



WELCOME TO THE SPATHROOM

Bath-based interior designer **Clair Strong** shares her expert tips on banishing the rubber duck and ditching the soggy bathmat as part of the transformation from humdrum bathrooms to decadent spathroom

The bathroom is a haven of tranquility, the one room in the house where you can truly be alone . . . unless you have a cat of course. It's one of the hardest working rooms in the house and yet the bathroom is something of an unsung hero. When it comes to renovating, the bathroom is often neglected, left until last, or worse – given a lacklustre makeover. The living room is lavished with love, the kitchen crafted by the finest artisans and the bedrooms bedecked with glorious furnishings. And then comes the bathroom's turn with a basic white suite, a few cursory tiles and a splash of neutral hued paint.

Well, this simply will not do. I have a passion for transforming neglected bathrooms into something much more worthy of what should be their lofty status.

You don't need a colossal budget or huge amounts of square footage to make more of your bathroom. Nor do you need to be particularly revolutionary with the decor if you prefer a more reserved look. Designing a spathroom is all about creating a space that meets your requirements and reflects your personality. So whether you love long, luxurious baths or prefer a quick in-and-out shower, it's about making the room work for you.

The Essentials

Every bathroom needs, well, bathing facilities. If it's time to upgrade that 1980s avocado-green suite, you'll be pleased to hear that your options are numerous. Bathroom suites can now include huge walk-in waterfall showers, Hammams, saunas, Jacuzzi baths and hot tubs. Even small spaces can indulge in rainfall showers or claw foot baths. Basins come in all shapes and sizes too, so you're no longer limited to the practical but often stylistically underwhelming pedestal basin. The essentials are the building blocks of your new spathroom. I would recommend choosing a scheme that makes you feel good, provide an atmosphere of calm and relaxation and is pleasing on the eye too.

Decor and Lighting

Bathroom decoration should be treated like any other room; start from the bottom and work your way up.

You'll need to give extra consideration to the decoration in the bathroom because it will endure a great deal of heat and humidity. The floor will get wet, so for the most practical and easy to maintain choose water resistant, easy-to-clean tiles, as slip resistant as possible – they could be rubber, stone or ceramic for instance.

If you're using stone then these will need to be sealed before use and at intervals over the years. Natural materials like slate and stone look fantastic in the bathroom; they're style classics, ultra hardy and add an element of cool, spa-like Zen to the room.

As for the walls, your options are open. Many people shy away from wallpaper in the bathroom, but it's actually a really rewarding style choice. Avoid wall papering directly around the bath and shower and create a single accent wall (away from water sources) instead. This works better in a room such as a cloakroom with only a loo and basin as there's far less chance of the paper getting wet, or peeling from humidity.

Paint is a great alternative and you can choose the dark, relaxing tones of a hotel spa or go for bright and breezy hues to wake you up of a morning. Don't be afraid to experiment, bold colours look fantastic when combined with neutral, natural materials.

Finally, lighting will give your spathroom the ambience you require. Choose overhead lights that can be dimmed, so you're always in control of the mood. Spotlights around the mirror, feature lights at skirting level around showers for instance add that touch.

Storage

When you're finally ready to sink into the tub the last thing you want is to be fighting for space with your children's bath toys. Plucking a rubber duck from your beautifully scented, bubbly water might kill the mood a bit.

Storage is an issue in many bathrooms as they're not naturally equipped with cupboard space and shelving. Fortunately, there are a number of bathroom-friendly options that will keep the spare shampoo, clean towels and extra loo rolls out of the way.



DELUXE AND DELIGHTFUL: all pictures from Clair Strong's collection of past projects

For items that need to be close at hand or are worthy of display consider shelving. Little alcoves cut into the wall provide a home for soaps and sponges or decorative accents like candles and sea shells. Alternatively, you could build floating shelves into oddly shaped corners and nooks.

Cupboards can be incorporated in innovative ways too; around or above the basin and even underneath the bath, if necessary. If you've got the room, a vanity unit along one wall, with the sink built-in, provides plenty of storage space, with room for the toys too.



The Finishing Touches

A few final embellishments will bring your spathroom to completion. Small, seemingly insignificant items like candles; a vase of flowers; towels in a complementary colour, and window treatments will make a huge impact on the overall finish of your room. It's like accessorising an outfit, that one piece of jewellery can take the ensemble from drab to fab. Find out more at: www.clairstrong.co.uk. ■

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