

# Wall and Floor Finishes

Choosing bathroom wall and floor coverings is both an art and a science. As the largest surfaces in the room, the walls and floors set the stage aesthetically for the fixtures and fittings. They are, however, more than mere backgrounds. They define the size and shape of the room and play a large part in its success. On the practical side, well-chosen wall and floor coverings enhance a bathroom's safety and need to fulfil certain durability and maintenance requirements.

Let's face it: beneath their shiny and sometimes glamorous surfaces, bathrooms are practical, functional spaces. They're exposed to constant moisture, a fair share of dirt, and daily wear and tear. The true measure of success is whether they can stand up to all that and still look fresh a few years down the road. That's why it's important to choose wall and floor coverings that are resistant to water, easy to clean, and simple to maintain.

Bathrooms can be divided into two zones: wet and dry. Wet zones are the areas in close proximity to water sources—sinks, tubs, and showers. With wall coverings you can afford to be more flexible, depending on which zone you're dealing with. In dry zones, you can be less practical, but the wall coverings in wet zones need to be water resistant as well as durable and attractive. When it comes to floor coverings, because, in most cases, you will choose only one material to cover the whole floor in both wet and

dry zones, you need a surface that will serve the needs of both. A floor surface that combines water and slip resistance is essential.

In this chapter we'll look at a variety of wall and floor coverings and discuss the advantages of these materials as well as any disadvantages. We'll take note of issues that separate high-quality versions from lesser quality products. We'll also point out reasons you might choose to splurge on a product and where you can save money without sacrificing style or quality.

As always, it's critical to match the materials to the ways the room will be used and by whom. The metallic floor that would be perfect for a guest bath might not be a very good choice for a family bath. The type of scrubbable wallpaper you'd choose for a children's bath might be a little out of place in an elegant spa environment. But with the variety of materials available, you're sure to find the one that's right for your bathroom.

**Opposite:** Thousands of tiny mosaic tiles march in straight lines across the walls and floor of this bathroom. The stripes are created by nothing more than a series of shifts in color.

**Below:** Here's a simple but effective combination. Wood floors and walls warm up the white-on-white color scheme of the painted walls and fixtures.

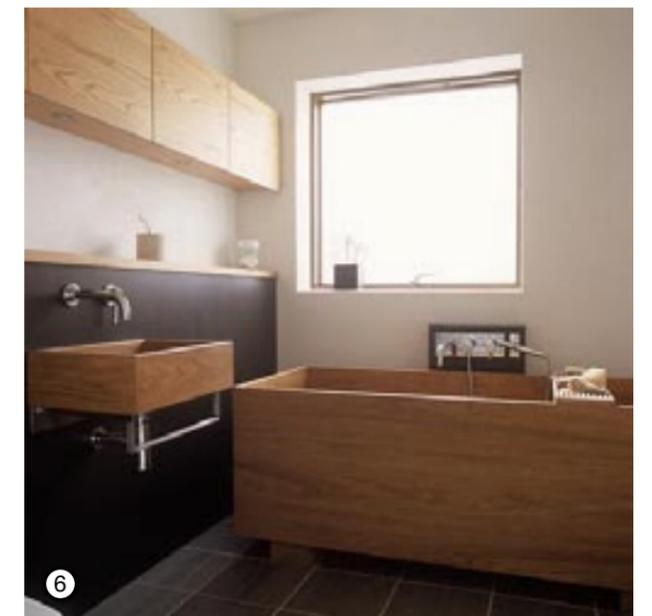


## Materials

A bathtub's material affects its appearance and shape as well as its durability and, most especially, its price. Each material has advantages and disadvantages. Some, like fiberglass, tend to be inexpensive and lightweight, but may not be as durable as you'd like. Others, such as wood and metal, offer high style and natural beauty, but may be quite expensive and sometimes require a substantial commitment to maintenance.

One of the most important characteristics of a bathtub material is its weight. Extremely heavy tubs, such as large stone or cast-iron models, may require that the floors of the bathroom be reinforced to bear the load. Be sure to verify the structural requirements of these tubs before purchase.

- ① The nickel lining of this bathtub contrasts beautifully with its copper exterior. Typically, tubs like this are handmade and may include visible seams.
- ② Enameled steel is less expensive and lighter than cast iron, but may not hold heat well and can be noisy. Some high-quality versions have an undercoating that helps resolve these issues.
- ③ This freestanding stone tub is simply stunning. Stone bathtubs are extremely durable, but tend to be heavy and expensive. Still, there's nothing in the world quite like the natural beauty of stone.



- ④ Glass and stainless steel combine to create an almost magical bathtub. The glass itself is manufactured for safety. Some manufacturers add a spot-resistant coating.
- ⑤ And now for the *truly* exotic: an acrylic bathtub wrapped in crocodile leather. Acrylic tubs tend to be lightweight, durable, and resistant to scratches. And the crocodile leather? Well, that's already proven itself around water, hasn't it?
- ⑥ Special finishes can make wood tubs last for generations. Most require a commitment to occasional maintenance, but this can be an inducement to those who love the grain and substance of wood.

**Radiators and towel warmers** are available in styles ranging from traditional to contemporary. They are typically hard-wired into the bathroom's electrical system and controlled by a timer, thermostat, or remote control.

Towel warmers are a type of radiator. They slowly radiate warmth that heats towels and dries delicate laundry. Wall-mounted units make good use of space, but not every bathroom has a good place to install one. Floor-mounted units typically offer multiple rungs and exceptional capacity in family baths or other bathrooms shared by several users.

- ① Wall-mounted, two-rail chrome towel warmer.
- ② Wall-mounted towel-warming shelf.
- ③ Contemporary towel-warming shelf with bar.
- ④ Multiple-rail, wall-mounted towel warmer.
- ⑤ Ladder-style, wall-mounted towel warmer.
- ⑥ Floor-mounted radiator with chrome towel warmer.
- ⑦ Contemporary radiator with multiple rails.
- ⑧ Apple-ladder-style towel warmer.
- ⑨ Floor-mounted, multiple-rail towel warmer.
- ⑩ Contemporary ladder-style towel warmer.
- ⑪ Radiator with multiple chrome towel warmer rails.
- ⑫ Space-saving chrome radiator.
- ⑬ Curved chrome towel warmer/radiator.
- ⑭ Tall, floor-mounted towel warmer with multiple rails.



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