

VERSATILE STYLE

Gone are the days when the bathroom was simply a functional space, relegated to the smallest room in the house. Often treated with an air of embarrassment, the focus of the bathroom 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, ranked right up there in the comfort stakes with wine, chocolate and a soothing cup of tea. So 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, as all the makeover programmes tell us! 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 bathroom suite is acceptable, by replacing dated or boring tiling.

It is acceptable to over-tile existing tiles **only** if they are totally flat and level. Disasters can happen otherwise. 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 your old tiles 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 an entirely individual thing, once you know the rules of what to use and where...

Floor tiles (whether ceramic, natural stone or slate) can look amazing on the walls, but will only work if the plaster is removed to enable tiling direct to the screed or plasterboard. I can't imagine any greater disaster than going into your bathroom for your morning's ablutions and finding an extra floor covering, when it should be on the walls.

Glazed tiles are considered the norm, but even here there is 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: for example, Fired Earth's Sardinia 30cm x 45cm 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. Have some fun!

Areas within a bathroom which fall under the spray 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 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 safety reasons. It pays to get the specialists in; companies such as Fired Earth will utilise their years of technical know-how to ensure your room stays watertight and beautiful.

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 - 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.

Fired Earth Interiors are based at Darts Farm Village, near Topsham, Exeter.

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