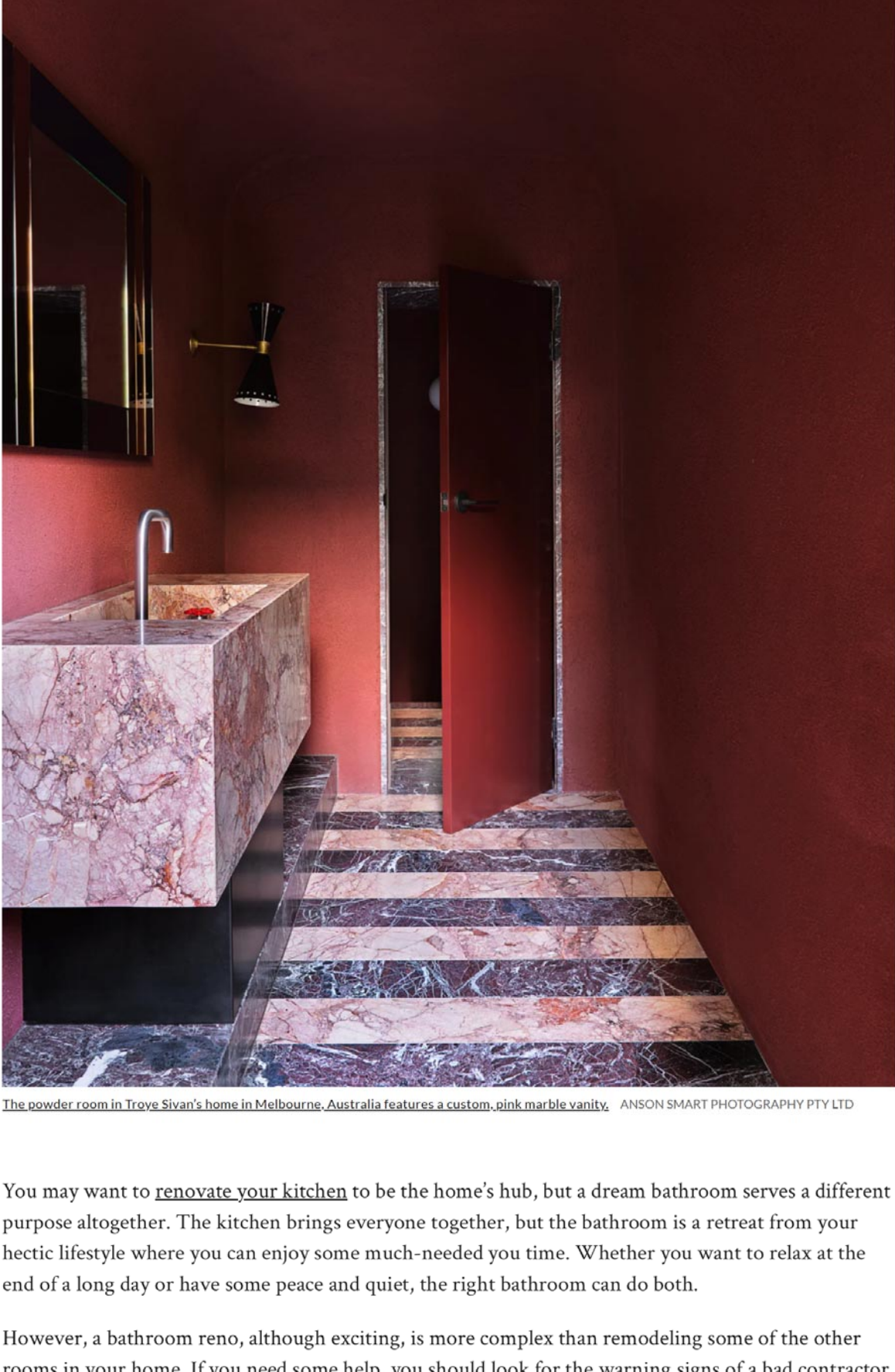


Avoid Making These 18 Mistakes on Your Next Bathroom Renovation Project

Because DIY errors can turn your luxe look into a nightmare that can't be fixed

By Terri Williams
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The powder room in Trove Sivan's home in Melbourne, Australia features a custom, pink marble vanity. ANSON SMART PHOTOGRAPHY PTY LTD

You may want to [renovate your kitchen](#) to be the home's hub, but a dream bathroom serves a different purpose altogether. The kitchen brings everyone together, but the bathroom is a retreat from your hectic lifestyle where you can enjoy some much-needed you time. Whether you want to relax at the end of a long day or have some peace and quiet, the right bathroom can do both.

However, a bathroom reno, although exciting, is more complex than remodeling some of the other rooms in your home. If you need some help, you should look for the [warning signs of a bad contractor](#) in any type of renovation project. But beyond that, there are certain mistakes you'll want to avoid while renovating your bathroom. Here are 18 things to look out for, according to design experts.

Failing to plan ahead

Some projects don't take a lot of thought and planning, but this won't be one of those. "You can wake up on Saturday morning and decide to paint your bedroom or dining room and be successful, but the same is not true with a bathroom project," explains Jeff Andrews of [Jeff Andrews Design](#) in Los Angeles. "You need to be well aware of the plumbing and electrical, understand the different flooring and surface materials... Even a few coats of paint could cause problems if you don't have good ventilation." In order words, you need to think through all of those components and more before embarking on a bathroom reno.

His view is shared by Stephen Pallrand, founder at [CarbonShack](#) in Los Angeles, who recommends taking the time—and hiring the right professionals, if budget allows—to draw up a really good, carefully considered layout. "It can be very tricky to fit in all the various elements you want to include in your new bathroom in a way that (1) makes sense, (2) looks good, (3) functions properly, and (4) conforms to your area's building codes." Pallrand recommends drawing up as many different iterations of the bathroom layout as you need to be confident that you've considered everything. "Putting in this extra work at the beginning of the project will help you avoid any undesirable, unintended consequences later on," he says.

Not visualizing what the design will look like

Technology has made it even easier to fully plan your bathroom reno, and it would certainly be a mistake not to take advantage of the digital tools at your disposal. "Years ago, it was a bit of an act of blind faith because you would have drawings, samples of materials, etcetera, but a lot was left to the imagination about how your room was going to end up," says Mark Cutler, cofounder of L.A. firm [CutlerSchulze](#). "Now you have the option of creating almost photorealistic renderings that show every detail of the design." Cutler admits that some of these renderings cost "not an insignificant amount of money." However, he says that they can save you countless hours and thousands of dollars in the end.

Putting the cart before the horse

It's understandable that you'd want to focus on the finishes. However, Charmaine Wynter, design principal at [Charmaine Wynter Interiors](#) in Southlake, Texas, warns that it's a mistake to spend less attention and energy on the less glamorous parts of the renovation. "For example, people often research at length the grout color, but they fail to consider if the tile requires sanded or non-sanded grout, or if the grout must be sealed versus unsealed." Wynter also points out that it's possible to spend hours searching for the perfect tile, but then fail to determine how much space is required between each tile for the proper adherence and to resist cracking. "In essence, DIY enthusiasts often put the cart before the horse, or the aesthetic before the function," she says.

Underestimating or wasting the budget

There's a tendency to underestimate the budget on any renovation project. However, Cutler notes that this is a particularly common problem with bathrooms. "The price for stone, tile, and plumbing may only be about a third or a quarter of the total cost of the bathroom," he says. "Labor for installation and construction always ends up being a lot higher than people think, and it is a huge mistake to try and cut corners because you could end up with leaks in your wall or mildew growing behind tile."

In addition to underestimating the budget, Cutler believes that DIY'ers also get carried away with all of the various options: "We have all been there in the plumbing showroom looking at all those amazing options: Body sprays, steam, heated floors, and even talking toilets, but they all come at a cost."

And sometimes, he says, there's a tendency to blow your budget on these features and then end up not using them a few months later. "Before committing to these toys, take a few visits to high-end spas and try some of them out to see if it is something that will fit into your lifestyle," Cutler advises.

Falling for the latest and the greatest new items

Every year, cool new bathroom features and gadgets enter the market. Cutler points out that a [bathroom remodel is one of the most expensive projects](#), so you should try to make it as timeless as possible. As he further explains, "Our rule of thumb is to make the bigger, more permanent items more classic, and then with things that are easier to change out—think wallpaper, light fixtures—make them more trendy." This will allow you to have a bathroom that won't need to be remodeled again for another five years or so.

Changing the location of the tub, toilet, or sink

Some renovations are like giving your bathroom a facelift, while others are like performing major surgery. "Changing the location of major water and waste systems is akin to major surgery," says Michael DiMartino, senior vice president of installations at [Power Home Remodeling](#) in Chester, Pennsylvania. "Your plumbing and electrical systems are already in place, and there are many complex steps involved in moving them around," he adds. "It requires gutting everything in your bathroom, rerouting water and waste lines, and making sure all attachments are connected and sealed properly."

DiMartino recommends keeping the tub, toilet, and sink exactly where they are because "you can swap them with updated models, but once you start envisioning your toilet where your sink used to be, call a contractor."

Overestimating your skillset

Although there are many bathroom projects that you may be able to handle, Wynter warns against trying to tackle the task of bathroom plumbing. "Many DIY'ers overestimate their skill and underestimate the difficulty, often venturing into life-threatening areas," she says. "Attempting to move or relocate plumbing pipes or drains is serious business as sewer gasses need to be vented correctly in order to prevent inadvertent poisoning." DiMartino agrees that it's far easier and less risky to hire a plumber for a few days of work than attempting a few weeks on your own—and you might end up having to call in a plumber for an emergency fix anyway.

Tiling your floor the wrong way

You may be tempted to save money by installing [bathroom tile](#) on top of existing tile or wood panels, but DiMartino believes that's a huge mistake. As he further explains, "In a room prone to moisture buildup, the tile must be laid down on top of a cement surface, or you risk the tile buckling and cracking."

When it's time to finally lay down the tile, he says that you need to start in the center of the room and work your way to the edges while ensuring everything remains level. "It's also helpful as it prevents you from walking on the new flooring, which will depress your tiles," he adds. The final step is grouting and sealing the grout. According to DiMartino, "Tiling is a four-day project that involves a lot of steps, but it's critical you implement each one, or you'll have major problems down the road."

Failing to plan out wall-mounted faucets

Wall-mounted faucets are beautiful to look at, and they can also save space—something that is vitally important in a smaller bathroom. However, Goli Karimi, director of design at [CarbonShack](#), warns that failing to properly plan can result in the spout being too high or too low. "You need to carefully determine the distance from the tip of the spout (where water comes out), relative to the sink top, and not necessarily the centerline of the rough valves in the wall."

Another mistake Karimi sees is a set that is too small or is positioned too far from the counter edge (if using a standard depth cabinet). If you have a wall-mounted faucet, she recommends a shallower cabinet. "Since the rough valve is put inside the wall well in advance of any finishes going in, a design professional's help is invaluable to get the location set properly," she says. "This should help avoid costly relocating of plumbing rough-ins later in the project since you don't want to remove an already-tiled backsplash to make unforeseen plumbing corrections."

Setting the countertop too high for vessel sinks

If you plan on installing a vessel sink at your vanity, don't make the countertop height too high. "Bathroom countertop heights these days are taller than they traditionally used to be—often 34–36", which is perfectly fine for under-mounted sinks," Pallrand says. But with a vessel sink, the counter should be lower. "There's nothing worse than having water run down your arm and onto the floor while trying to wash your hands or face." Pallrand says he actually experienced this at someone's home where there was a tall vessel sink installed on a counter 34–36" high. "Always adjust the counter height as needed to ensure a comfortable sink position."

Botching the shower system placement

However, it may be worth it to make *some* water supply changes. According to [Christopher Grubb](#), president of Beverly Hills-based Arch-Interiors Design Group, changing plumbing locations isn't always as expensive as you think—and sometimes, it may be worth it. "You may be tired of turning on your shower and getting wet, and if the controls were on an opposite wall, it would be more comfortable," he says. "The cost consideration is relocating sewer lines, and if you have a raised foundation, it is much easier to move drainage pipes." If it's not a significant relocation, Grubb says the cost won't be too significant. "Slab foundations become much more expensive because it is more complicated and labor intensive," he adds.

Patrick Planeta, principal at the [Planeta Design Group](#) in Boston, agrees that shower placement is pretty important. "Your shower should be your sanctuary, and there is nothing worse than getting your arm wet with too hot or frigid water while adjusting your water temp," he says. "When you enter your shower, a good rule of thumb is for the controls to be within reach from the shower door." Here's another tip: Planeta recommends keeping in mind the hinge direction of your shower door so you won't block your controls.

Skimping on shower floor details

Curbless showers are a hot trend these days, but [Veronica Solomon](#)—CEO and principal interior designer at Casa Vilora Interiors in Katy, Texas—says that most DIY'ers are not doing enough research on how to properly install them. "They look very simple to install, but you need to consider the size of the shower, drain selection and placement, how to properly prepare the subfloor, the slope of the shower floor, and even showerhead placements," she says.

Kristi Nelson of [KM Nelson Design](#) in Los Angeles warns that another mistake is not selecting the right type of tile for a shower pan. "Anything larger than 4" x 4" is, depending on the size of the shower, very difficult and almost impossible to contour into the slope needed for drainage," she says. "Small tiles also have an important safety factor in wet areas—more grout lines equal less slippage because they provide a grab for your feet."

Speaking of slippage, [Sophia Shibles](#) of Sophia Shibles Interiors in Providence, Rhode Island, warns that bathroom floors in general tend to be wet and slippery. "If young children or older adults will be using the bathroom, careful consideration will lead to a safer design." She recommends checking the DCOF (Dynamic Coefficient of Friction) value on the tile before making a purchase. "It should be less than 0.42 for any bathroom with a shower or bath."

Choosing the wrong paint

When choosing paint for your bathroom, it's a mistake to only consider the color. DiMartino insists that the finish is just as important. As he further elaborates, "Flat and matte paints are the most forgiving and are great for covering up blemishes, while semi- and high-gloss finishes are typically used for trim and moldings." DiMartino recommends an eggshell finish as the happy medium for a bathroom, adding that "because it contains more acrylic than flat and matte finishes, it's great at repelling moisture—but it isn't so shiny that it'll overwhelm your walls." Another pro tip from DiMartino for this finish is painting in one stroke. "Roll your walls from baseboard to the ceiling in one motion, or the paint will look patchy," he adds.

Forgetting about organization and outlets

If your bathroom is cluttered, Grubb claims that it will take away from your return on investment. "If you don't have shower niches, a remodel is the perfect time to add them and get rid of any shower caddies." He also says that drawers with dividers and slide-out drawers with interior cabinets can create space for blow dryers, curling irons, and more.

Planeta also recommends drawers that have electrical plugs. "With drawer accessories built in, they are always at the ready, all your everyday tools have a place, and there are no unsightly cords taking up space." However, he warns against using ornate cabinet knobs and pulls because the more intricate it is, the more maintenance it will require. Instead, he recommends simple hardware that will be easy to clean.

Failing to let the contractor buy the goods

It's always tempting to see tile or fixtures on sale and purchase them yourself, but this decision could prove to be a mistake. "When you let the experts purchase the materials, they can make sure the order is correct (tile quantities and trim pieces, plumbing rough-in components and finish trims, etc.), and then they must assume responsibility if an issue arises with the order," Karimi says. "Homeowners generally just don't know the installation implications of, say, a decor tile body that is thicker than the field tile, but contractors *will* know the change order cost arising from such an oversight."

When you DIY it on purchases, Karimi warns that any potential savings will be lost if they result in mistakes that require change orders to correct.

Underestimating the importance of ventilation

The one area that DIY'ers shouldn't skimp on is proper ventilation. "Without it, humidity and moisture will wreak havoc on your materials and finishes and make your brand-new bathroom prime real estate for mold," Shibles explains. "Lingering moisture will break down grout, seep into subfloors, and cause painted and stained finishes to peel prematurely."

And then there's the effects on your health. "Make sure to purchase a ventilation fan that is properly sized for the square footage of your bathroom, and if the toilet and shower or tub are far apart, consider using two smaller ventilation fans," Shibles says.

Using natural stone incorrectly—or not at all

If you love marble bathrooms, you're not alone. "It's durable, a great insulator, comes in many shades and varieties, and it's gorgeous," says [Vicente Wolf](#) of Vicente Wolf Associates in New York City. "With the many varieties of stones to choose from, it is easy to fall in love with a slab infused with lots of natural veining."

To create an air of soothing elegance, it's important to avoid busy slabs. "Dominant patterning in marble can overwhelm a bathroom's design for a disquieting experience," Wolf says. "It gets worse with marble tiles—imagine all the walls and floor consisting of tiny, mismatched tile squares."

As long as it's not too busy, Grubb doesn't understand why some people hesitate to use natural materials like limestone, marble, and granite. "I've been in this business for 30 years, and I've never had a client complain if they used it." Regarding maintenance, he says it merely needs to be sealed annually to prolong its beauty. "Using any leftover counter slab material for niches or the shower surround is a beautiful detail that also avoids waste."

Sacrificing what you love

We've provided more than enough expert advice on the importance of not blowing your budget on impulse buys—trendy items or features that you might not use. However, Grubb says you shouldn't give up on a product or finish that you *love*. "It is important to never finish your project and regret you made the sacrifice and think, 'Why didn't I?' After all, the design is for your personal enjoyment and ease of use.

This view is also shared by Cindy Rinfret, principal designer at [Rinfret Interior Design](#) in Greenwich, Connecticut. "If infrastructural amenities—like heated floors or water jets for your tub—are high on your dream list, rework your overall budget to make sure they are taken care of during the renovation instead of saving for them later," she says.

Though you may be putting some luxuries off and planning to add them down the road, Rinfret notes that approach can actually cost you more money. "Heated floors, for example, will be gotten rid of in advance of tiling."