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MAKING A

Splash

- ◆ Customizing Baths & Kitchens
- ◆ Green Makes Business Sense
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Contractor Gary Phillips in his
Splash Galleries showroom in Raleigh, NC.



Personalize your space. Put your individual stamp on your surroundings. Customization of kitchens and bathrooms, or of elements in those spaces, ties into this trend.

"Inspierences" and "Customer Made" are two consumer trends identified by Trendwatching.com (www.trendwatching.com/trends).

"Inspierences" represent homeowners' desire to bring top-level experiences from the (semi) public domain into their personal space. In the kitchen, for example, it can mean installing a wine refrigerator, professional coffee machine, floating countertops and stainless steel appliances.

In the bathroom, it may mean installing luxury items comparable to what guests find in a five-star hotel — oversized showerheads, body sprays, steam showers and heated tile floors, Trendwatching.com reports.

"Customer Made" is "the phenomenon of corporations creating goods, services and experiences in close cooperation with experienced and creative consumers ... and in exchange giving them a direct say in (and rewarding them for) what actually gets produced, manufactured, developed, designed, serviced or processed," according to Trendwatching.com.

An example of this is Design Lab 2005 in which Electrolux invited students to design household appliances for the year 2020.

CUSTOMIZING SINKS AND FAUCETS

"There seems to be a lot of activity in categories that previously could not offer customization, such as stainless steel sinks," says Tom Samanic, vice president/general manager, residential trade business unit for Elkay's Plumbing Products Division.

Elkay sinks can be customized in terms of finishes and edge treatments, he notes. Custom finishes also are a popular request for faucets and countertops.

Beyond that, typical areas of personalization include cabinet and tile pairings, or scale, color and texture change-ups to different elements of the space, Samanic says.

"To satisfy this emerging need for personalization, Elkay now provides a custom solution for the building, design and architecture communities with the creation of custom, signature sinks," Samanic notes. "Professional specifiers can work with Elkay's new 'Dream Weavers' team to bring their clients' custom creations to life for their luxury hospitality projects, such as stadiums, hotels and time shares."

StoneImpressions tile.



BY PAT LENIUS

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match products. The company provides an online "Inspiration Gallery" for both the bath and kitchen.

Symons introduced "Showcase Design Studio Live" at the 2008 Kitchen/Bath Industry Show. This user-friendly Web-based tool enables designers, architects and property owners to custom design projects. The customer receives a 3-D model of the design within four days, metal prototypes in 15 days and delivered product for the property in 16 weeks. The user can browse through existing design templates or create a completely new design using Google SketchUp software. Customers can build a library of ideas and projects.

In addition, homeowners can customize the indoor environment for the kitchen and bath using a "virtual design studio" offered by Rheem and Ruud. The DesignStar home comfort system customization tool allows contractors to interactively "drag and drop" individual system components such as air conditioners, heat pumps, furnaces and package units, along with accessories like humidifiers, thermostats and media centers, into an assembly area to create a customized home comfort system.

PERSONALIZED SHOWERS

Kohler Co.'s WaterHaven offers custom showering components centered around one plumbing connection. It includes a shower tower with seven adjustable water ports: two dual-direction telescopic shower arms, four height- and flow-adjustable body sprays and a removable personal hand shower.

The WaterHaven features four different-sized receptor/enclosures that extend far enough to provide a seat and storage ledges. Tile or wall coverings can be added to the remaining walls for further personalization. The owner also can customize the shower fixture's location and dimensions.

Basco Shower Doors introduced the interactive Door Wizard on its Web site. It leads the customer through a step-by-step process to select everything for the shower enclosure from

the door configuration to the frame and glass options. Design considerations are based on what the customers currently have and their vision of a dream bathroom.

In addition, Basco offers a "Virtual Showroom" that allows customers to mix and match the company's 16 glass options and 20 frame finishes.

CUSTOMIZING TILE AND STONE

Stone Forest offers a custom kitchen island, carved from a single block of the consumer's preferred stone. The customer chooses the material for the cabinetry and the island's size. The sink is part of the original solid stone. The company can manufacture customized countertops.

Walls and floors in the bath and kitchen can be customized with tile from StoneImpressions. The tiles are created using an exclusive artist-developed process to hand print a variety of designs on stone. The product selection includes environmentally friendly stone tiles to use as murals or borders; a Designer Program that includes more than 3,000 images from Rosenstiel's fine art and engravings collection to create murals, accents and listellos; and flooring tiles featuring murals and patterns that can be selected from the company's library or the homeowner's own design.

A CONTINUING TREND

"The idea of consumers wanting to personalize their spaces to better suit their needs is a sustainable trend," Elkay's Samanic says. "Fixtures will need to continually evolve as our customers' visions for their homes evolve."

"Home remodeling will usually provide a consistent and solid return-on-investment, particularly for the kitchen or master bath, but if having a custom finish or shape for your sink or faucet will make your home stand out in the crowd and be more enjoyable when you live in the space, then I believe that more features and customized options will continue to be offered at a variety of price points to provide solutions for a range of customers."

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