

bathe in beauty

GIVE YOUR BATHROOM THE FINISH IT DESERVES, SAYS FIRED EARTH'S EWA SHEPHARD

One are the days when the bathroom was simply a functional necessity, relegated to the smallest room in the house. Often treated with an air of embarrassment, the bathroom's focus was hygiene and practicality and, as a result, the room was devoid of personality, leaving it bland and unwelcoming.

Thankfully, times have changed. The bathroom is a place for contemplation, for the mind and body to unwind after the stresses of the day. A long hot soak in a bubble bath is a luxury available to most people. It's right up there in the comfort stakes with wine, chocolate and a soothing cup of tea. Therefore, it stands to reason that blank, boring wallcoverings, threaded with mildew, will not encourage you to indulge in a little water therapy.

A quality bathroom is as valuable an asset in selling a house as a well-designed kitchen - all the makeover programmes tell us so! Creating a perfect bathroom requires forward planning, especially if you fancy moving those essentials around. However, a huge difference can be made if the basic sanitaryware is acceptable by replacing the, no doubt, dated or boring tiling.

It is appropriate to over-tile existing tiles only if they are totally flat and level. Disasters can happen if not! Clean them thoroughly with sugar soap and then coat them with a universal bonding agent to give your new choices a fighting chance. Apply adhesive and off you go.

However, if the current incumbents are higgledy-piggledy, loose or just downright unbearable, you have no option but to remove them all, hoping most of the plaster



stays in place! Once the surface is ready to go, your revamp can occur.

Choice of wallcoverings is a wholly personal thing, once you know the cans and cannots of what to use where. Floor tiles (whether ceramic, natural stone or slate) can look amazing on the walls, but only if the plaster is removed to enable tiling direct to the screed or plasterboard. No greater disaster would there be if, coming in for your morning's ablutions, you find an extra floor covering when it should be on the walls!

Glazed tiles are considered the norm but even here there is such a huge variety available - where do you start? Consider the size and airiness of the room. If it is small don't go straight for mosaics as all you may end up seeing is grouting. Mixing the scale of tiles - especially if they are from the same design 'family' - would be an inspired way of adding depth and perspective (e.g. Fired Earth's Sardinia 30cm x 45cm tiles and Sicilian mosaic tiles look beautifully serene, imitating their stone forebears, yet peachy to clean as they are ceramic). Mix texture with colour, matt and gloss - it's a personal thing, so have some fun!

Areas within a bathroom which fall under the gaze of a power shower need greater consideration as the full force of these dirt busters can get beneath the glaze of crackle-finish tiles, or even start to erode natural stone or marble if they are not sealed thoroughly and regularly.

If a total revamp is required consider the growing trend, particularly for the smaller bathroom, of the wet room. It does away with confining shower cubicles as the floor slopes gently to a central drain and becomes the base of the shower. Wet rooms require lining to cope with the constant water bombardment and the floor is often raised slightly to allow for drainage.

Choose slate or stone floor tiles (ensuring they are suitable for such a wet environment), and avoid glossy surfaces for obvious reasons. It pays to get the specialists in on this makeover as companies such as Fired Earth will utilise their many years of technical know-how in ensuring your room stays watertight and beautiful for years.

If, ultimately, you feel about as inspired as your current crumbly bath sponge, call in the experts! Many tile retailers will assist you in your choices, with Fired Earth even having a home design consultant based in-store who will provide you with designs and schemes for your new room (not only bathrooms) for a small refundable fee. True design is available to us all - even if all you want is a background foil to your current bathing beauty.

Ewa Shephard, Bathrooms Manager at Fired Earth Interiors, Exeter. Fired Earth Interiors is based at Darts Farm Village, near Topsham, Exeter. Tel: 01392 878252, open 7 days per week. Christina Dickinson is the in-store home design consultant.

