

Style, accessibility and safety punctuate shower system developments



Bastian Lohmann

Trending design in the area of shower systems continues to be the concept of floor-even, barrier-free showers. These can be challenging projects that require knowledge, training and good product systems, noted Bastian Lohmann, wedi Vice President, Sales and Marketing. Other trends are more technical and installation-oriented, supporting good design and performance. They include:

- More manufacturer-hosted training programs for professionals
- Smarter, modular shower systems offering faster, cleaner, simpler and rock-solid installation experience
- The use of defined, quality materials, which are safe to work with
- Sustainable lifespan of these products in use
- The ability to offer predictable performance, with the protection of a strong, comprehensive warranty program – the big “peace of mind always beats low cost” trend



Greg Gelston

One of the most popular trends in the last several years in the home renovation segment, noted Greg Gelston, President, Profilitec Corp. North America, is to remove traditional bathtubs and replace them with dedicated stand up showers. “Of the reasons, at least at the initial stages of this trend, was that our fast-paced lifestyles did not allow the time necessary to ‘relax and luxuriate’ in a bath. Fast forward 10 years and the trend to replace tubs with showers is still hot but, ironically, showers are being built as a place to ‘relax and luxuriate,’ as we did with tubs several years ago.

“The typical 5- to 8-minute shower is being replaced by spa-like experiences where showers are being built to include benches, music, TVs, multiple heads and other amenities to enhance the experience,” he said. “This now being a reality, it is necessary for the construction industry to recognize systems that adapt to this radical change in shower usage in order to address new challenges such as increased water volume and the presence of steam,” he said. Sealed shower assemblies, as outlined in method B422 of the *TCNA Handbook for Ceramic, Glass and Stone Tile Installation*, have been specifically designed to address these additional challenges.

As Josef Erlebach, Vice President of the new company

Rapid Recess noted, “The trend is clear, like anywhere in the world, even U.S. homeowners want curbless/flush entry showers. Most Europeans do not even have a name for what we call ‘curb’ in the shower; they simply do not use it and make the showers function and look beautiful.



Josef Erlebach

“Most of our customers request curbless showers because of style, accessibility or design and are extremely happy to see the design realized,” he said. “There are special considerations for these types of showers, like the capillarity break, but these issues are usually addressed by a good tile-setter... There is no turning back and a lot of companies are focusing their efforts in the direction and just for people with accessibility issues.”

Over the course of the last few decades, many innovations have significantly changed the way tile installers go about their business, noted Dean Moilanen, Director of Architectural Services for Noble Company. Large-format tile, large-format tile thinsets, and clip/leveling systems, are just a few of the changes that have become commonplace within the tile industry, he said.



Dean Moilanen

Prefabricated foam shower pans have made significant inroads into the industry, replacing dry-pack mortar as shower pan installations, he said. They are popular in residential use, and are gaining ground in commercial applications. “With the increased usage in this area, architects and specification writers are scrutinizing the performance metrics of the various products available, particularly with regard to compression and point loading concerns,” he said. “An ANSI standard is possibly in the works, in which elements of IAMPO PS 106 may be incorporated. The design community as well as tile installers would benefit from a standard that identifies ‘good, better, best’ amongst the various foam pan/tray offerings available.”

Catering to an aging population

Arthur Mintie, LATICRETE’s Technical Services Director pointed out that the number of Americans aged 65 and older is projected to more than double from 46 million in 2016 to over 98 million by 2060, accord-

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ing to the Population Reference Bureau. Accessibility needs are “a significant reason barrier-free showers are expected to continue to increase, meaning the manufacturing of these installation materials will also likely increase.”



Arthur Mintie

Barrier-free systems can also streamline installation, he noted. “While conventional systems on the market may require up to four days to install a complete shower system, new advancements focus on ease of install and will allow tiling to begin within hours,” he added.

Sean Gerolimos, Director of Research and Development, Schluter Systems, said curbless showers have become a very popular design choice for aesthetic reasons and to assist homeowners with aging in place or managing reduced mobility. Custom tiled showers can empower homeowners and reflect their



Sean Gerolimos

needs and desires and curbless options can be practical solutions for aging populations. “One of the challenges when constructing curbless showers is to effectively manage height changes between the bathroom floor and the shower floor,” he said.

David Scalise, Founder and President of TileWare, said shower systems are a growing category. “Consumers love tile and want their days to include a relaxing, spa-like atmosphere,” he said. “This is notably true for baby boomers. From aging-in-place to senior living, baby boomers are fueling the construction of both safe and beautiful tile showers. As shower demand has increased, so has the demand for accessibility.”



David Scalise

With the need for expanded accessibility, Scalise observed that “the industry needs to enlarge its waterproofing envelope to include grab bars, folding seats, partitions and general accessories.” – *Louis Iannoco*