

Bathrooms ON A BUDGET

Renovating a bathroom can be a daunting proposition – but **Vicki Holder** reveals some key tips and tricks for your next upgrade.

HAVING JUST SOLD HER HOME AND trekked around Auckland to find somewhere reasonable to rent, designer Hayley Dryland, of August & Co, understands the importance of providing a decent bathroom to attract good tenants. “Bathrooms are one of the places where you walk in and just cringe,” she says.

Dated 1970s bathroom fixtures and fittings; ugly black mould and mildew growing in grout; stained toilet seats; dripping shower heads and leaky cisterns – she’s seen it all. Grotty bathrooms in rental properties are far from unusual.

On the upside, she says, landlords can upgrade them in many, simple, cost-effective ways. It’s worth it, because good tenants like herself are prepared to pay more for a clean, neat bathroom.

“I’d spend more money on a rental just for a decent shower,” Dryland says. “I understand why landlords are scared of touching them. Council regulations have gone through the roof and it’s become expensive because there are huge issues with waterproofing. But a bathroom is not the place where landlords should skimp. Do it once and do it right,” she advises.

DIY VS PRO

Landlords are limited by what they can do themselves. Dryland says they can only make simple improvements, replacing like with

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- KIRSTY EDWARDS

like – for example, by just changing the toilet seat, painting or swapping in an acrylic shower or vanity. For upgrades involving structural changes and restricted building work critical to the integrity of the building, a licensed builder, plumber and electrician are needed.

To be on the safe side, check the work you are planning to do with a builder before you start, advises builder Todd Wickenden, of Broswick Builders.

Landlords can save money by doing the demolition and sourcing materials from reputable suppliers - like Plumbing World, Plumbing Plus or Placemakers, Wickenden says. They can also measure for tubs, taps, mixers and so on.

Dryland agrees: “An off the shelf vanity is fine. But ensure it’s not made of chipboard, which lets in moisture. Get one made of moisture resistant mdf with soft closing drawers that give longevity. Try to keep it clean and

white for a hygienic look.

“Put your cleaning hat on. Go for the things you can keep clean easiest. Opt for durable surfaces like vinyl on the floor. Don’t go for expensive tiles with grout. And consider porcelain basins that cover the entire top of the vanity and don’t have joins to clean.

“Acrylic showers appear cleaner than grouted showers. The likelihood is tenants won’t keep them clean. Sometimes cheaper options are more serviceable.

BEWARE BARGAINS

Kirsty Edwards, from Plumbing Plus in Hastings, says if your budget is limited, gradually replace bits at a time.

“You can do bathrooms on a budget,” Edwards says. “But don’t skimp on tapware. Things get broken and you can never get replacement parts. If you don’t select good tapware, things will leak. If you choose cheap, unknown imported brands, you won’t get a warranty and if a tap leaks it will ruin the vanity or shower so you won’t save money in the long run. You’ll end up having to get a plumber back to fix the mess it’s caused. Cheap taps are false economy.”

Buy quality tapware from a local manufacturer like Methven, says Edwards. With a three-year warranty, Methven’s Flexispray Aurora Slide Shower is a cheaper shower suitable for all pressures and retails for

Go for white, easily cleaned surfaces.



It is a false economy to skimp on tapware as it will be heavily used.



Get your electrician to put your extraction fan on an automatic setting - it will help keep the bathroom dry and free of mould.



about \$75 at Bunnings.

Marek Koliandr, of Methven, says: "For around \$160 and with a five-year warranty, you can get a very high quality Echo Slide Shower at a reasonable price that would easily fit a landlord's budget. It represents a good mix of quality and price."

A new shower enclosure doesn't have to be expensive. Edwards says, "You can get an acrylic one for about \$600 and have it installed

with tapware for about \$600. Or go for a more expensive model like the Atlantis system with an acrylic tile liner that saves on waterproofing and you don't ever have to worry about grout going mouldy.

DOME IT

"Bathrooms can be damp, dark spaces," Edwards says. "Ventilation is key. You need extractor fans. They are fairly standard. Ask

COST TO UPGRADE A TYPICAL RENTAL BATHROOM

2.5m x 2.3m = 5.75m²
- By Tom Harding, Bathroom Solutions

- Demolition and removal of all rubbish throughout works.
 - Building labour and materials including Aqualine Gib on walls and ceiling - licensed building practitioner.
 - Electrical labour and fittings (in-wall) - registered electrician.
 - Plumbing labour and fittings (in-wall) - certified plumber.
 - Tiling labour and tiles for bath surround and vanity splashback.
 - Decorating - plastering and painting all surfaces including existing window jambs and internal door.
 - Flooring - preparation, laying and good quality vinyl from flooring specialist.
- Fixtures (estimate below).
- Misc. items including accessories, mirror, lights, shelves in shower etc.
- TOTAL \$17,191.00 including GST**

- Fixtures are all New Zealand sourced with warranties purchased from a plumbing merchant.
- 1x1 metre shower.
- 1200mm twin drawer, wall hung vanity. 1655x740mm bath.
- Comfort-Height back-to-wall toilet suite.
- 7-bar ladder towel warmer with timer.
- Methven shower mixer & rail, basin mixer and bath taps.
- Showerdome.

a bathroom expert for advice on which one is right for the size of your bathroom."

Dryland says: "Lots of tenants don't want to waste power by putting the fan on but you need to ventilate. A good working fan on an automatic setting is a foolproof option."

A showerdome, which ensures that no steam is leaked into the room from the shower, is an alternative to an extractor fan. These can be self-installed or installed by a technician.

Ross Van Horn, from Showerdome, says it's a "no-brainer" for landlords.

"By putting a showerdome in you can stop the creation of steam," Van Horn says. "By having no steam in the bathroom, in effect it is just like any other room in your rental."

"There will be a heap less maintenance - I have a rental property which had mould and mildew in the living areas and bedrooms due to tenants drying their clothes inside, but funnily enough there was no mould in the bathroom - due to the showerdome."

TYPICAL LEAKY PROBLEMS

Peter Fuller, a plumber with H2OPro, says one of the main reasons for leaky plumbing is faulty Dux Quest acrylic pipework installed in the 1980s. "It deteriorates and splits in ceilings, walls and floors, causing leaks and huge insurance problems, Fuller says.

"Hot water cylinders often age and become

leaky, even fall through the floor because they haven't been installed in a tray to catch the water.

"Showers that haven't been put in properly by a good plumber is another thing. Water starts leaking behind the walls and into surrounding rooms. Then there are mixers that connect to taps that haven't been put in right. If it goes wrong and there are leaks, the insurer needs to know the work was completed by a licensed plumber."

Wickenden says landlords trying to do plumbing themselves usually costs in the long run, but there are some things landlords can remedy themselves. When there's a leaky cistern, it's usually just the washer under the base, the seals or the fill valve that needs replacing.

PAINT IT RIGHT

When painting bathrooms, use paint specifically for wet areas.

And don't paint over mould. Karen Warman, of Resene says, mould left untreated will grow through the new layers of paint and ruin your fresh paintwork. "Always treat mould before you paint with a product like Resene Moss & Mould Killer. Once the mould is killed you can continue with painting," Warman says.

Solvent-borne enamels or water-borne enamels are two main options for paint in a bathroom. You can't use normal acrylic paints. "Water-borne enamels are preferable as they are easier to clean up without the solvent odours. We recommend the Resene Kitchen & Bathroom paint range, a range of Environmental Choice approved waterborne enamel paints made with anti-bacterial silver and MoulDefender to inhibit bacteria and mould."

As bathrooms tend to be steamy, Resene recommends bathrooms are left for at least 48

hours before using after painting, to give the paint time to cure.

"Steam and condensation can cause surfactants in a new paint film to come to the surface as shiny streaks," Karen Warman says.

To ensure your bathroom paint finish keeps looking its best, for the first five to seven showers, wipe steam moisture from walls using a lint free cloth immediately after showering. If any marks appear use Resene Interior Paintwork Cleaner.

Bathrooms often have old shiny surfaces, such as Seratone or laminated finishes in old colourways. They are expensive to replace but they date the room. Update by coating them with Resene Waterborne Smooth Surface Sealer, to provide a grip coat, and finish in topcoats of your choice. This is ideal for old cabinetry or similar if complete replacement isn't an option.

All paintwork should be kept outside the shower enclosure. Paint and water ponding don't mix.

RENTAL UPGRADE

Wellington landlord Penny Darwin swears by showerdomes and has used them, along with extractor fans, for moisture control in all her rentals.

Darwin recently upgraded a bathroom ensuite in Karori for \$22,000 using Bathroom Solutions.

"It was past its used by date with a manky hand basin," Darwin says. By moving the shower, she built in a wardrobe to give tenants extra storage. Because the location attracts professionals, she used quality fittings and tapware. Although she hasn't raised the rent for her tenants, she knows she could get an extra

THE UPGRADE PROCESS

- Plan drawn up by architect, designer, draughtsperson, bathroom specialist.
- Submit plans to Council for approval (if restricted work).
- Get quotes (if project is not already managed).
- Employ licensed builder, plumber, electrician or bathroom specialist.
- Demolition.
- Source materials.
- Framing built or adjustments to framing so walls are flat and plumb.
- Framing inspection sign-off for restricted work.
- Waterproof floor for wet-floor shower - put in a central drain.
- Waterproofing inspection sign-off for wet-floor shower.
- Plumbing work installed.
- Complete electrics for lighting, heating, fan, heated towel rail.
- Complete wall linings then waterproofing for wet area shower.
- Complete tiling and painting.
- Plumbing and electrical fit-off completed with vanity, basins, cabinetry, shower, tub, tapware, mixers, lighting, heating, fans.
- Final council inspection for restricted work.

\$100 a week.

Penny Darwin is now completing another bathroom renovation, using the same company - to avoid tenant hassles. "They say they will take five weeks and they do. I recommend having a professional do the project when the tenants are still there. If I were managing it, they'd give me flak."

By changing the six-bedroom property with one bathroom into a four bedroom with two bathrooms, Penny will be able to raise the rent significantly, "because two new bathrooms will make it a much better rental proposition." ■

