

design news

Design trends, innovative solutions give high-traffic washrooms style, security

BY JASON RENNER

You know the old saying, you shouldn't judge a book by its cover? The fact is, customers and patrons do judge a restroom by its (toilet seat) cover. It's been documented that restroom quality and cleanliness do impact the decision on where to shop or eat.

People may even choose their destination based on the restroom, going as far as consulting a city guide of the best flushing facilities. Statistics show about 80 percent of the people that enter a facility will visit the restroom. Increasingly, building owners are realizing that while a lobby area may provide the first impression, allocating resources toward a better restroom experience can be the most lasting impression.

Special considerations must be made for all high-traffic restrooms, but each type of facility will have its own distinct needs and challenges. Airport restrooms will be different from those in a hotel lobby, which will not be the same as those located in sports stadiums. They should have a couple things in common — they must be inviting and virtually indestructible. If a restroom was not originally designed with these goals in mind, often it can be cost-effectively updated. Sometimes just changing a few fixtures or accessories can be a vast improvement.

Trends in restroom design

A trend resonating across all types of public restrooms is toward creating a warmer, home-inspired environment with rich colors and textures. Washrooms in high-traffic areas need not be sterile and cold looking. Painting walls with warm earth-tone shades, or infusing the room with

bright splashes of color is an easy change from boring white walls. In addition, lavs, toilet partitions and accessories can be chosen in complimentary or coordinating color schemes. Softer recessed lighting can help create a more inviting area.

Contemporary restrooms incorporate architectural elements and curved lines. Think outside of the box, and use rounded shapes over square ones. Oval mirrors rather than the usual rectangular variety is an easy change. Curved walls or fixtures, like a wave-shaped lavatory sink, also add visual interest.

Another consideration is the "touch-free" factor. People are more



Good design and durability can go hand-in-hand, as this stylish public washroom amply illustrates.

aware of germs today, buying anti-germ products at an increasing rate. No one wants to touch anything. One reason could be the statistics. Researchers from the American Society for Microbiology have found that while nearly everyone says they wash their hands after using public facilities, only 67 percent actually do.

Germs in restrooms tend to be concentrated in wet areas and on door handles. These factors have driven the industry toward hands-free faucets, hand dryers and even soap dispensers. It's another reason many restrooms are now designed with "maze-type" angled entrances to eliminate handling the door, yet still providing privacy.

Durability without sacrificing design

The good news is that aesthetically pleasing, well-planned restrooms can also be durable. The key to a well-designed public restroom is specifying products that are attractive, tough and easy to maintain. All restroom fixtures and accessories can be selected with vandal-resistant features. For example, toilet tissue dispensers and combination wall units should have

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Washrooms don't have to be cold and institutional. Family-friendly environments are becoming more popular.

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Innovation brings style to washroom design

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sturdy full-length piano hinges and tumbler locks for added security.

Durable cast brass faucets with infrared controls should be a top consideration since there are no surface-mounted knobs to tempt vandals. In some models, the sensor module and operating valve are housed within the faucet body, giving these units a distinct advantage. Another tip is to select recessed, flush-mounted accessories. They not only look great, but they maximize space and cannot be knocked off the wall.

Installation and easy maintenance

Routine maintenance should be top-of-mind when choosing and installing products. Mounting toilet partitions from the ceiling and hanging lavs on the wall keeps floor spaces open and saves a tremendous amount of cleaning time. Wall-mounted lavatory systems are also easier to clean than individual china lavs.

Low-maintenance solid surface products are stain-resistant, allowing marker, scratches, stains and burns to be scrubbed away. Potential installation problems are reduced because the units can be hung directly to the wall, and there are fewer plumbing connections and rough-ins needed.

Selecting larger capacity accessories can help keep maintenance to a minimum. Jumbo tissue dispensers and heavy-duty soap dispensers can reduce restocking time. Choosing electric hand dryers over paper towels eliminates excess trash. In addition, dryers are more cost-effective, better for the environment and keep the restroom more sanitary.

Going with the flow

Moving traffic in and out of a high-traffic restroom can be a challenge. Retrofitting an existing row of china sinks with group hand washing fixtures is one economical solution. Washfountains or solid surface lavatory systems can accommodate more users in a shorter amount of time. These wall-mounted units also take up less floor space, providing more space for users to walk.

Proper placement of accessories can impact traffic flow and will help keep traffic moving toward the exit. Moving mirrors away from the sinks can create more hand washing space. Hand towels or dryers should be close to the sink to avoid water being dripped across the floor, creating a safety hazard. Ideally trash recepta-

cles and soap dispensers should be built into the sink unit.

ADA compliance also impacts traffic flow. In addition to providing specifications such as sink heights and disabled-access stalls, ADA mandates entry and stall corridor width. The "hallway" area in front of the toilet partitions must be wide enough to meet today's wider regulations. This area is particularly important for airport facilities, in which all users need more space to accommodate rolling luggage and carry-on bags.

Bringing it all together

The most inviting restrooms are those that creatively incorporate attractive design elements, like color and texture, with durable and easy-to-maintain fixtures and accessories. Beyond simply following general restroom guidelines, designers and contractors must consider the needs of specific application. Working together with a washroom product expert, owners, architects and contractors can easily "flush out" the best solution for any high-traffic restroom. ■

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