



The Upgraded Bathroom Experience and the U.S. Housing Market

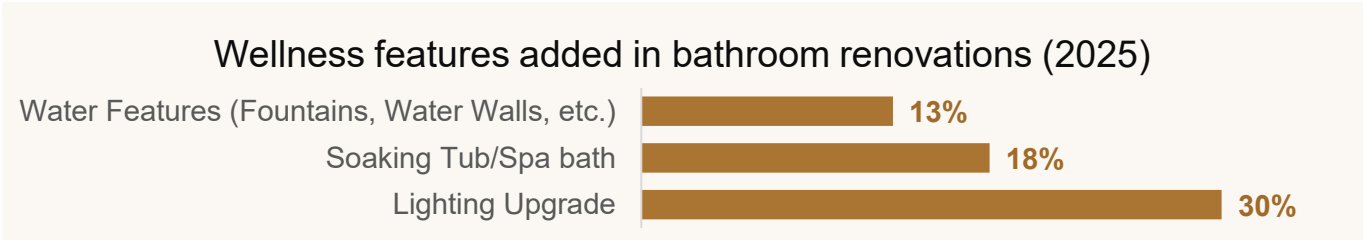
The Role of the Bathroom is Changing, and it is Reflected in Residential Design

In the U.S. housing market, the bathroom is changing! Traditionally, bathrooms were utilitarian and focused on hygienic needs. They were not a place to linger. Today, however, bathrooms with their 21st century features are not yesteryear's water closet. This change in bathroom design is the result of growing health consciousness, changing lifestyles, smart-home adoption, and an aging population. A 2026 trend survey by National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA), North America's largest home improvement industry association notes that in new home designs, the master bathroom has become not merely a space for washing but a living space where you indulge yourself.¹ This shift is influencing the size and aesthetics of bathrooms and can affect the overall value of a home as well. Why is this happening. This article examines the trends shaping bathroom design and amenities in the U.S., while analyzing what forces are driving these changes.



The "Home Spa" Driven by Wellness Trends

The most notable change in current U.S. bathroom is its transformation into a “wellness space.” According to NKBA research, 77% of respondents stated that desires related to residential bathroom design have been influenced by spa experiences at hotels and resorts.¹ As a result, bathrooms in new homes increasingly include features intended to promote relaxation and personal well-being. Steam showers, heated floors, towel warmers, and showers with aromatherapy functions are becoming more common even in everyday homes. Some homeowners are incorporating other spa-like amenities such as residential saunas and cold-plunge installations. This trend is also reflected in home remodeling. According to Houzz, an online platform that provides information on home renovation, construction, and interior design, approximately 36% of renovated bathrooms now include wellness-related features.² Importantly, this movement is not simply about luxury. Rather, it reflects people’s interest in stress reduction, self-care, and improved quality of life. In recent years, Americans have become increasingly focused on their mental health and wellness, creating strong demand for residential environments that provide relaxation and recovery experiences at home. The bathroom has emerged as the ideal setting for this purpose, increasingly functioning as a private “home spa.”



※Soaking tub: A bathtub designed to be deeper and wider than a standard bathtub

Source: Houzz³

The Shift Toward Shower-Centered Bathroom Design

Changes in bathroom fixtures are also transforming the layout of bathrooms themselves. Historically, bathtubs occupied a central role in American bathrooms. In recent years, however, shower-centered layouts have become increasingly dominant. NKBA data indicates that 55% of respondents now prioritize larger showers over bathtubs.¹ Reflecting this preference, many renovations now feature expansive walk-in showers or wet rooms that integrate the entire bathroom into a unified shower space. Data from Houzz shows that one in six bathrooms currently being remodeled are wet rooms, 3 percentage points increase from the previous year.⁴ Beyond daily bathing, showers can easily incorporate features such as steam, lighting, and aromatherapy.

Still, bathtubs have not completely disappeared. Most newly built single-family homes in the U.S. still include at least one bathtub as a standard feature,⁵ and such homes are said to have 5–20% higher property values compared to homes without bathtubs.⁶ When it comes to bathtub selection in today’s homes, demand is growing for deep soaking tubs designed for relaxation rather than traditional shallow tubs. Additionally, designer tubs such as hydrotherapy tubs are frequently installed as signature fixtures, creating a division of roles where showers are used for daily bathing and bathtubs are reserved for relaxation. The modern bathroom is therefore becoming a layered space that combines functionality with experiential value.



Example of a wet room

Source: Houzz⁷



Example of a soaking tub

Source: Wellfor⁸

Smart Technology Enters the Bathroom

The expansion of smart-home technology in the U.S. is now extending into the bathroom. Products such as smart toilets with automated cleaning and bidet functionality, as well as voice-controlled shower systems, are becoming increasingly mainstream. These technologies are designed not only to improve the bathroom experience, but also to personalize the residential environment based on individual lifestyles and preferences. For example, smart systems can automatically adjust water temperature and pressure, while adaptive lighting can change based on time of day or user mood. Such features are transforming bathrooms into highly personalized spaces. The younger generations, Generation Z, in particular, have a high level of interest in AI and eco-friendly equipment, suggesting that more bathroom digitalization is likely in the years ahead.

IoT-enabled smart shower (featuring water flow and temperature control, timer functions, etc.)



Source: Faststream⁹

"Aging in Place" and Accessibility

The aging population in the U.S. is also affecting bathroom design. In recent years, the concept of "Aging in Place" – allowing older adults to remain safely in their existing homes – has become a central theme in American residential design. Because bathrooms are among the most accident-prone areas within a home, accessibility-focused design has rapidly gained importance. Features such as curbless showers, slip-resistant flooring, grab bars, and built-in shower benches are becoming increasingly common. While such features were once associated primarily with assisted-living or senior-care housing, they are now widely incorporated into mainstream residential design.

Accessibility is no longer viewed solely as a functional or medical necessity. Instead, these features are increasingly integrated into sophisticated, high-end design aesthetics. Accessibility is gradually becoming part of the standard residential specification rather than a specialized accommodation. According to NKBA research, many experts believe "Aging in Place" design is already mainstream or soon will be.¹ Furthermore, Houzz reports that 68% of homeowners (up 4 percentage points from the previous year) are considering "special needs" and seeking improved accessibility.³



Examples of a walk-in shower and bathtub combination



Examples of a walk-in bath

Source: Kohler¹⁰

Storage and Low-Maintenance Design Tailored to Lifestyle

Changes in bathroom fixtures also focus on the ease of daily use. In recent years, vanities have evolved beyond the basic sink and vanity to include storage areas for hair dryers, cosmetics, and medications, as well as drawers with power outlets. These new vanities have become central fixtures supporting personal grooming and self-care.

Furthermore, homeowners are prioritizing designs that reduce cleaning and maintenance burdens. Large-format tiles with minimal grout lines and waterproof wall panel systems are increasingly popular because they simplify upkeep while maintaining a clean, contemporary appearance. Beyond aesthetics and functionality, changes in bathrooms also result in less upkeep everyday increase convenience.



Vanity designed with integrated storage features

Source: Forbes¹¹



Bathroom with Large-Format Porcelain Slabs

Source: Porcelanosa¹²

Bathrooms: A Core Driver of Housing Value

The evolution in U.S. bathroom design reflect broader social changes. The wellness culture, smart-home adoption, and age-related requirements are reshaping the home and will lead to a new standard for housing design. Barrier-free showers not only enhance safety for the elderly, but they also contribute to a luxurious, hotel-like spatial design. Likewise, smart bathroom technologies offer not only convenience but also can assist with health management and lifestyle optimization. In the past, the housing market has centered on kitchens and common living space, but bathrooms are entering the fray. The bathroom will no longer be merely a functional space; it is emerging one of the defining elements of residential value in the modern American home.

Sources

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