

# *Bathroom Design*

Key considerations for designing a bathroom that holds up under scrutiny — and over time.

---

A GUIDE FROM HARMONY HOUSE

# *The Harmony House Guide to Bathroom Design*

---

The bathroom is the most honest room in a house. In a living room, a beautiful sofa can compensate for mediocre floors. In a kitchen, good lighting can forgive a lot. But in a bathroom — particularly one with no windows, no views, no distractions — everything is present at once, and there is nowhere for a weak decision to hide. This guide covers the six decisions that most determine whether a bathroom project succeeds.

## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is organised around the decisions that most determine whether a bathroom design project succeeds. Each section addresses a distinct design consideration — the questions to ask, the trade-offs to understand, and the principles that guide our approach. Use it as a framework for your own project conversations.

---

01

## Scale, Proportion, and the Spatial Brief

---

Before any material is selected, the bathroom requires a spatial brief: how large is the room, what must it contain, and what is the relationship between those elements? A 60-square-foot bathroom with a freestanding tub, double vanity, and walk-in shower will feel crowded and compromised. A 60-square-foot bathroom designed around a single generous shower and a furniture-grade vanity can feel deliberate and luxurious.

The discipline of the bathroom is subtraction. Understanding what the room genuinely needs — rather than everything it could theoretically contain — is the first design decision, and often the most important one.

- Define the room's primary function: primary bath, guest bath, or powder room
  - Establish circulation clearances before fixing fixture positions
  - Consider sightlines: what do you see from the doorway, from the shower, from the vanity?
  - Resist adding fixtures that fight for space — generosity in one element beats compromise in three
-

*“Without limits, rooms can wander. The bathroom focuses you. Constraint is the brief.”*

---

02

## Material Selection: Tile, Stone, and the Touch Test

---

In our studio, we apply what we call the touch test before specifying any material in a bathroom context: what does this feel like when you run your hand across it? What does it do to your breath? Cool glass and brushed metal communicate precision and care, but in a room where the body is exposed, those surfaces need to be held in balance by something warm and organic.

The tile selection in a bathroom is the most consequential material decision in the room. It covers the largest surface area, it defines the room's character from a distance, and it reveals craft — or the absence of it — up close. We recommend treating tile as furniture-grade: spend the budget here before anywhere else.

- Natural variation in tile (handmade, tumbled, or honed) reads as warmth and quality
- Large-format tile reduces grout lines and reads as calmer and more spacious
- Stone requires sealing and ongoing care — discuss this honestly with clients
- Matte vs. glossy: matte is more forgiving of water marks and fingerprints in daily use
- Floor tile must be slip-rated for wet areas — beauty and safety are not in conflict

03

## The Vanity: Furniture Logic in a Fixture

---

The vanity is where bathroom design most often goes wrong — and where the greatest opportunity for distinction lies. Stock vanities signal cost-cutting immediately. A vanity designed with furniture logic — thoughtful proportions, considered detailing, a material that reads as warm rather than manufactured — transforms the entire room's register.

Floating vanities create the impression of more floor space and are easier to clean. Integrated tower storage flanking a floating vanity provides the practicality of a larger piece while maintaining visual lightness. The mirror treatment above the vanity — whether a single expanse, individual framed mirrors, or a medicine cabinet — should be resolved as part of the vanity design, not as an afterthought.

- Consider a floating vanity to open the floor plane visually
- Specify integrated storage (towers, niches, drawers) before finalising the layout

- Hardware finish should coordinate with plumbing fixtures — choose one metal family
- Mirror and lighting are resolved together: the mirror determines lighting placement

---

*“A beautiful tile in a modest vanity reads as a considered room. A generic tile in an expensive vanity reads as unresolved.”*

---

04

## Lighting: The Most Underestimated Decision

---

Bathroom lighting is almost always handled as an afterthought and almost always regretted. The fundamental problem is that overhead lighting — the default — creates shadows directly under the eyes, nose, and chin: the worst possible light for a room in which people look at their faces every morning.

The solution is to light the face, not the room. Sconces flanking the mirror at eye height provide even, flattering illumination without shadows. Overhead lighting should supplement rather than serve as the primary light source. In a shower, waterproof recessed fixtures positioned overhead work well. Separated circuits allow the room to transition from task mode to ambient mode — a small addition to the electrical scope that pays dividends every day.

- Sconces at eye height (60–65 inches to centre) flank the vanity mirror
- Specify warm white (2700–3000K) throughout — cool white is unflattering and clinical
- Separate circuits: task (vanity), ambient (general), and accent (shower/tub)
- Dimmers on every circuit — the cost is minimal, the daily benefit is significant
- Waterproofing ratings matter in wet zones: specify IP65 or higher for shower fixtures

05

## The Shower: A Room Within a Room

---

In the primary bath, the shower deserves to be treated as a room within a room: a space with its own spatial logic, its own material palette, and its own sense of enclosure. A shower that is generous enough to step into without ducking, with a bench, a niche, and considered tile work, reads as a luxury amenity. A shower that is merely compliant reads as a requirement met.

The enclosure decision — frameless glass, framed, or open wet room — significantly affects both cost and character. Frameless glass maximises the sense of space and shows the tile work fully. Open wet rooms (no enclosure) work

well in larger bathrooms and lend a hotel quality to the space. Both require a waterproofing approach that is thorough and properly specified.

- Minimum comfortable shower dimension: 36 x 36 inches — 42 x 42 inches preferred
- A built-in bench adds function and material interest at modest cost
- Recessed niches should be planned in the rough plumbing stage, not added later
- Frameless glass requires precise installation — specify this clearly to the contractor
- Linear drains allow for single-direction tile slopes and a cleaner aesthetic

06

## Budget Allocation: Where the Money Goes

---

Bathrooms are expensive per square foot — more so than any other room in the house. Understanding where to concentrate the budget, and where to exercise restraint, is a design decision as much as a financial one.

Our consistent advice: spend on tile and stone first, plumbing fixtures second, vanity third. These are the surfaces and objects you touch and see every day; their quality registers constantly. Lighting, mirrors, and hardware are less expensive ways to add refinement once the major surfaces are established.

- Tile and stone: the highest-impact investment in the room
- Plumbing fixtures: quality shows in both appearance and longevity — specify reputable brands
- Vanity: a custom or semi-custom piece distinguishes the room significantly
- Lighting: relatively low cost for high impact — do not cut here
- Accessories (towel bars, hooks, toilet paper holders): match the plumbing fixture finish

---

*“Spend on the surfaces the body encounters first. The quality is felt even when it is not consciously registered.”*

---

OUR WORK

## Selected Projects

---

The following projects represent our applied work in this category. Each was approached as a unique design problem — shaped by the client, the site, the budget, and the brief. Visit [harmony-house.com](http://harmony-house.com) to see full photography.

---

### Beans Bight Bathroom

Bainbridge Island, Washington

A single-room residential renovation designed around the discipline of constraint. Custom floating vanity, handmade tile with natural variation, and a shower designed to hold craft up close. Every decision was made knowing there was nowhere to hide.

---

### Beck Road Residence — Primary, Guest, and Powder Baths

Bainbridge Island, Washington

Three distinct wet rooms within a whole-home commission — each with its own character while remaining coherent with the house. The primary bath features a freestanding tub positioned for the best light; the powder bath uses bold wallcovering and a sculptural vanity as a moment of drama; the guest bath exercises considered restraint.

---

READY TO BEGIN?

# *Let's Talk About Your Project*

---

Whether you are renovating a single bathroom or designing wet rooms as part of a whole-home commission, Harmony House brings the same level of craft and material intelligence to every project. We would love to hear about yours.

Website	<a href="http://harmony-house.com">harmony-house.com</a>
Email	<a href="mailto:hello@harmony-house.com">hello@harmony-house.com</a>
Phone	206.207.2889
Location	Bainbridge Island, Washington