

Brighten up your bath this fall

By Tara Marion

Refinishing and adding accents are two bathroom remodeling alternatives that will make waves without drowning you in debt.

What's your expectation when you walk into a bathroom? "You want it to be clean," answered Ray Masters, co-owner of Tub Renewal Systems in Battle Creek. If an old, damaged tub detracts from your bathroom's appearance, Masters suggests refinishing as one solution.

Tub refinishing means stripping off a bathtub's old finish and resurfacing it with a porcelain-type glaze. This process can cover mineral stains or mold, repair cracks and burns and add shine to grungy tubs—making them look clean and new.

"If a tub's dingy and dull, hard to clean and has water stains, obviously, it's not going to be viewed with much value," Masters explained.

Although there are different processes, Masters said that refinishing begins by removing the original shiny glaze. This is done with acid etching on porcelain surfaces and by sanding on fiberglass tubs.

After the surface is cleaned, an epoxy primer is used and Masters said he then applies the new glaze, which is a urethane-based top coat used by 98 percent of the industry.

After three applications of the top coat, the finish is approximately one-sixteenth of an inch thick, which prevents peeling and chipping.

Not only is tub refinishing durable, but it can be customized in any color, meaning you can match it to other bathroom fixtures or to a swatch of wallpaper or fabric.

Despite this versatility, Masters said only 5 percent of people customize the glaze's color, while 5 percent use almond and the remaining 90 percent of customers choose white.

"White is the most popular and widely used because it's easier to decorate around," he explained.

In addition to these benefits, Masters said refinishing saves time and eliminates the need for major remodeling. In fact, he said these are the primary reason for choosing tub refinishing, which is usually a 24-hour project from beginning to end, whereas remodeling may involve pulling off tile and breaking the tub into pieces to remove it, possibly damaging surrounding fixtures, drywall, ceramic tile or flooring.

Masters said tub refinishing is not only durable, lasting five to 25 years, but is generally less expensive than a replacement tub and the installation that requires.

Stacy M. Durr, writing in *Kitchens and Baths Magazine* (Summer 1997), agreed that remodeling isn't always necessary to improve your bathroom. "The best thing about such a small room is that even the tiniest changes make a difference," she said.

With this in mind, Durr offered a variety of options to give your bath a splash of ambiance.

Whether you have your tub and sink refinished or are working with your current fixtures, you can still add a touch of newness with faucets and hardware. "Old-fashioned brass shower fixtures and vintage-style faucets all recall the era of romance," Durr noted.

Nothing adds personality to a room like hand-painted touches, which are easy to create with stencils if you don't trust your freehand abilities.

You can enjoy flowers year-round with a vase of dried or silk flowers, wreaths or floral-patterned accessories. "Whether you decorate with a rose-patterned wallpaper, a lilac shower curtain or botanical bath accessories, your room is sure to shine with quintessential charm," Durr explained, point out that these flowers are maintenance-free.

Lace conveys elegance and tenderness, and Durr suggested hanging lace-trimmed towels or draping lace over a vanity mirror or a small table topped with mementos.

Wicker baskets filled with rolled-up towels or magazines are both decorative and functional. "A wicker basket with your favorite soaking treasures is especially charming," said Durr.

If you have a spacious bathroom, a sofa or easy chair is a comfortable place to cuddle up with a good book while waiting for your tub and accessorizing the seat with velvet pillows is a quick fix.

"One of the simplest ways to dress a bath with charm is by decorating with fabric," Durr explained, adding that lush towels and a lavish shower curtain are an easy way to add color and pattern to the tub area.

Durr pointed out that window treatments can create extravagance or romance. "If you like extravagance, go for long, luxurious drapes in sumptuous materials," she said. "If you want something romantic, but not quite so heavy, opt for a simple lace panel and jazz up simple treatments with ribbons, cords and tassels."

Although natural light is the best way to brighten your bathroom, there are alternatives. "Shed some light on romantic decoration with elegant lighting fixtures," said Durr, who suggested Victorian-style sconces, graceful curves, rich textures and floral designs.