

UNIVERSAL DESIGN IN BATHING HAS NEVER BEEN SO GOOD...

By Carol Lamkins, CMKBD, CID

Walk-in bathtubs are where safety meets luxury, especially for those with age and mobility challenges. These acrylic bathtubs supported by stainless steel frames provide freedom to bathe and deep soak, on your own and in safety, comfort and convenience. The thresholds are very low for easy and safe access. Amenities include built-in ADA compliant safety bars, contoured seats (usually 17" high), slip-resistant tub floors, faucet and hand-held showers, therapeutic whirlpool and air massage systems with adjustable jets, neck pillows and seat cushions. Some tubs even have an exterior mounted towel bar. Sizes vary but you can have all of this in a retrofit into the 5-foot wide space of a standard bathtub.



Courtesy of Safety Tubs



Courtesy of Home Living Solutions

It is important to allow for positive sealing and clearances of the door systems. Double width doors allow for side entry from wheelchairs. Operative folding doors also allow for knee clearance when sitting in the tub. Oversized locking door latches makes sealing the doorway against leakage easier and requires less grip strength to open and close.



Courtesy of Rane Bathing Systems

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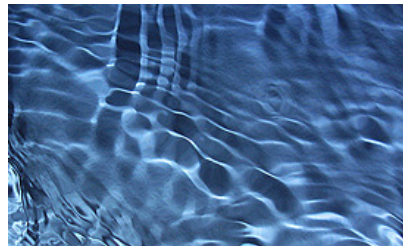
Courtesy of MediTub



Courtesy of MediTub

Shower retrofit for 32"x38"x38"

Health benefits include chromotherapy and aromatherapy. Chromotherapy involving the use of light, profoundly influences the emotions. The full spectral range of colors – red, orange, yellow, green, blue and violet is incorporated into many systems. Aromatherapy is a healing art using the sense of smell. This has a profound effect upon how we feel and what we think about.



Many of these jetted tubs have in-line heaters and sanitary cleaning systems, some with ozone. These systems may be self-cleaning with purging to void the water from the piping. Some systems add an additional pump to void the tub water in a few minutes. But gravity draining can still do the job in around 5 minutes. These tubs should carry certifications of compliance with all building codes.

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Courtesy of Masco

Barrier free shower systems are emerging with integrated recessed trench drains that are level with the floor or low 2" thresholds to make entry and exit from the shower easier and safer. The zero threshold shower base has a removable drain cover for easy cleaning. The floor is textured for slip-resistance. Preset sizes include 39" x 39" or 63" x 39" (providing a 60" clear turning radius). Sleek fold-down shower seats with spa inspired design are simple and minimally invasive in their raised position. Others have contoured integrated seats.



Courtesy of Masco



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Courtesy of Health Craft

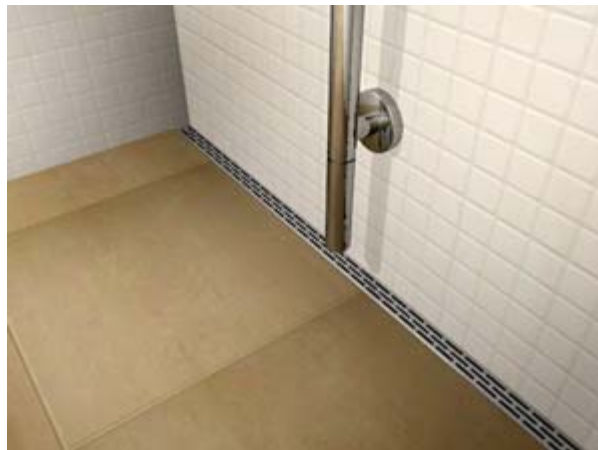
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Custom barrier free showers are now available with pre-manufactured linear channel shower drain systems to be used with tile, stone and other custom flooring materials. These low-profile drain systems are clean and unobtrusive looking with very high drain flow capacity.



Courtesy of Quick Drain USA



Courtesy of Quick Drain USA

Accessories have evolved from an institutional look into the luxury art realm. Some of the more unique styles are contoured half circle support rails that wrap over and around tub and shower valves and integrated support rails in corner shelves and soap dishes, arched above integrated towel bars and toilet roll holders. Multiple finishes are available. The integrated support will handle up to 350 pounds.

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Several companies have products for recessed storage in the stud bay of the walls. This eliminates projections that may interfere with movement in the bathing space. Recess units include fully independent systems with shelves and acrylic none-shatter mirrors. The one pictured below is configured for 16" on center wooden or steel framing members. The fully assembled vanity is dimensioned to be recessed between two adjacent framing members in the wall and attached by stainless steel fasteners. The vanity includes an open front, forming a cavity to accommodate bathing and grooming products. These are easy-to-clean, mirrored chrome removable sliding doors that provide aesthetic beauty and grooming functionality.

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Courtesy of Hidden Shower Vanity

The Baby Boomer population has driven the marketplace for years. Many Baby Boomers and their parents are currently facing health challenges and limited mobility. Currently manufacturers have recognized this trend and are creating products for universal safety and adaptable function in typical living environments. Homes no longer need to look institutional to be well-situated for living. Supply and demand are making universal and barrier free products, such as the ones in this article, easily available and affordable.