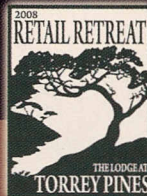


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Retailers from department stores to boutique shops nationwide are building or remodeling fitting rooms and restrooms to lure savvy shoppers.

By Kris Alderson

Retail restroom designs take cues from residential styles, designs

If given the option, all of us would prefer to do our bathroom business in the privacy of our own home rather than in a busy public restroom. Some of the most frequent complaints about shopping are the condition of the restrooms. Increasingly, retailers and malls are recognizing that restrooms can be a key differentiator, particularly for women who tend to use restrooms more than

men and often with children or elderly parents in tow.

For women who make or influence 95 percent of all purchase decisions, conveniently located restrooms that are clean and well designed can make the difference between leaving the store (never to return) and staying to shop a while longer. Appointing retail restrooms as well as the spa-inspired residential

restrooms that consumers are accustomed to using makes sense. Restroom product manufacturers are responding with an array of new plumbing fixtures and accessories to help architects translate a store's design into washroom spaces.

Durability and aesthetic appeal are no longer on opposing spectrums in commercial restroom design. Decorative plumbing fixtures are not just for residential applications. Manufacturers have created a new category of products under the high-end decorative commercial plumbing umbrella. Best of all, these new offerings are cost-effective and have a longer lifecycle than china lavs and other less-inspiring commercial restroom standbys.

Upscale materials

Retailers from department stores to boutique shops nationwide are building or remodeling fitting rooms and restrooms to lure savvy shoppers. Both areas are becoming larger for improved accessibility, and better materials are being used because these retailers know that for women there is a direct connection between the condition and quality of the restroom





The popularity of stainless steel appliances in the home makes stainless an appealing material for public restrooms because it evokes quality.

and their perception of the retailer.

For instance, where toilet partitions were once an afterthought in the restroom, they are now a more important part of the design equation. Stainless steel partitions with a pattern or texture are selected over less costly options. Although more expensive than phenolic or solid plastic partitions, stainless steel is extremely durable and difficult to dam-

age. Moreover, the popularity of stainless steel appliances in the home makes stainless an appealing material for public restrooms because it evokes quality. Stainless steel also provides a cool contrast to other tones in the restroom in much the same way it sets off design elements in residential kitchens.

Look for a new type of toilet partition that has genuine granite pilasters and

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Although trendy vessel sink materials such as colored glass or carved wood may be an appealing choice for the home, they simply cannot withstand the abuse of constant use in most retail restrooms.

partition panels combined with stainless steel doors for the ultimate in upscale luxury. A number of granite options are available and the stainless steel is given a softer tactile feel with options such as brushed, textured and leather-grain finishes. These textures make the stainless more forgiving, and eliminate the need for frequent polishing to remove fingerprints.

Outdated single user china lavs have given way to beautiful solid surface lavatory systems and lavatory decks in retail restrooms. Lavatory systems are not only more cost-effective to install and maintain, they also help keep water and soap from dripping onto the floor because it drips right into the bowl. Plus, solid surface materials can be easi-

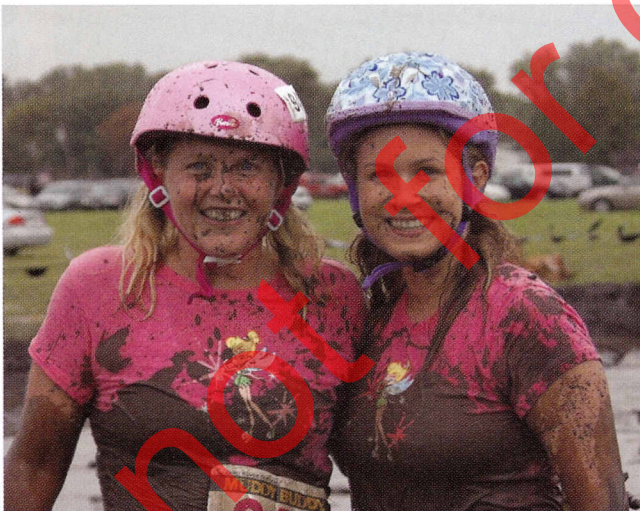
ly repaired. A wide range of color choices are available such as organic shades with larger chunks of aggregate that mimic the characteristics of granite, without the need for regular sealing. Note that lighter shades tend to be easier to maintain.

Appeal, longevity

Taking a cue from the popularity of vessel sinks on the residential side, vessel sink lavatory units are coming to market that are ideal for retail applications. Vessel sink systems create a unique public, yet personal space that is also easily accessible. Be sure to specify fixtures that are flexible

in terms of color options, design choices and multi-height flexibility — these types of units allow you to customize the system to fit your specific needs.

A complete system with both the lavatory deck and vessels made of a durable solid surface material will have greatest longevity. Although trendy vessel sink materials such as colored glass or carved wood may be an appealing choice for the home, they simply cannot withstand the abuse of constant use in most retail restrooms. A solid surface system also offers a seamless, smooth design that is easy to keep clean and naturally



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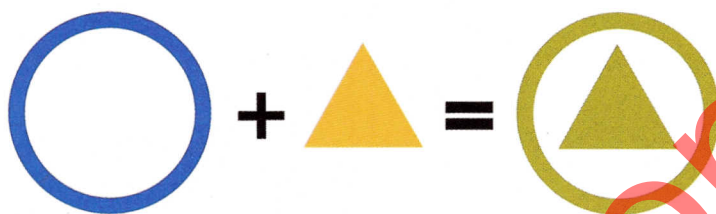
More flexible vessel sink systems accommodate either deck- or wall-mounted faucets. Better units allow designers to mix and match, some going as far as offering vessel sinks in different heights to pro-

vide a standard-height sink and lower ADA-compliant sink all in one pre-assembled unit. Custom finishes may include a choice of edge treatments on the lavatory deck, and a wide range of color choices to create different combina-

tions for the lav deck and vessel sinks.

Even in faucets, the line between residential and commercial products is blurring. While residential product manufacturers are capitalizing on the popularity of touchless facets

Even in faucets, the line between residential and commercial products is blurring. While residential product manufacturers are capitalizing on the popularity of touchless facets commonly found in public restrooms, newer commercial fixtures mimic residential faucet trends.



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commonly found in public restrooms, newer commercial fixtures mimic residential faucet trends. Wall-mounted faucets are an example. Often the faucets are mounted through a mirror for a crisp, contemporary look.

Touchless faucets have also been updated, featuring more graceful curves and hidden sensors to reduce temptation for vandals. Capacitive sensing technology eliminates the sensor windows that can be punctured. Instead, the entire spout of a capacitive sensing faucet is like an omni-directional sensor which activates the flow of water from any angle of approach. The result: less user frustration and fewer maintenance hassles.

Setting the tone

A critical but often overlooked element of good

Whether it is the granite on the toilet partitions or an environmentally-friendly recycled glass tile for a tile inlay on the wall, the VIP retail customer will take notice. And today more than ever, she's looking for the same (or better) fit and finishes as found in her home.

restroom design is lighting. The right lighting will help make restrooms look cleaner, and importantly, can give those looking into the mirror a more flattering appearance. There are a range of energy-efficient lighting options that give restrooms a warmer glow. Recessed can lights and

large pendants paired with wall sconces create a finished look and can be a great way to tie-in lighting fixtures from other areas of the store.

Mirrors are equally important. A large wall mirror is always an option, but it's not the only choice. Look for mirrors in inter-

esting shapes such as a wave design to pick up on the wave shape of a lavatory system. For a smaller-scale restroom, consider framed mirrors above each of the lavatories.

Creating upscale restrooms to complement the rest of a retail facility is a wise investment, and today plumbing manufacturers are offering more products than ever before to help designers meet this need. Generally higher quality finishes and more durable fixtures translate to lower operating costs over the project's lifecycle, so this strategy makes sense for owners and operators.

Finally, in choosing

plumbing fixtures, accessories and accents for retail restrooms, keep in mind that women are tactile and will notice all of the details in finishes. Whether it is the granite on the toilet partitions or an environmentally-friendly recycled glass tile for a tile inlay on the wall, the VIP retail customer will take notice. And today more than ever, she's looking for the same (or better) fit and finishes as found in her home. **R**

Kris Alderson is a senior marketing manager for Bradley of Menomonee Falls, Wisc. She can be reached at 800.BRADLEY.

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