

# BATHROOMS SHOULD MIRROR YOUR HOME

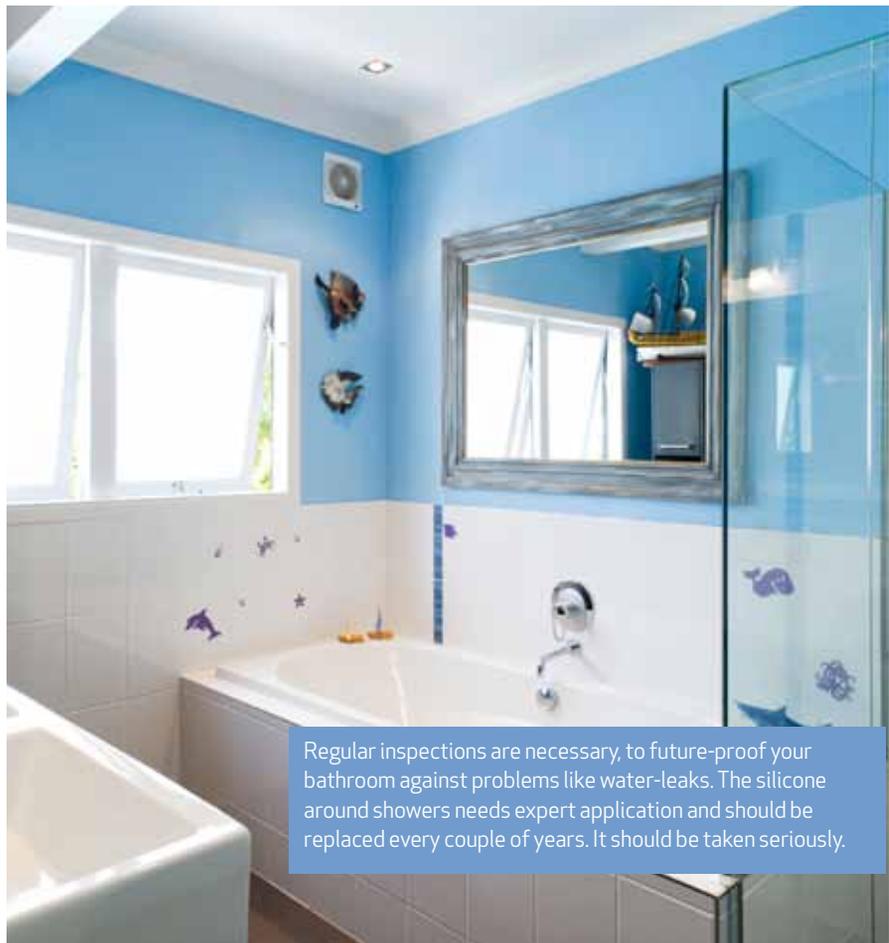
The bathroom is one of the home's desirable areas. Aesthetically, the small room appeals to renters. Make first impressions count, writes **Liesl Johnstone**

**AN ATTRACTIVE BATHROOM** is a big draw-card to renters. It creates renter competition, and tenants will want to stay longer. But for a beautiful, functional thing now to still be a beautiful, problem-free thing in 15 years' time, guidance is good.

Don't use any product or method to achieve lasting results. So say two canny investors who have done up numerous bathrooms over the past two decades. We asked Mark Trafford, owner of Maintain To Profit, Auckland, and Amber Hamilton, a national award-winning interior designer (Amber Hamilton Design, Christchurch), to share their wisdom.

So, the aim is to install clean, crisp quality which looks good and functions well for years, without a huge cash outlay – minimum outlay for maximum return.

Water is usually the crux of bathroom problems, Trafford underlines. Trapped, unvented steam turns to unsightly mould, and dampness then traipses into other rooms. Shower curtains studded by a pattern of grey mould spores are an abomination. So is mouldy old nylon carpet.



Regular inspections are necessary, to future-proof your bathroom against problems like water-leaks. The silicone around showers needs expert application and should be replaced every couple of years. It should be taken seriously.



## BATHROOM HOT TIPS

Need hot tips on how to upgrade your bathroom? Here are major tasks to tackle:

- Research, planning and phoning around is far and away the best investment of your own time. Each tradesperson needs to give you a written-down fixed price plus a fixed time-frame. If they won't, use someone else. Lining up the various trades to be ready in quick succession (reminding them several times in the previous weeks of where they fit into your exact time-line) will save time-lag frustration and wads of rental cash. If inability to pick up certain materials in time is a hold-up, do that for them.
- Measure up your space and your existing sad-looking fittings. Have a good hard think about how the bathroom will function best, ideally without the expense/consent process of moving plumbed features. Document it out by sketching any changes, with measurements. Research about on-special bathroom package deals from major suppliers ...PlaceMakers, Bunnings, Mitre 10 Mega. If you need predominantly one item to upgrade, say, the vanity, see if an ex-display vitreous china model or demo-yard one is available cheaply, and plan around it.
- Painting the walls, ceiling, windows and skirtings is something you can do yourself at the end. Using correct products will pay dividends down the track. (See Amber's advice main article)
- Check the dwelling's insurance policy. What cover applies during renovations? If the cover is inadequate, change this!

If replacing the toilet, Amber advises a soft-closing, thick resin toilet seat be selected, which should last well for years.

Trafford says he believes a transformation can realistically be achieved for \$8000-\$12,000, and equally importantly, within five to 10 days. That's for your average-sized bathroom of 2.5 by 2.5 metres. Quality materials and top workmanship will be key to the room's longevity.

It may seem obvious, but in the heat of price-competitive phone research, it's easy to overlook the importance of hiring registered tradespeople only. The building code changes, and a non-registered tradesperson may not know new rules. You'll need a builder, plumber, electrician, tiler and gib-stopper and painter, unless you can tackle the last of these – painting.

Also, if damage is later found and insurance claimed on, you'll be asked

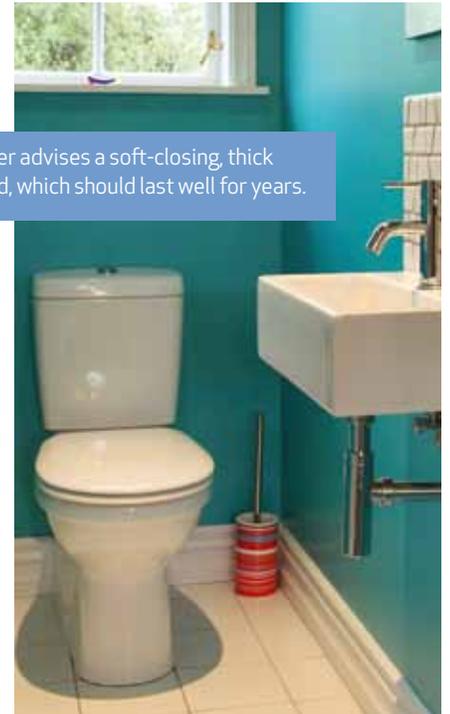
### FEEL THE PAIN AND USE OIL-BASED PAINT ON BATHROOM WALLS AND CEILINGS

– AMBER HAMILTON.

whether the tradesperson was registered.

It's a frightening phenomenon, but Mark Trafford says that of the 75 bathrooms he estimates MaintainToProfit install or renovate each year, around 50 are not planned. Gradual and sudden water damage and leaks are big issues for investor landlords; what might have started as a tiny pin-prick leak can end up costing an accidental \$10,000.

The lesson, he says, is to ensure everything is as water-tight and membraned as possible. Aqualine gib (the green gib) is now the required undergarment for the bathroom, and a good idea anyway. Another modern



requirement is for bathroom-approved-light-fittings. You can't select any lights to install above the mirror, Amber Hamilton warns. They have to be screened from the possibility of water-induced electrocution. For the central ceiling light, choose one which can't throw out lines and shadows, with no resting place for a growing collection of insects.

Even though tiled bathrooms are high-end-attractive, the bathroom floor in low to mid-range investment properties can look equally stunning with a wood-grain vinyl laid over thin-line board. Mark and Amber think the latter a great solution, with no need to re-grout after a few years. These products are much more sophisticated, hard-wearing and aesthetic than in years past. Using thin-line board is an important step and "covers a multitude of sins," Amber Hamilton says.

She believes, however, that white tiles behind the vanity basin(s) taps are preferable to the mirror reaching right to the basin. It's smear-avoidance. And in the interests of no hair-dye and make-up stains on the vanity and basin, choose a vitreous china model over plastic or acrylic versions, Hamilton cautions. She even lines bathroom cupboards and drawers with cream rubber mesh to prevent unfixable surface disfigurement.

## RENOVATION: BATHROOMS



Before and after... Amber Hamilton and husband, John, regularly do up bathrooms to stunning effect. Even in investment properties the couple will install a low-cost heated towel rail as well as a bathroom heater.



Other ways to future-proof are to choose quality, branded products like showers and taps with long guarantee/warranty periods. Twenty years is good. Also, if the shower's hinges fail in some way, you'll be able to replace the exact parts with a well-trusted brand. Ask at the showrooms. Hamilton warns against purchasing the 900mm corner shower in a package-deal. It's just too mean a space for elbows when washing hair! If a bath tightens space, always install a shower over it, with a 200mm or 300mm safety glass screen. Young families and older tenants appreciate having a bath, so it's worth keeping, and

even adding hand-grips nearby.

Once basic items are purchased, make the room visually spacious. Mark Trafford and Amber Hamilton agree to the principle of white, white and more white. Also, use large mirrors, which can be ordered custom-made or bought cheaply in standard sizes. The smaller the bathroom, the bigger the mirror. Storage is important, too, Trafford adds. Have plenty of drawers – on each side of the vanity, if possible.

Installing a good-sized extractor fan, vented outside, which goes on with the light switch and over-run timer is a real boon in avoiding bathroom mould. Ditto with

installing strong window stays. They allow tenants to air the bathroom properly while deterring burglars.

Painting the bathroom necessitates another decision: water-based or oil-based paint? Amber's top tip is to "feel the pain and use oil-based paint on bathroom walls and ceilings." Yes, you'll have to use turpentine and dispose of the rollers afterward. But this negates wall and ceiling condensation patches forevermore. She recommends Resene's 'Lustaglo' for the job. Water-based paints can nevertheless be used on skirting boards and around windows, she adds. ■