

# MANSION GLOBAL

## How to Avoid the 5 Worst Bathroom Design Mistakes

We asked architects and designers how to steer clear of torturously placed towel bars, unflattering lighting and—ugh—wall-to-wall carpet. Plus: The craziest gaffes our pros have ever seen.

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BY **RACHEL WOLFE** | ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED ON NOVEMBER 2, 2020 | [THE WALL STREET JOURNAL](#)



ELIMINATE DIMNESS In a Jackson Hole, Wyo., loo by designer Madeline Stuart, sconces, a pendant and nearby windows offer illumination. *TREVOR TONDRO/OTTO (DESIGNED BY MADELINE STUART)*

WHAT DO designers fear in the bathroom more than a monster behind the shower curtain? For Allison Babcock, an interiors professional in Sag Harbor, N.Y., it's seashells that rudely protrude from shower walls. "I cannot stand built-in whimsical accents in bathrooms," she said. If you want a little idiosyncrasy, she advised, focus on easily swapped-out accessories.

Design pros see mistakes repeated in bathroom planning and decorating, and it pains them. Here are the five most common and vexing ones, along with remedies.



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*Trevor Tondro/OTTO (designed by Madeline Stuart)*

## 1. Unflattering Fixtures

If you've ever left a strip of beard unshaven or applied so much concealer you emphasized the flaw you were trying to hide, blame bad illumination. Direct lighting above the mirror is the worst, warned Ms. Babcock, "aging you and accentuating under-eye bags." Sarah Kennedy, a designer in Jackson, Wyo., noted that bathroom lighting must serve many masters. "We go there to get ready but also to relax and pamper."

Instead Flank a mirror with wall sconces at a flattering 66 inches from the floor, advised Chicago designer Donna Mondì. As a fresh take on the dressing-room mirror, Elisabeth Post-Marner, an architect with Spacesmith, in New York, takes a page from Hollywood and installs Roborn Mirrors with dimmable LED strips. "A well-lit mirror that makes you look great reinforces your self-esteem," she said. Ms. Kennedy likes to combine ambient, task and natural lighting for optimal illumination.

## 2. Fetid Carpet

"I wonder what possessed someone to make that decision each time I encounter it, and I'm amazed how often I still see it," said Dallas designer Jean Liu of the unattractive and unsanitary choice of wall-to-wall in a loo. Designer Eilyn Jimenez, in Miami, noted that anyone who has ever cleaned a bathroom knows how disgusting the floor around a toilet gets. Even pristine steam and water ruin rugs. "Carpets soak up moisture and will end up smelling wet and mildewy," said Ms. Jimenez.

Instead Opt for tile or water-resistant engineered wood, Ms. Jimenez recommended. For an alternative landing pad for wet feet, "try bamboo bath mats or microfiber area rugs," Ms. Jimenez said, and stay away from slow-drying cottons and twills.



San Francisco designer Marea Clark limited strong colors to artwork in a mostly neutral bathroom in a Healdsburg, Calif., bathroom, .  
*Suzanna Scott*

## 3. No Niche

Mismatched bottles on the tub edge or shower floor clutter your sanctuary, so build in a storage nook. "I want people to see materials, design elements, light fixtures—not a drugstore shelf," said Ms. Mondì. Alcove position is key: "I hate when it's the first thing you notice," said San Francisco designer Marea Clark.

Instead Tuck shower niches out of sight. "If you make them low, it creates a spot to prop your leg to shave," said Ms. Clark. "Our female clients always comment on how much they love this feature."

#### **4. Elusive Towels**

McLean, Va., designer Tracy Morris is surprised how often homeowners fail to install easy-to-reach towel bars. "No matter how beautiful a bathroom is, there is nothing worse than having to walk across the bathroom to get your towel after a shower," Ms. Morris said.

Instead Hang rods strategically: outside the shower, next to the tub and by the sink. No room for a whole towel bar? Opt for hooks, Ms. Morris suggests.

#### **5. Chaotic Color**

"It's important to think before you order terrazzo tiles and vibrant paint hues and end up with an overwhelming mess," said International Designers chief Rita Chraibi. And leave your love of butter yellows and olive greens off the walls. "The colors tend to make your skin tone look awful," cautioned Raleigh, N.C., designer Liles Dunnigan.

Instead Stick to soothing colors "such as nude, earthy and soft tones that create better backdrops," said architect Kobi Karp advises clients to limit strong color to a framed artwork. Ideally, one depicting something other than butter or olives.

#### **HEAD CASES / Pros recall the weirdest bathroom-design decisions they've encountered**

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Instead Stick to soothing colors "such as nude, earthy and soft tones that create better backdrops," said Ms. Dunnigan. "You don't want to look like you have a stomach bug while you're getting dressed." Miami architect Kobi Karp advises clients to limit strong color to a framed artwork. Ideally, one depicting something other than butter or olives.

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I had a client request two toilets in the same water closet. Like vanities, they wanted designated his and hers toilets." —Courtney Tartt Elias, founder of Creative Tonic Design, Houston

Only today, I set foot in the bathroom of a country house that had a feature wall of black metallic tiles, which looked like something out of a disco." —Greg Natale, designer, Surry Hills, Australia

A full office set up in a client's bathroom, which included a glass desk, a chair, a Mac computer, a printer and a television. Their rationale was that the bathroom was the one place in their home where they wouldn't be disturbed and so they wanted to maximize their efficiency." —Kobi Karp, architect, Miami

I recently renovated an apartment that had these very detailed gold cherub plumbing fixtures—not only an eye sore but difficult to clean and maintain." —Jennifer Cohler Mason, designer, New York

A large tiled step that made the toilet sit higher than everything else in the bathroom. It was like you had to climb to get up there." —Melissa Warner Rothblum, designer, Los Angeles