



Access Granted

As the baby boomer generation ages, accessible bathtubs keep up with its needs and tastes

By CATHY CASSATA | CTW Features

In 2011, the first baby boomers reached the traditional retirement age of 65, and by 2025, baby boomers will comprise about 25 percent of the total U.S. population. As this demographic group ages, one of their primary decisions will concern how their homes can accommodate them.

According to a 2003 AARP study, more than three quarters of respondents said it's important to have non-slip floor surfaces and bathroom aids such as grab bars or a bathing stool. But while 80 percent feel that bathroom aids are important, only about one third have them in their homes.

Recognizing a need in the market, bath companies are providing elegant and high-tech options for the elderly or disabled. Accessible bathtubs take into account the needs of customers in addition to aesthetics.

"One of the things that people who are aging often have to sacrifice is that they can no longer enjoy a deep soak," says Diana Schrage, senior interior designer at the Kohler Design Center. "But the latest accessible bathtubs allow the aging to bathe in a tub that's not only high-tech and safe, but includes elderly specific features."

BELLS AND WHISTLES

An accessible bathtub needs more than just a few grab bars. These tubs usually incorporate a deeper soaking tub style, built-in seat and walk-in door. This way, the bather doesn't need to risk losing balance by stepping over the high bathtub wall.

The typical walk-in bath has a hinged door that can easily be latched and unlatched. A new alternative is a rising wall bathtub, in which the entire outer wall of the bathtub raises and lowers easily. The extra-wide door opening allows a person to lift legs in and out of the bath and transition from a wheelchair.

Besides accessibility, bath manufacturers add other features that appeal to aging customers. The Kohler Elegance rising-wall bath has an elevated seat to minimize motion required to sit and stand, deck-mount faucets and



Elegance rising: Today's accessible bathtubs have more luxury features and style points than before. This rising-wall tub has an extra wide door for easy transition from a wheelchair.

hand shower within arm's reach of the user. American Standard's walk-in tubs have air spa and combination massage options.

"Those who are less agile can safely enjoy a bath in a spacious tub and have in their reach hydrotherapy controls, an integrated grab bar, and more," says Kalpesh Nanji, business development director for American Standard's safe and accessible baths.

QUICK DRAIN CONVENIENCE

A concern that some people forget with walk-in tubs is the need for quick drainage.

"In order to get out of a walk-in bath, you have to open the door - but before

you can do that, the water has to drain, which can take 6 to 7 minutes in a typical tub," says Nanji. "That's quite a bit of time to sit in the water, but the quick draining feature eliminates water in under 2 minutes in a normal-sized tub."

MEDICAL BENEFITS

To ease aches and pains, many accessible tubs offer jetted features that are said to provide hydrotherapy benefits - the use of water in the treatment of disease. The term can encompass a few techniques, "everything from air jet systems to an invigorating jetted system to vibroacoustic technology, which is the use of sound to produce mechanical vibrations," Schrage says.

Nanji suggests researching the effectiveness of these features for various tubs before investing. "Really look into the type of feature you want and research which tubs offer those," he suggests.

AFFORDABLE OPTIONS

If spending thousands of dollars isn't in your budget, a walk-in tub or rising wall bath might not be the best option. Such tubs can cost as much as \$5,000 or more. While some models might easily retrofit into an existing bath space, hiring a professional to do the work will add cost.

Those looking for a simple bathing experience might find that a low-threshold shower with a sturdy stool is all they need to get the job done. Otherwise, non-slip floors and grab bars provide some peace of mind for those who need to be extra careful stepping in and out of a bath.

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SAFE AND COMFY BATH TIME

If installing a rising-wall bath is out of reach, consider incorporating these simple bathroom tips from Chicago-based interior designer Leslie Markman-Stern, who has worked with many seniors and people with special needs.

- Install grab bars. Grab bars don't have to look like the ones you see in a hospital, Markman-Stern says. "Look for stylish ones that match your faucet and other hardware throughout."
- Add a folding bench. For small showers, Stern recommends a wall-mounted folding seat.
- Think slip-resistant floors.

Whether you like stone, marble or something else, Markman-Stern says make sure it's honed, not slippery: "This means you've taken off the polish on the surface."

- Choose color-conscious walls. Contrasting colors between the wall and floor make them easy to differentiate.
- Add easy-to-use controls. Levers are easier to maneuver than knobs, Markman-Stern says.

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A Taste for Tufting

A Victorian-era style comes roaring back for all the right reasons: elegance, nostalgia and comfort

By BETTINA CHANG | CTW Features

Tufted furniture was a style that stemmed from necessity and has retained popularity throughout the years as a classic and comfortable style.

Now, with the scramble to add a hint of nostalgia to every design, it's hard to ignore the scores of tufted designs promoted by furniture designers and retailers. Everything from traditional armchairs to modern chaise lounges, to sturdy leather ottomans or ornate velvet sitting stools, makes use of this technique.

"It somehow seems to bridge traditional and modern, and that's what's in trend right now," says Loreen Epp, the editor-in-chief of online magazine Roomplanners.com and interior design/merchandising professional. "It provides a tidy, clean look that both traditionalists and modernists love."

Historically, tufting was used as a technique to secure cushions to furniture frames, says William Silveira, vice president of merchandising at Z Gallerie, an American home furnishings retailer.

Tufts are created by passing a thread through fabric at regular distances, which creates depressions in the upholstery, he explains. Traditional tufted furniture features deeper depressions that are secured by buttons. A modern take on tufting usually has shallower depressions and "blind" tufts, with no buttons.

That transition from traditional to modern is a sign of tufted furniture's current popularity. "It is being shown in non-traditional homes," he says. "Contemporary sofa frames enhanced with tufting create textural interest and movement in sometimes static designs."

Of course, since tufted furniture has never really been out of style, it's hard to call it a trend, Silveira says. At Z Gallerie, "we tuft everything that can be tufted,

including placemats; we love what it adds to a piece."

The benefit of tufting, regardless of style, is the texture and character it adds to fabric. "It looks beautiful in pile fabrics like velvets and some microfibers," Epp says. "Buttons pull the fabric down and give you those shadow lines. It looks great in leather, too."

Epp adds, "You're creating little pillows on the seat. It's a puff of fabric, for lack of a better word. It makes for a firm but comfortable seat."

Of course, there are always drawbacks; deep tufts act like magnets for dust, crumbs and dirt, and it is very hard to clean. Shallow tufting or tufted backs of seats (instead of bottoms) can help curb the mess.

Both Epp and Silveira say that tufting can be a dramatic look that will act as a focal point. Epp recommends an accent



Crossover classic: This chaise lounge uses tufting to add a texture, character and a hint of tradition to a modern piece.

chair or button-tufted sofa. "Pick one piece, rather than a room full of it," she says. "It's a great way to accentuate and avoid overkill."

Simplicity in the other features of the furniture piece will allow the tufting to take center stage, Silveira says. He points to the simple leg design of the tufted Lola bench from Z Gallerie.

As for colors or room styles that are most suitable for tufted furniture, Silveira throws caution to the wind. "There is no limit. Think of tufting as just another way to elevate design. We have probably tufted every imaginable color and material."

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