



# BATHROOM BLISS

For today's homebuyers, bathrooms are important – so a well-judged renovation will pay for itself. Getting the right advice from the outset can be the most vital part of the process, says **Sharon Newey**.

**ON THE FACE** of it, upgrading the bathroom in a rental property might seem like an easy project. After all, it's one of the smallest rooms in the house.

All you need to do is replace a few of the fittings, right? Well, actually no. Because it's a wet area, the bathroom has a hard life and if you don't want to have to turn around and do it all again in a couple of years, it pays to renovate it properly with a practical design and quality materials that will last the distance. If you do it well, your renovation can add value to the property, making it more enjoyable to use and helping to attract a better-quality tenant.

Unless you have some pretty smart handyman skills, the smart approach is to consult the trade professionals to obtain some specific renovation advice. Get quotes and call builders, plumbers, electricians, gasfitters etc in early, so they can help you work out exactly what condition your bathroom is in and what needs to be replaced or just fixed or moved.

The overall bathroom design is important. Just replacing the existing bathroom, installing new fittings where the old ones were, may not be wise. The key is to think about who your tenants are and how they'll use the spaces.

It's probably not a good idea to combine a toilet and bathroom, especially in a larger

rental property. If you can move the toilet to a separate space, do so. A separate toilet gives the property wider market appeal.

If structural alterations are required, make sure the builder is involved early to coordinate this work. Bathrooms must be constructed properly from the ground up to ensure the finished job is correct and true. This also ensures the design and look of the bathroom has a great finish.

Good design also considers the spatial flow, natural light, window space, the size of the fittings, storage and drainage options. It's useful to draw a scale floorplan of the room with existing drainage points, water inlet points and electrical points and show this to the plumber, builder, electrician and gasfitter if there's to be gas hot water heating.

They can work out whether your plans are feasible and can alert you to anything you may have forgotten.

If you decide to do the work yourself, make sure you hire a skip for when you pull out the old bathroom. You don't want to upset the neighbours with a pile of junk accumulating on your lawn or kerb.

Get an electrician to cap off the electrical wiring and a plumber to cap off the water fixtures ready for you to start the work.

Once you have removed all the fittings, the electrician and plumber will need to return



to re-install all the first-fixing work for the electrical wiring for lighting, heating, ventilation and switches as well as the water and drainage pipes.

When you know where the fixtures are going, you or your builder can prepare the nogging to support things like the bath, vanity and heated towel rails.

Next stage is for the wall and ceiling linings to be installed. The most common, cost-effective, quality option is Aqua gib.

Unless you install an acrylic shower on wall-liners, you'll need to waterproof your bathroom floor around the shower recess and bath. Check the building code.

If the bathroom is on a concrete floor, you don't need to worry. Any floor other than the ground floor will need to be waterproofed up to 100ml all around the room. Bathroom waterproofing is not always an easy job, so quality and accuracy are important.

Remember, although acrylic shower cubicles are an economical option, they are notoriously difficult to install correctly. Many people are confused by the





**THE  
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PART SEVEN

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## RENOVATION: BATHROOMS

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instructions, so they simply do it their own way and think it will be good enough. The problem is, if they're not installed properly, they usually leak due to capillary action.

When the bathroom has been lined and sealed, the flooring can be laid and walls plastered then tiled or a Seratone product installed. If you're using tiles, consider their durability, slip rating and maintenance – not just their style.

The floor must be smooth and fairly flat with a slight fall to the drainage outlet. Grout with a good quality sealer. Tiling is not expensive, and the bathroom is a small area, so it's worth getting a professional to do it properly.

These days, the Building Code stipulates that bathrooms need to be well-ventilated with an extractor to the exterior. You're supposed to manage two air changes per minute so you'll need to calculate

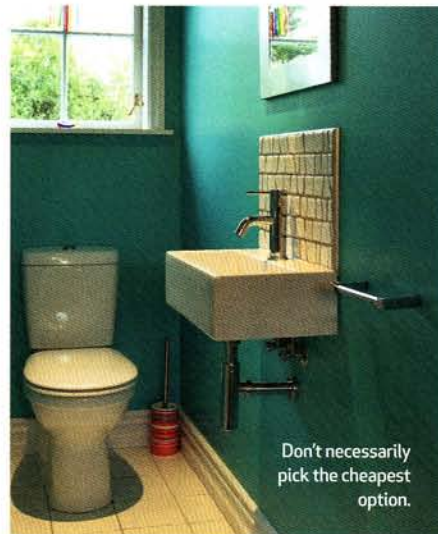
the volume of the room and select an appropriate fan vented to the roof or soffit. An electrician can do this for you.

If you decide to switch the old, space – and power-hungry hot water cylinder for a more efficient, modern instant gas hot water supply, speak to your gasfitter for advice on what is appropriate.

The most enjoyable part of the bathroom renovation is selecting your plumbing fittings and fixtures. There's plenty of choice at all price points. Don't necessarily go for the cheapest import, especially when it comes to things like tapware. Any plumber's merchant will tell you the hassles they have with cheap, but good-looking imported fittings that cannot be fixed.

You may as well spend a bit more upfront to save having to replace the whole thing a couple of years down the track. There are now many superb, locally-made products that outshine their imported competitors.

Fit your new bathroom vanity making sure it is level and sealed around the top with quality silicone and also seal around the bath. Make sure the fittings are in the right place before you drill into your tiles.



It's usually best to stick to white sanitary ware in a durable finish. Colours come and go and once they've gone, they can look very dated.

Above all with bathroom renovations, it's the research and planning that count. Don't just go for cheap. And remember, it's not a job for the faint-hearted. Getting it right before you start can save an awful lot of hassle and money. ■