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Self-cleaning toilet among latest trends

Freshen up your bathroom

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CRANBERRY TWP — A self-washing toilet, faucets made on a 3-D printer and free-standing bathtubs are just a few of the latest trends in bathroom design. That's the word from Rich Eakin, showroom manager at Robertson Kitchen and Bath Gallery on Freedom Road. Eakin said his customers come in with a wide range of needs, including those building new homes, updating an original bathroom or looking to update an old bathroom with the pink, lavender, green or baby blue fixtures.

The latter bathrooms, which were likely designed and installed in the 1950s or 1960s, often have the tile halfway up the wall and tiny floor tiles that were popular in that era. He said many people come to the showroom looking to replace a broken pink or blue toilet tank lid or other broken fixture from that time, which none of his vendors stock. "They are not readily available and they are not attractive, so that can start the ball rolling for a bathroom update," Eakin said. "People will try to freshen up that look."

In addition to the client's budget, other factors that figure into a remodel include space; whether to place a shower, bathtub or combination of both; hot water tank capacity; and storage needs, Eakin said. One top-of-the-line fixture that is becoming more popular is the self-cleaning, clog-free toilet made by American Standard. He said a special mechanism allows the bowl to be washed, and there are no holes under the rim because the bowl fills using a different system. Bidet toilets and heated toilet seats also are popular with some families, Eakin said.

Regarding color trends for sink tops, toilets and bathtubs, he said the teal and aquamarine that were popular about five years ago have given way lately to gray tones. "Almost any color works with gray," Eakin said, "but whites are still the most popular." Brushed nickel, chrome and oil-rubbed bronze faucets and fixtures seem to be in vogue now, he said, and accessories like towel rods, grab bars, soap dishes and toothbrush holders are often matched with the faucets. Eakin recommends a higher gooseneck for lower vanities, which provides for better hand washing. "It gives you more space to be able to do your work in the morning," he said. One innovative look for those with a higher-end budget is a faucet made with a three-dimensional printer. Clients can design the look of their faucet using the method. "It's a very, very unique faucet," Eakin said. Regarding showers, Eakin said almost every model includes a hand-held mechanism that slides vertically to accommodate people of all heights and abilities. "It also helps with cleaning," he said. Large showerheads or multiple showerheads on a slide bar are also popular, Eakin said, but the capacity of the hot water tank and the building's water pressure must be taken into consideration. The same goes for the larger freestanding tubs. "We've got to do the math," Eakin said. "One of our tubs holds 73 gallons of water. If you've got a 40-gallon hot water tank, we've got an issue."

He also recommends grab bars for clients of all ages, which will appear stylish because they will match the room's fixtures. "Let's plan ahead, and let's be safe," Eakin said. "Plus, these are not your grandmother's grab bars." Clients have choices to make when



Rich Eakin, showroom manager at Robertson Kitchen and Bath Gallery on Freedom Road in Cran., who is pictured with a few of the latest bathroom sink designs being chosen by customers.

it comes to bathtubs that were not necessary in years past, Eakin said. The standard bathtub is made of a light acrylic material, and can be outfitted with in-line heaters that hold the water temperature steady. Cast iron tubs naturally hold heat longer than acrylic, he said. "Freestanding tubs are in vogue right now," Eakin said. Various heights are available, he said. Floating vanity cupboards are also popular, according to Eakin. Appearing to have no base against the floor, some vanities are as high as 12 inches off the floor. "It's a very trendy look," he said. "It allows you to put the vanity at whatever height you want." Another popular item is a combination vent, fan and light that can play music through a Bluetooth speaker, "You can play the music on your phone through the fan light," Eakin said. He said the average bathroom remodel costs \$10,000 to \$35,000. "Some bathroom remodels nowadays can be more expensive than a kitchen remodel," Eakin said. "It all comes down to the design and look."

Information on Robertson Kitchen and Bath Gallery is available by calling 724-772-3855 or by logging onto www.robertsonkitchenandbath.com.