stephen Melman, director of economic services for the National Association of Home Builders. Bathroom remodels, in particular, provide one of the best returns on investment for home projects: According to *Remodeling* magazine’s 2009–2010 Cost vs. Value Report, owners who remodeled a bathroom recouped on average 71 percent of the cost when they sold their homes. ■ Need inspiration for freshening up a bedroom or bathroom? Here’s a look at the latest design trends.

Gray walls set a soothing tone in the bedroom, and abundant natural light makes the space feel airier.



COURTESY: JASON BALL INTERIORS

Select Cool Shades

When choosing paint colors, many homeowners are shifting away from yellow tones to more restful blues, says Mary Lawlor, a color stylist for San Carlos, California-based Kelly-Moore Paints.

“Cooler tones are coming back in,” she says. “The pendulum is always swinging, and new colors can redefine a decade.”

Crisp blue tones are increasingly being incorporated into decorating schemes, as are earthy shades of gray, Lawlor says. She adds that red, in all its hues, remains popular as a primary and an accent color. In children’s bedrooms, pastel walls and white furniture are getting punched up with the addition of high-contrast accent walls that play off the lighter tones.

People looking to bring hints of the outdoors inside their homes are not only using plant life to do so, but also choosing paint colors inspired by

nature—for example, tones reminiscent of granite, stone and weathered wood—that evoke a sense of timelessness and calm. The National Kitchen & Bath Association noted in its 2010 Design Trends Survey that popular bathroom color choices this year included beiges and bones, whites and off-whites, and browns—colors that reflect a “subdued” palette.

In the bedroom, cool begets calm, says Piper Lauri Salogga, owner of Seattle-based sustainable-design firm Natural Balance Home and Office. Salogga says she’s seeing clients ask for richer colors to replace the “boring beige” that is often a default color for bedrooms.

“People are looking at deeper colors,” says Salogga. “They want blues, grays and browns.”

The Bathroom as Sanctuary

In the master bath, it’s all about creating a spa-like environment—one that conforms to how the home-

A deluxe walk-in shower gives busy homeowners a spa-like experience, while a freestanding tub is great for a luxurious soak.

owner uses the bathroom. For example, for people who recognize they don't have a lot of time to linger in the bath, a deluxe shower has become the new deep-soaker tub. From coast to coast, remodeling professionals say they're pulling out big, jetted tubs, and even conventional tubs, in master and full bathrooms, and replacing the tubs with large walk-in showers, often with benches, dual showerheads and steam features. In other cases, homeowners are requesting a deluxe shower, in addition to a separate freestanding tub they use strictly for the occasional soak.

A deluxe shower is an ideal solution for those who desire a pleasurable bathing experience but have limited time in which to enjoy it, say design-industry professionals such as Scott Thomas, director of architecture at PulteGroup, a company that builds homes in states including Arizona, California, Oregon and Washington.

"Based on recent home buyer and other customer research, we're now designing new-home blueprints for first-time, move-up and older buyers that offer showers in lieu of tubs in the master and other full bathrooms within a home," says Thomas.

According to Holly Hall, president of Dallas-

CHARLES DAVIS SMITH



COURTESY: KELLY MOORE PAINTS

based HPD Architecture, walk-in showers are also popular among aging homeowners who are looking to incorporate elements of "universal design"—styles that accommodate homeowners as they age, so it's easier for them to stay in their homes. Walk-in showers with little or no threshold to step over offer the easiest accessibility.

Another trend in showers is the use of large tiles on the walls. Ball, the Portland designer, says that when he designs new showers for clients, he favors rectangular tiles that are 1 foot by 2 feet, or even larger. "Large tiles make for a smooth look, thanks to fewer grout lines, and are also easier to clean due to less grout," he says.

Abundant Storage

If bathroom storage is tight, seek out clever ways to maximize space. For example, many remodeling pros have started raising countertops from the standard 30-inch height seen in most American bathrooms to 36 inches. Not only do taller counters make for taller cabinetry, and thus more vertical storage, they also provide better ergonomics for most adults.

Cabinetry is getting deeper, too—new cabinets

A cracked-glass countertop, protected by tempered glass, adds texture to a sleek bathroom, and spacious storage helps keep clutter in check.

Bold accent walls provide a visually appealing contrast to white furniture in a child's bedroom.

the Grab Pot

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CINDY APPLE



This eco-friendly bathroom features a PaperStone recycled-paper countertop, low-flow water fixtures and a dual-flush toilet.

are often 15 inches deep, versus the traditional depth of 12 inches. The extra space gives homeowners more room for storing towels, washcloths and other linens.

Additionally, Ball says his company is bringing what he calls "kitchen-cabinet features," such as compartmentalized drawers, into bathrooms to replace the shallow medicine cabinets that are common in older homes and help de-clutter countertops.

"We're seeing pull-out drawers with spaces where women can store their lotions and potions, and appliance pull-outs where they can stow curling irons and hairdryers," says Ball. "It helps create a clearer space."

New Looks for Greener Bathrooms

Another focus in bathrooms is the incorporation of energy-efficient features, such as fluorescent lighting. Efficient water fixtures, including dual-flush toilets and low-flow faucet aerators, also continue to top clients' lists of requests when embarking on a bathroom project. Investing in efficient devices can save homeowners money by cutting down on water usage, says Patrick Kessi, co-developer of 937 Condominiums in Portland, Oregon,

which earned LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum certification in August. "Efficient water features, for example, can save more than 30 percent of the typical water consumption, reducing the demand on the fresh-water supply."

When selecting a style for a bathroom redesign, many homeowners are choosing the retro look—think subway tiles in shower-and-bath surrounds, hexagonal tiles on the floor, and silver-toned hardware and knobs. Green-minded clients who favor this aesthetic are often pleased to discover that water- and energy-saving technologies, such as dual-flush toilets and LED light fixtures, are available in more varieties than ever before. For instance, dual-flush toilets now come in Victorian and other styles that fit a retro-style bathroom's design ethic.

"It's getting to where green products don't look different from traditional materials, and they are available for comparable prices," says Jason Legat, owner of Seattle-based building company Modelremodel.

In Dallas, Hall says she's getting requests for textured countertops in eco-friendly materials, including recycled glass and concrete, which "add to the decorating palette in the bathroom." Another much-requested option in countertops is quartz—a low-maintenance, durable material available in a wide variety of colors.

An essential element in every room is lighting. In the bathroom, experts recommend incorporating multiple lighting types that enable homeowners to set different moods. For example, there might be a dimmer that allows for mellow lighting during the early morning or evening hours, task lighting for times when brightness is needed, and a specialized fixture for a deluxe shower, says Legat.

Smart, Simple Bedrooms

Whether a result of the economy or the growing movement for conserving resources, the median size of the American home has fallen from a peak of 2,300 square feet in 2007 to 2,161 square feet in





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2010, says Melman of the National Association of Home Builders. The percentage of consumers seeking more than four bedrooms in a home has also fallen, from 39 percent in 2005 to 34 percent this year, according to NAHB.

In existing larger homes, however, multiple master suites are emerging as a trend, Melman says, as families anticipate multi-generational living situations where a young adult lives at home during or after college or an aging parent moves in with a son's or daughter's family. Typically, in homes with more than one master suite, the largest suite is located upstairs for the homeowner, while a smaller suite for a guest or extended-family member is downstairs.

"The second master suite doesn't have to be huge," Melman says. "Generally, though, it would include a bedroom area, a bathroom, a closet and a sitting area that possibly contains a mini-fridge or wet bar."

In smaller homes with more conservatively sized master bedrooms, builders and designers are getting more creative with space and are striving to incorporate both storage and aesthetic intrigue. At Pulte, Thomas sees master-bedroom designs with the closet positioned between the bedroom and the bathroom. The closet can be opened from either side, allowing homeowners to minimize noise and motion in the bedroom where a partner might be asleep.

Prefabricated storage systems are another convenient feature for bedrooms, as people look to de-clutter their sleeping spaces. Thomas says Pulte is building roomier standard closets than in the past, in dimensions that will accommodate a home buyer's choice of "plug-in" closet system. Additionally, the bigger closets give people space to accommodate storage furniture away from the main bedroom, if they choose.

"People are moving dresser-style storage into the closet or even into the bathroom to help open up the bedroom," says Hall, the Dallas designer.

Salogga, the Seattle designer, uses another innovative storage solution. She says she often advises clients to hire carpenters to retrofit favorite furniture pieces,

such as armoires, so they contain more storage elements for clothing or media.

"It's a nice idea to 'close up the technology,'" says Salogga. "People need peace."

Making the Most of Bedroom Space

Since master bedrooms in many new homes are getting smaller, Thomas says Pulte creates the illusion of additional space by placing windows where they maximize natural light. "People want a bedroom that isn't oversized but still feels generous," he says.

In larger bedrooms, many designers say, homeowners are opting for a more spare look than in the past, forgoing the once-popular sitting area for open space or furniture that offers storage features.

"It used to be that people wanted a sitting room in their bedrooms, but that trend is over," says Hall. "Now people are moving their sitting spaces to public areas and spending less time in the bedroom."

Thomas echoes that sentiment, but says that many clients surveyed by his company still like to devote some master-bedroom space to a "foyer" entry—a transition area between the hall and the bedroom space that marks a separation between the bedroom-as-retreat and the rest of the home.

When it comes to decorating that retreat, eco-friendliness is a trend, just as it is in bathroom decor and design. Consumers are increasingly seeking out green materials and products—ranging from draperies made of organic cotton to bedding created from bamboo. "These materials can lend an earthiness and softness to a room," says Salogga.

She adds that many of the latest bedding styles feature patterns that are simple or small in size, making them easy to pair with a variety of wall colors.

REGARDLESS OF HOW EXTENSIVE a bedroom or bathroom redesign is, homeowners are looking to create a sense of order, space and calm—an enduring aesthetic that will stand the test of time. ▲

Jane Hodges is a freelance business and real estate writer living in Seattle.



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