

## **Bath Remodeling - The Smart Investment**

by Lloyd Summy

Americans are finding that real estate may offer the best investment for their money. Home and apartment owners who are seeking to increase their return on real estate are investing in remodeling projects. In fact, 82% of people polled now feel real estate is a better long-term investment than the stock market.

According to the *State of the Nation's Housing: 2002*, a report from the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University, spending on home additions and alterations has soared to \$99 billion annually, a 62% increase in the past decade. Of course, the nation's aging housing stock also plays a role in the trend. More than half of the 120 million homes and apartments in the U.S. were built more than 60 years ago. They weren't designed with today's lifestyles in mind, and their bathrooms have become hopelessly outdated.

According to *Remodeling* magazine's 2003 Cost vs. Value Report, bathroom addition and remodeling projects deliver the highest return on a homeowner's investment. For instance, the report estimates that a homeowner with a one or one and-a-half bath house will recoup approximately 94% of his or her \$15,058 cost to add a bathroom. A midrange remodeling job that updates a bathroom that's at least 25 years old costs an average of \$9,720 and might yield an 88% return upon the sale of the house.

There are three possible ways to handle a bath remodel: one is the traditional tear-out and replace, second - reglaze the existing bath room fixtures and, still another, use a bath liner system.

1. The traditional tear-out and replacement method normally takes two to three weeks. The bathroom has all the fixtures and tile work removed. The contractor asks that a lock box be placed on the property so they can have their employees or sub-contractors access the worksite as needed. Also, the bathroom will not be usable for most of the time that the construction is occurring. Generally, a lot of dust, noise and inconvenience are part of the job. This option is the most expensive and generally the only warranty offered is the contractor's.

2. Reglazing the existing bath fixture is another option. Reglazing is a process of applying an acid to etch the surface, applying a primer then a top coat. The top coats that are used can be an epoxy, urtherine or polyutherine. During its application the technician will ask the occupants to leave then he will put a suit on to avoid contact with the chemicals. When asked, the contractor will sometimes say that three or more coats of the top coat are applied but ... that usually refers to the number of times the spray gun is passed by the surface rather than different applications of the material. The application time is usually a few hours but the curing time can be as long a five days. Reglazing is the lowest cost approach with prices ranges from \$125 to \$700. The resulting product is fragile and any defect in the original can still be visible in the new surface. Also, no warranties are made by the contractor for basic items like chipping, scratching or peeling.

3. The last option is a bathtub liner, but have you ever heard of a bathtub liner? If you have, you're in the enlightened minority. As the *Wall Street Journal* reported in the January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2003 publication, "sales of bathtub liners are increasingly growing". An increasing number of homeowners are becoming aware of this option for their outdated, overused bathrooms. The 1/4-inch thick acrylic bathtub liners are cast from a mold that is an exact duplicate of the tub. The bathtub liners meet the standards established by the Uniform Plumbing Code and Underwriters Laboratories. It is then slipped over the old tub and attached with adhesive. The bathroom walls can also be relined with similar material. Once the liner is delivered, the job takes only a few hours; the cost is typically between \$1,000 and \$3,000 and a manufacturer's warranty is included. Bath liners resist mildew, bacteria, chipping and peeling. It is less messy, provides the least inconvenience, and is less time consuming to the homeowner, landlord and/or tenant than the other options.

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