



Sing in the SHOWER

when your perfect bathroom falls into place. LAKSHMI KRUPA tells you how



Whether you're looking to redo an existing bathroom or starting out to set up a new one, these simple ground rules will help you make the most of what you have. "You must pay attention to different aspects of the bathroom and also focus on functionality. Look at who is going to use the bathroom and then design it accordingly," says Vikram B, architect and interior designer. Indeed, aesthetics can always be brought into the picture later, once the basic needs are met.

Tiles and flooring

Since bathrooms tend to be smaller rooms, use smaller tiles. This will ensure limited wastage. "Choose a tile pattern that you like and if you divide the bathroom into wet and dry areas, then you don't have to tile the entire room. You can tile till about three feet off the ground," says Vikram. Joint-free tiles are easy to maintain and don't let dirt and germs accumulate. Non-slip tiles are a great option, especially if you have elderly people at home. Slopes and drains in the bathroom will make sure water doesn't stagnate.

Many people prefer the shower area to be lower than the WC area. This helps demarcate the wet and dry spaces," says Vikram. Your budget will determine whether you pick mosaic or ceramic tiles.

Plumbing

There are plenty of options in sanitary fixtures, based on budgets and spaces. If there's a space crunch, consider wall-mounted WCs. "For wall-mounted fixtures, you need a rear wall that can support the fixture or a ledge with a minimum thickness of 9 inches," says Vikram. As for taps and showers, decide if are more comfortable with a single lever tap to mix hot and cold



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water or separate levers. Single lever taps need enough water pressure, so check that first before you install it or you will only get a trickle of water. Decide early if you want a hot water option in the wash basin and add the fixture and line accordingly.

Shower area

While shower areas can be demarcated with glass, acrylic or fiberglass partitions, a shower curtain works just as well if you are on a shoestring

budget. "Lower flooring with the right slope will ensure that water drains out effectively," says Vikram. His advice is to always have the shower in the far end of the bathroom and the WC in the middle. "People tend to do the opposite but this is the most effective way to set up a shower," he says.

Storage

Storage spaces are integral to bathrooms. "The storage must be out of reach of water

BRIGHT IDEAS

- Shower door handle can double up as towel holder
- Matt enamel paint for toilet walls are easy to maintain
- Provide 5 amp plug point for electric shaver / hair drier
- Concealed cisterns save space but must be pre-planned
- Large mirrors make bathrooms look larger

and this needs planning," says the architect. Wherever possible, create unobtrusive storage spaces or niches tucked into walls instead of protruding shelves.

"This ensures dry storage as well as safety in case someone slips or accidentally gets soap in the eye!" A ledge or vanity with mirror just above the basin makes ideal storage for toiletries. Lighting above the mirror is a must, for shaving or even make-up. "Add a tissue holder next to the WC and a towel rack next to the basin. Readymade flats sometimes leave these crucial points out.

A few add-ons

An exhaust fan, especially for a much-shared bathroom, is a good idea. It ensures better circulation of fresh air. A small, wall-mounted fan is another good idea for summers and dry floors. Make sure there are plug points for hair dryers and shaving equipment, but make sure they won't have water splashing on them. Once these basic needs are met, you can personalise the space with easy-to-maintain artifacts, paintings or a wacky poster behind the door.

Special care

In case there are senior citizens, children or physically challenged people in your home, follow the basic rules of wide doors opening outwards, a small bench or stool in the shower, grab rails and non-slip mats.

A little tile spin

Traditional pickle jars in white and brown, aruvamani, laddes, vegetables... you will find them all in this kitchen. Only, not on its shelves but as part of the uniquely patterned tiles on its walls.

Sumitra Vasudevan uses tiles as the main ingredient of her artwork and rustles up murals that brim with originality. "When we first started doing this, we got tiles especially made, but now we use whatever is available in the market (at Rs. 40-50)," she says. "Old kitchen objects like grinding stones are no longer in use and we may perhaps find them only in Dakshina-Chitra these days," says Vasudevan, who works with Aprobuild, an architecture and interior design firm.

Many clients rely on Vasudevan to come up with different and fun designs for their walls, but some come to her with an idea. One client wanted a traditional pongal scene, complete with a decorated bullock, pongal paanai and sugarcane. "I first do a free-hand sketch and then replicate it on the computer. Basically, it's all grid patterns." The next step is to get wooden templates made, with each piece cut to fit the design. After this, the tile workman cuts the final tiles according to the design, somewhat like a cross-stitch pattern. Together, they first do a rough assembly on the floor before setting it up on the wall. The idea can be translated to bathroom walls or any other space that needs extensive tile work. "It gives a personal touch to the home," says Vasudevan, and is a lot like customising your walls.

LAKSHMI KRUPA

THE PLOT

For that aesthetic appeal to the lawn

Tree canopies, thickets of shrubs, heavy climbers and creepers join together to give that verdant appeal to a forest. But a garden cannot afford to be as wild as a forest. What plays a major role in any garden plot getting admired for the lushness is undoubtedly its lawn. Lawn turf is nothing but tiny grass plants planted in close spacing, intensively manicured and trimmed to a certain height to look like a carpet. Lawn is an essential feature of any garden. Though smooth and soothing to look at, lawn is the most difficult part in a garden for establishing as well as for maintaining. For every step of lawn development - selection of right lawn grass species, bed preparation, planting, feeding, watering, weeding, mowing, edging and other operations - one needs to have basic knowledge. Lack of necessary knowhow and skill leads to ill-maintained lawn - an eyesore in the garden. There are multiple uses of having a lawn as part of the garden, the first and foremost being its aesthetic appeal. The land turfed with lawn grass creates dust-free environment and retains the shape of the landscape by preventing soil erosion. Quick garden can be achieved by turfing. Turfing is used in diverse locations like playgrounds, parks, party areas, homesteads, street-scaping and also for creating foreground or back ground for garden plants or other features of a garden.

Location, shape and level

Intended use, and affordability in terms of time, water and resources will help the property owner determine the lawn's size, shape, level and location. Shape and extent of the lawn must be decided during the planning stage. It can be a presentation lawn for display in small extent or an area to walk or sit or play or relax on or it can be an extension of the living room or back yard. Flat lawn is easier to establish and maintain as the operations like mowing and watering are difficult in the heavy slopes.

Based on the utility and availability of light, many choices of lawn grass species are available (details are shown in the table). However growing grass in deep shade is not possible. In the shaded areas within the lawn, especially underneath the trees, it is advisable to use mulch material to avoid unsightly patches devoid of lawn.

Preparation of bed is the first and important step in making a lawn. The bed should be of five to six inches thick with fertile soil and adequate drainage. Any stagnation of water in the bed will ruin the lawn grass, so mild slope should be provided for proper drainage. Farmyard manure consisting of seeds of various plant species is avoided during the bed formation to prevent



VARIETIES OF GRASS

Name	Description	Requirement of direct sunlight per day	Mowing frequency
Korean grass (<i>Zoysia species</i>)	Very hardy grass with fine and narrow leaf blade and sharp pointed apex. Can be planted in sunny to light shade areas, and can withstand trampling. Good for public places and play fields but difficult to mow.	5-6 hrs	25-45 days
Bermuda Grass, Doob grass, Selection 1 (Cultivar) (<i>Cynodon dactylon</i>)	Very hardy grass with narrow leaf blade. Cannot withstand shade. Easy to mow. Many cultivars and selections are available.	6-8 hrs	15-20 days
Paspalum / Bahia grass (<i>Paspalum notatum</i>)	Hardy, shade bearing grass with coarse and broad leaf blade with pointed apex. Can be planted in semi-shade areas.	3-5 hrs	20-30 days
St. Augustine grass (<i>Stenotaphrum secundatum</i>)	Grass with fine, broad leaf blade and rounded apex. Suitable for semi-shade areas. Bright variegated form is also available in this species which can be used for making patterns.	3-5 hrs	20-30 days

emergence of weeds. Using more sand in the bed and addition of organic material like leaf mould and neem cake will not only improve the soil aeration and fertility but also increase the hardness of lawn against trampling, by reducing the compaction. Any type of lawn grass can be established in three different ways - seeding, dibbling and sodding. Sowing of the seed is the first method when seed of the particular variety is available. We can avoid

initial weed problems by this seed broadcasting method. But in India seeds of lawn-grass varieties are not available, and hence this method is not so popular here. In the second method the slips of grass along with roots or internodes can be collected from an existing weed free lawn and dibbled at close spacing in the loose and wet soil and over a period of time the grass establishes and spreads to form a thick carpet. The third and popular method is to turf

the soil with grass mats (sods) of different sizes but uniform thickness. It is applicable where ready-made lawn grass is needed.

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(Next week: Lawn problem and maintenance)

GREENSENSE

GOING GREEN IN THE KITCHEN

What has a house kitchen got to do with sustainability? For most of us the idea of going green with kitchens may appear irrelevant, or even suggest envying the neighbour's kitchen. After all, the kitchen is a place to cook and clean, a functional space that serves the household. It cannot do much towards an eco-friendly home.

Before we fully subscribe to the above thought, let us pause for a while and think. Which part of the house is most used during a typical day? Which room demands a large part of our electricity consumption? Which space costs the most during interior designing?

Where do we end up with maximum gadgets, buying or upgrading them? Which area of the house requires good space planning and design efficiency? Surprisingly, all of us would suggest a single word answer for all these questions - kitchen.

For most of us grown in traditional houses, with kitchens normally thrown to the back with less light and air, often filled with smoke in case of firewood cooking, kitchens have been among the neglected part of the house. They were never the focus of the house.

Nowadays, thanks to both technological and social changes in Indian urban society, most kitchens have moved from the back to the front, both physically and metaphorically. On many



Natural chimney

matters ranging from comfort to consumption, they demand our attention more than ever. As such, the idea of kitchen as a central issue in an eco-friendly house design is a new thought, though it may sound strange.

The need for fresh air and light in a healthy kitchen has already been much talked about, but most architects and owners continue to struggle to achieve it. While a range of modern kitchen chimneys - the ducted exhaust systems to pump out the hot air above the stove - are available today, they need electricity, make a fan sound, require periodic filter cleaning and cost much money.

Even when installed, most families do not put it on all the time, keeping it off during simple tasks like making tea, when there is no exhaust at all.

In many traditional homes, there used to be a chimney built with bricks, a narrow shaft going from up above the stove all the way to the roof. It is still possible to have them, fabricated in metal today, fixed between kitchen space and final roof such that it sucks the heated-up air and kitchen smells.

For the general looks, they can be made to look like an electric chimney, but would actually be a natural one, consuming no power, making no sound and requiring no cleaning.

Our modern living requires different sets of solutions, but they all need not come from modernity itself. Traditional chimneys can be a simpler and natural solution to modern problems!

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