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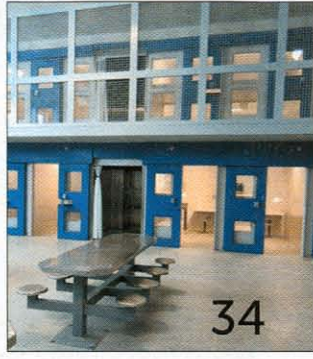
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The hottest trends in kitchen & bath

Part I

BY LINDA JENNINGS DECORATIVE PLUMBING SPECIALIST

This year's design trends are more inspired than ever. The current economic conditions have created a new breed of consumers. They are no longer impulse buyers; much more thought is going into home purchases. Those in a buying position are investing in products that address a wide array of needs, including emotional and physical well being, sustainable living and innovation.

Informed consumers are visiting showrooms and retail outlets to achieve the newest looks in everything from tubs and faucets to sinks, decorative hardware and even shower systems. Today's consumers are reinvesting in their homes, and they continue to look for products that help them reach personal fulfillment.

Highlighting the style network is the evolution of green products. As consumers get more sophisticated about sustainability, so do the products, with a new wave of materials raising the bar on eco-friendly product design.

On the style front, retro is white hot with hardware, faucet finishes and tubs all going white for a 1970s throwback. Multi-generational design continues to be the fastest-growing bath trend, as more and more households need to equip for multiple generations. Hardware inspired by designers and seamless sink innovations are new to the design front and getting rave reviews. Also, showering just got more illuminating with LED lighted shower systems.

Trend No.1 — Green evolves

Sustainability is not a trend but a new way of living. More and more consumers are seeking ways to reduce negative impacts on the environment, and their product purchases are reflecting this forethought. They are educated and very conscientious. But they also have impeccable taste and high design standards, so it's no longer enough to just go "green."

To keep up with the diverse offerings in the marketplace and the growing sophistication of the green buyer, products today need to have a serious design edge when it comes to sustainability. It's all about re-thinking green — kicking it up a notch and giving the consumer luxury choices. The result is a new wave of eco products that are extremely creative and will surely have consumers green with envy.

A number of manufacturers are experimenting with mixed sustainable materials such as the striking Elliptical soaking bath, which combines stainless steel with bamboo pole skirting for an eclectic look rooted in texture and style.

Unlike many other engineered materials, the stainless steel vessel shell is 100% recyclable without degradation, making it fully "sustainable" and a true champion for the environment.

Bamboo sinks are also getting sophisticated, with new shapes and sizes. Featuring organic warmth and natural beauty, these surprisingly durable sinks can easily withstand the rigors of daily use. Known for its peak density, color clarity and sustainability, bamboo is an undeniably green product that fits naturally

into both the kitchen and bathroom environments. Products made from this renewable resource are a fabulous way to combine responsible living with fashionable style. It's green with a creative twist.

Leading tub companies are turning to volcanic limestone mixes to create minimalist styles that are sustainable. As a result, there is a new wave of seamless, solid-surface organic bathtubs that excel in modern design with their contoured bottoms and clean, sleek lines. As the stone-rich alternative to both cast iron and acrylic, the tubs are cast in one seamless piece that won't crack or flex.

The high-performance materials are naturally insulating, durable and stain resistant. The tub is warm to the touch, water stays warm longer, and there are no nasty cold shocks when getting into the tub. The building industry is advancing to a new level of sustainable awareness, and bath manufacturers are meeting those needs with tubs that are superior in design. Ecology-minded manufacturers are shipping the baths in recycled cardboard on pallets made of reclaimed wood, with strapping made from recycled bottles.

Other designers are reclaiming stainless steel and copper to craft freestanding bathing vessels and door pulls with fabulous high-end design results. Metal delivers superb quality and durability, guaranteeing no boundaries when it comes to design requirements. This allows engineering teams the flexibility of creating the most design-savvy products the market has to offer.

As concern for the earth has clearly become a key issue with consumers, designers are heeding the call. Some companies will even custom create door hardware on request to meet Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification standards, the rating system devised by the United States Green Building Council.

Employing organic materials, quality construction and timeless design are keys to offering smart, ultra-luxe and green products that consumers are craving. Sustainable design is here to stay. It's not a passing phase — it's a revolution!

According to The American Society of Interior Design (ASID), "Clearly we are on our way toward adopting sustainability on all levels of our projects, our businesses, our lives — something is happening and it's both an exciting and challenging opportunity for our industry. Individuals and business leaders are making decisions every day that support the economy and lighten their environmental footprint toward attaining sustainable results."

The consumer has evolved when it comes to green living, so manufacturers really have to raise the bar when it comes to design. It's not enough to just be green — products have to be eco-licious!

Trend No.2 — Multi-generational bath design

There's no doubt that multi-generational design is one of the fastest-growing trends in today's housing industry. As more and more people discover the benefits that smart planning affords to those of all age groups and abilities, a rising demand is emerging for products that combine style and safety, beauty and comfort, practicality and versatility.

Multi-generational design need not be a foreign concept. It is, after all, what good design should be. Multi-generational design has applications throughout the house



KITCHEN + BATH

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but is particularly important in the bathroom. A well-thought-out bathroom can easily accommodate the needs of young children, older adults and those with disabilities. And while there are many practical considerations that play an important role in the design process — including safety, space constraints, comfort and ease of use — being “sensible” doesn’t mean the bathroom has to look utilitarian.

Quite the opposite, in fact. Manufacturers of bath products

are now finding new ways to infuse style into what was once a strictly institutional area of bathroom design. The results are something style-savvy consumers would want to have in their homes — even without the added bonus of multi-generational benefits. MTI Whirlpools leads the way with a line of bath products that open the door to accessibility. From low-profile shower bases to easy-entrance tubs, MTI has an extensive collection of products, accessories and options that allow all

family members to enjoy a bathroom environment that looks great while being universally accommodating.

Industry insiders are gearing up to accommodate this trend, which is expected to increase exponentially over the next several decades. The oldest Baby Boomers will celebrate their 65th birthdays in 2011. According to government projections, by 2030 nearly 26% of the U.S. population will be age 65 or older, compared with just 17% today. This is creating a change in the profile of the typical American family. A survey from AARP reported that the number of multi-generational households has grown from 5 million in 2000 to 6.2 million in 2008. Nearly a quarter of baby boomers expect that their parents or in-laws will move in with them — and half of those who anticipate that living arrangement are excited about it. Experts predict that four-generation households will become more common as more Baby Boomers reach maturity and life expectancy increases. People are planning ahead now and looking for homes that will lend themselves to future demands of the multi-generational lifestyle.

Part II can be found in the December issue of phc news. ●

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Jennings is also a member of the DPHA and writes for their monthly Newsleak newsletter.

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