

THE PERFECT BATH

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A chic, polished guide to creating the perfect bathroom.

Whether you call it your sanctuary, a private and indulgent space or a place where guests need to feel comfortable, the bathroom is a room that reflects your personal style and priorities. Creating the sophisticated interiors of homeowners and designers alike, Barbara Sellick has an obsession for the perfect bathroom. In the house requires as much as the bath. In *The Perfect Bath*, Barbara Sellick, the luxury brand of bathroom accessories, explores the product and beautiful detail. She shares her favorite and esteemed baths, and takes us through their work, including Suzanne Lovell Lee Mindel, Gil Schafers, and how they offer important, how

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Suzanne Lovell

My practice is frequently cited for our emphasis on incorporating fine art into interiors. But the work is, in fact, driven primarily by the architectural language of a given project, which derives from the context and the client. Residential architecture is a three-dimensional experience, one that draws calm and comfort from its consistency and its simple palette of materials.

THE ROLE OF ART

As in landscape design, where there are moments of arrival that enable you to pause and consider your surroundings, artworks serve to create moments of memorable experience on the way through any home, providing opportunities to stop and listen to the personality of the homeowner. In this regard, the *placement* of art is everything—essential to how a piece is experienced and remembered.

THE BATH AS ART

The most likely bath in which to showcase fine art is the powder room, which receives minimal traffic and is more stable environmentally. A master bath offers a similar showcase opportunity, but it is also a utilitarian space, and its practicality can't be impeded by concerns about what water or steam might do to a fine art object. Rather, I tend to think of the bath as an artwork in and of itself: constructed from fine, judiciously selected and layered materials, mosaic borders, and trims that give the consistent message of timelessness within the greater context of the architectural language, be it modern or contemporary. The bath can be personalized even further by the selection of "jewelry," as in polished nickel faucets and mosaic motifs for the floor and/or wall.

This very grown-up (and very dressed-up) bath harkens back to antiquity with its floor mosaic, wave-patterned wainscoting, and classical soaking tub—yet the artwork introduces modernity.





ABOVE: Furniture remains an essential part of a big bath.
OPPOSITE: The curved wall that draws one into the shower (on a series of waves) is at once playful and sensual.



A CONSISTENCY OF LANGUAGE

The baths must tell the same story as the rest of the house and, assuming a given residence will have multiple baths, relate to one another in a way that expresses a hierarchy of importance. In my work, the master bath and powder room typically have the same fixtures, ones that portray a strong message, while the guest baths are united by faucets and fittings that are similar in character but less boldly articulated. Similarly, if in a master bath we might fashion a Parsons-style vanity entirely from onyx, the guest bath in the same residence may feature a simple stone top and below would be a lacquered or stained wood cabinet. In this respect, the language of architecture is the same as spoken language: more or less formal depending on the greater intent of the home.

BATHS AND THEIR ADJACENCIES

No less important than the baths themselves are their adjacencies and the dialogue that goes on between the two. The master suite—bedroom, dressing area, and bath—is the ultimate example of a series of interlocking experiences that need to complement and support one another: an intimate zone within the larger public zone of the home. This entire area is becoming as important as the kitchen, as it is becoming the space in which people most frequently use technology to organize their lives. The entire narrative that serves as the beginning and conclusion of one's day should hold you in a way that supports the peaceful and the personal. A fluency of connection, a consistency of materials, and the rhythm of the procession from space to space all contribute to the outcome. With this in mind, I will often place a distinctive artwork just *outside* the master bath, where it serves to set the mood, a prelude to the experience that is about to begin.

The challenges of using a terrazzo floor to highlight the tub as a central sculptural element—almost as though it were a fountain—while also incorporating an unusually large shower have been well met in this balanced master bath, an effective combination of the functional and theatrical.





THE ART OF ELEGANCE

While functional considerations are uppermost, the bath affords the opportunity to bring elegant moments into the home, to create an experience that remains timeless. The things people notice in a home often aren't the grand gestures but the objects they touch: the knobs and handles, faucets and taps. These, too, form the art of a residence, and as the bath is their ultimate repository, we pay great attention to these "jewelry" pieces, as well as to the mirrors (which I always frame with at least a one-inch bevel all around) and the polished or honed finishes of the tile or stone—everything that contributes to the bath's restrained glamour.

When putting together a bath, I typically begin by deciding whether stone or tile is more appropriate based on the overall style and palette of the residence, then we select the colors as we develop the design in architectural elevation. We are very specific about where the wall and floor materials start and stop, about using borders to "hold" fields of tile or stone in place, and about drawing a datum line that connects the sink, shower, and wainscoting. But whatever the balance, we are always careful not to do too much—I will literally count and limit the ideas to be integrated into design development. In the bath, as in life, too much of a good thing detracts from the whole.

WHAT A DESIGNER SHOULD NEVER FORGET

Finally, there are two things applicable to design in general and the bath in particular that I always keep in mind. The first is to be what I call an ambidextrous listener—to pay attention to the often opposing ideas of a client couple and find imaginative ways to reconcile them. The other is to remember that everyone has a budget—and the bath, in which the objects and materials can be notably expensive, requires a serious commitment under any circumstances. I want to work with anyone who is brave enough to ask for help; I always try to find the best ideas, and a way to interpret them that respects the means of our clients.

The combination of oak and brass in this bath is lovely, and defining the small space architecturally gives it a pleasantly assertive presence. Lovell also managed to work in a dressing table without making the space feel cramped.



Water closets are a functional necessity; they need to respect the design of the room and not be overly fussy. A simple choice is usually the best. Adding a point of interest over the water closet is a subtle design decision.