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STYLE | DESIGN

5 ‘Dream Bathroom’ Upgrades That Homeowners Tend to Regret

Luxe bathroom trends, from zellige tiles to vessel sinks, seduced these homeowners and interior designers. Here, they share their disappointments.

By Yelena Moroz Alpert

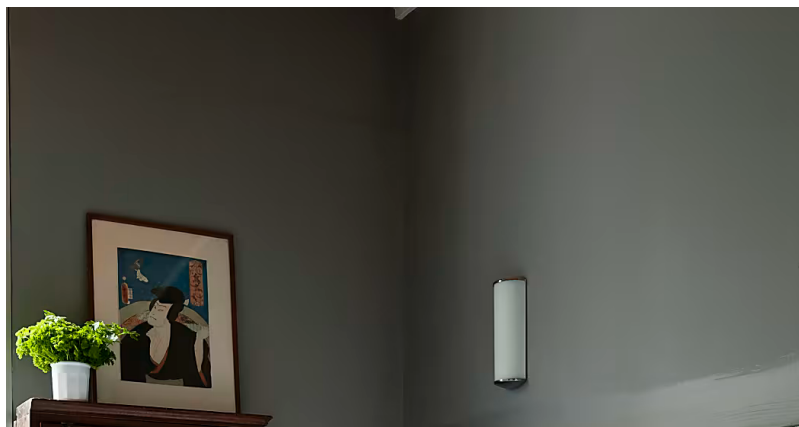
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JULIANNE KELLY did a hard stop when clients requested square toilets they thought would modernize their house. “They were three times the price of a normal toilet and uncomfortable,” said the principal of Carrier Design Co. in Jacksonville Beach, Fla. “Everyone has a budget cap, and square toilets are not a place to surpass it.”

The quest for luxe, even absurdly “unique” bathrooms has surely been stoked by celebrities’ tendencies to open their own intimate sanctums to public view. Watching Goop tycoon Gwyneth Paltrow deliver “wellness” advice from her California home’s massive spa, complete with a plunge pool, can make you crave a larger shower. What is coveted, however, can prove impractical, as the following homeowners and even design pros can attest after succumbing to gotta-have-it trends they lived to regret.

1. Vessel Sinks

Vessel sinks aren’t sunk at all. They perch atop the vanity, joined to the countertop in a way that attracts soap buildup and toothpaste gunk. And given that the bowl sits too high, “they make for terrible face-washing and teeth-brushing experiences,” said Leah Alexander, principal of Beauty Is Abundant, a design firm in Atlanta. Water drips from hand to elbow, and kids need step stools. “I hate them,” said Rick Grafmeyer, an attorney in Washington, D.C. “I’ve had them, and I’m building a new home and would never put them there. The water ends up on the countertop.”

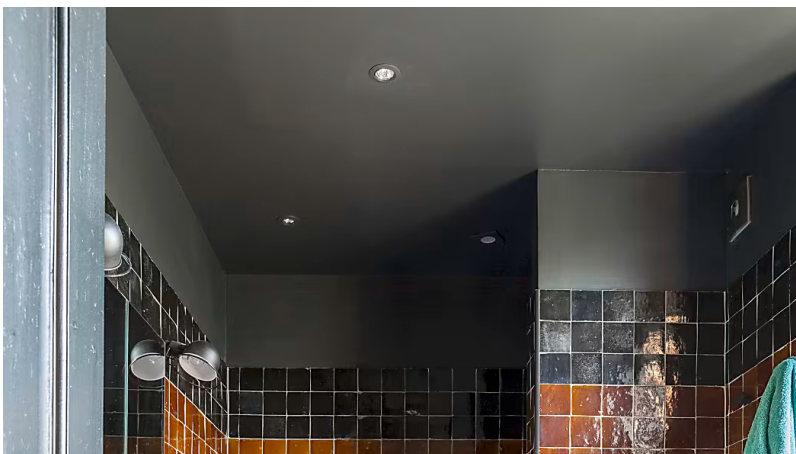


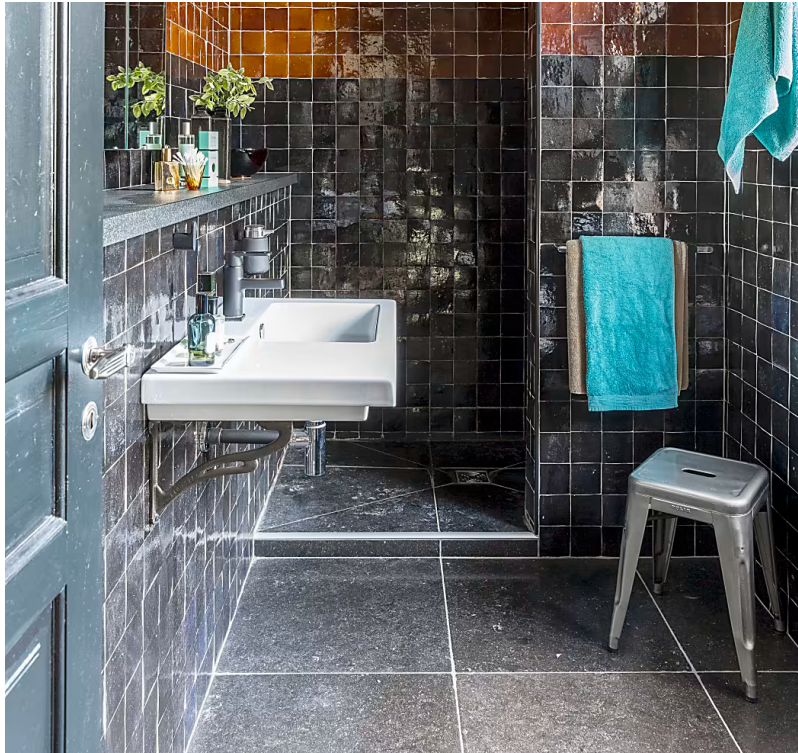


The protruding edges of zellige tile collect dirt and are sharp enough to shred sponges and scrape elbows. PHOTO: ANDREAS VON EINSIEDEL/LIVING4MEDIA

2. Tiles That Bite

Alexander swooned over the earthy irregularity of zellige tile and installed it in two of her own Atlanta bathrooms. She quickly realized those trendy ragged edges bite, nicking her elbow more than once while showering. The uneven surfaces attract more dirt than smooth tiles, too. “I clean my shower twice as often,” said Alexander, who uses a coarse bristle brush for scrubbing because the rough ceramic shreds sponges.





In black-tiled stalls, the only thing you can easily see is the very visible soap film around the controls.

PHOTO: OLIVIER HALLOT/LIVING4MEDIA

3. Dark Shower Stalls

During a TikTok tour of her Spanish-style mansion in Calabasas, Calif., cosmetics magnate Kylie Jenner steps into her bathroom and confides to her nearly 55 million viewers, “I made the biggest mistake getting a black shower, because you can’t see s*** when you’re in there. It’s just horrible.” Absent a window or brilliant overhead light, which rather negates its sexiness, a noir shower “will be like walking into a cave,” said Charleston, S.C., designer Margaret Donaldson.

Kevin Chan, co-founder of Toronto design studio Nivek Remas, created a “grotto spa” in his basement bathroom with charcoal tile and notes the upkeep. “You have to be more diligent about cleaning,” he said. Soap scum and mineral buildup leave a milky residue, especially around the controls.





Open shelving in vanities collects gobs of hair and dust, and requires rigorous neatness. PHOTO: MEZZA & ESCALANTE/LIVING4MEDIA

4. Naked Storage

With the best intentions, Kelly included an open-shelf vanity in her Jacksonville, Fla., bathroom. Easy-to-grab hair ties and brushes helped her kids get ready in the morning. Also pleased with the accessibility? Her pup, who regularly swiped the grooming tools.

Open storage suits hotel bathrooms, where dogs rarely check in and housekeeping tucks in constantly refreshed, smoothly folded towels. “They can look beautiful if you take pride in being organized,” said Pasadena, Calif., interior designer Hayley English. But beware the ick factor. “When I clean, I often find a combination of human hair, animal fur and dust gathered in the back of the shelves behind the towels,” said communications executive Jessica Doyle of the doorless cupboard in her Charleston, S.C., bathroom.



Experts view low-hanging chandeliers in bathrooms as an electrical hazard. PHOTO: SIMON MAXWELL PHOTOGRAPHY/LIVING4MEDIA

5. Fancy Lit Baths

A chandelier twinkling above a soaking tub might seem the height of sybaritic splendor, but water and electricity clearly don't mix. "Clients ask for statement chandeliers, but unless it's the correct height—8 feet from the rim of the tub—I cringe," said Nikki Pulver, principal of Shaker Interiors in Cleveland. "What if you're about to fall and pull it down with you into the water?" And fixtures rated for dry locations can fail over time and cause an electrical fire. "A standard chandelier is not rated for a damp location," said Kyle Krueger, director of codes and standards with the National Electrical Contractors Association, in Washington, D.C.