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DISPLAY UNTIL NOVEMBER 15, 2010

# designing for a new generation

WATER EVERYWHERE BUT WITH CONSERVATION IN MIND • By Barbara Ballinger



*Interior designer **Leslie Markman-Stern**, ASID, ([www.LeslieM-SternDesign.com](http://www.LeslieM-SternDesign.com)) is based in Chicago and has been designing for the last 25 years. She's always had an interest*

*in working with people with special needs. We caught up with Leslie at the recent National Kitchen & Bath Association (NKBA) show. Here's her advice for designing your own special bathroom retreat:*

## What are you doing to make bathrooms green and what do you suggest others do?

**A** I tend to use dual-flush wall controls for toilet fixtures, since they control the amount of water used. Also low-flush toilets by Toto feature a new glazing material, SanaGloss, which really helps because it prevents debris, mold and bacteria from sticking to porous surfaces as it seals the china, creating a smooth surface over the totally glazed toilet bowl area, making it easier to clean. Also, the toilets look new longer and they work well with less-water-usage fixtures.

I use dimmers to control artificial light levels; specify low-E windows to control energy use; pick window treatments to decrease heat loss; opt for lots of insulation in walls and heated floors, which decrease energy consumption, too, and favor anti-scald faucets, which control the amount of water heated, therefore using less energy. I always try to install an exhaust fan on a dimmer to control energy to de-mist a bathroom. Installing light fixtures on mirrors to reflect light back into a room without using more watts is another good idea.

## Does going green translate to more expense?

**A** I think if you design with energy-efficiency regulations from the start and specify materials that use less energy, like low-flow water toilets and tubs that

have built-in liners to keep the water warm, you will get your money's worth from the products. The cost becomes a problem for homeowners later, when they want to substitute different products and make changes. California has eliminated incandescent lamps in kitchens for years, but designers in that state know how to design around this scenario and make less energy-guzzling choices. It's no different than specifying fire-retardant fabrics for safety; you do so from the get-go. The good news is that in the future you'll see more choices available. Incandescent lights eventually will be eliminated because of their high energy usage.

## Universal design seems more popular, perhaps the way green became more widespread a few years ago. Is this true?

**A** Yes, universal design has become more popular—and for good cause—as Baby Boomers age and people live longer. Lighting is key in eliminating falls, since the bathroom is the most dangerous room in the house; 45 percent of all accidents happen there, often because of too-low light levels. Older people have a harder time seeing at night. Seniors require three times more light than young adults. Good lighting in all the task areas, such as showers, tubs and toilets, helps. It's also smart to use effective lighting in sink areas to avoid glare and shadows; consider using lights on either side of a vanity mirror that can assist homeowners in shaving and putting on makeup.

Using nonslick flooring materials and tiles with larger grout lines, honed (rather than polished) tiles, textured tiles and small-profile thresholds all help, too. And don't forget to add grab bars for better egress in tubs, toilets and showers, but select ones that look decorative rather than institutional. There are many choices now available. Installing them into studs with blocking behind the drywall so they don't come loose is smart and cost-effective. Levers instead of knobs provide better gripping for those with arthritis or muscular degeneration. These strategies are also good to assist young families with



It's more cost-effective to install water- and energy-efficient bathroom fixtures when remodeling than to retrofit them down the line.

children, since anyone can face navigational and safety issues. Universal design is for all, not just the old or young.

## What are some hot trends you're seeing?

**A** Some homeowners want all the gadgets and seek a totally luxurious spa experience in their bathrooms. They want tubs with chromatherapy, aromatherapy, jets, even music. Others desire some features for therapeutic reasons and for greater resale. I think the vast majority of homeowners wants a fabulous shower with rainheads or body sprays, but ones that conserve water. Not everyone just wants a shower; many still want one of the great tubs for themselves or their children. And some want their bathrooms to be a gathering spot for more than one person with a soaking tub, TV, music, a toilet that's at comfort height and maybe with dual-flush controls or a seat that can be warmed. They may also want a coffee bar or wine cooler and exercise area.