

KITCHENS & BATHROOMS

A survey by the Australian Bureau of Statistics found that 2.9 million households had undertaken a renovation at least once within 10 years – the most common type being kitchen upgrades. Ground-floor extensions came in second, and bathroom overhauls, third.

With lower borrowing costs and hefty real-estate prices, the number of renovations being done is only expected to rise.

So how much can you expect to spend? Well, according to the Housing Industry Association's 2008-09 Kitchens and Bathrooms Report, the average value of a kitchen replacement is \$10,775. A kitchen makeover – in which the original cabinets are mostly left in place – is \$6178.

The average bathroom renovation is pricier at \$17,460. Still, a bathroom makeover, in which only select items are replaced, is on average \$2741.

According to the Association, the average age of a kitchen set to be renovated is 15 years, while for a bathroom it's 18 years. So perhaps the longer wait for the latter reflects the desire to splash out a little more.

People are also increasingly opting for multiple bathrooms, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics figures showing about 170 bathrooms per 100 homes.

The top looks when renovating? In kitchens, benchtops in engineered stone reign supreme, followed by granite, according to the Association's report. Stainless steel, high-pressure laminate and concrete are also popular kitchen materials. In door types, glass and two-pack polyurethane or furniture lacquer are tops, while there has been a decline in natural timber and timber veneer.

Glass splashbacks are another popular option, with a desire for splashbacks in engineered stone and granite continuing to grow.

Technology-wise, the Association also found that European-look appliances,

Renovation rescue

STORY CARLA CARUSO



two-door fridges and coffee machines continue to hold our gaze.

In bathrooms, double basins and showers are popular, the report says, and Reece dubs the look 'his and hers'. "With consumers increasingly time poor," it states, "it's unsurprising that the bathroom is going double. As well as being a time saver, the his-and-her style bathroom is also a great way to create a retreat in the home."

In sinks, undermount, square-form, two-piece and round bowls are the hot styles.

Karl Noonan claims that updating these areas of the home is more than just a fashion statement, saying "Life is made easier when our interior spaces are designed well to serve us better. Investing in a home is far smarter than buying a vehicle that is going to depreciate. You live in your home, not your car."



TECH- SAVVY

With renovations comes the chance to employ new technologies. One recent bathroom innovation is a vanity incorporating a night light made up of a backlit strip comprising a light behind acrylic. This look from Karl Noonan Designs took out the gong for New Product for a Kitchen or Bathroom at the NSW HIA 2009 Awards.

According to Natalie Bristow from Parisi, another innovation for bathrooms is progressive mixers. "The water changes temperature by turning the taps either way – the lever doesn't have to be lifted," she says.



PLANET FRIENDLY

Karl Noonan finds that Australians are keen to do their bit environmentally when renovating. "Lower-energy products, like LED lighting, are becoming more popular," he says, "and, buying them is straightforward – the star ratings are a no-brainer."

Brightgreen offers LED lighting, which use 80 per cent less energy than halogens and represents substantially lower power consumption – a plus both environmentally and financially.

Also on the topic of energy efficiency, Michael Kitchener says induction electric cooking is proving attractive. This is a form of flameless cooking, which is faster than traditional cooktops as the pot itself is heated, rather than the stovetop.

The 2008-09 HIA Kitchens and Bathrooms Report also found that there was higher demand for water-efficient tapware and greywater recycling.



STORE IT

Drawers are multiplying in kitchens and bathrooms. "Five years ago," Kitchener says, "people generally wanted about five drawers per kitchen. Now, we're seeing 14 drawers."

These are being used for everything from chinaware to pantry items. "Instead of a bottom shelf in a cupboard, which you may have needed to get down on your hands and knees to access, now everything can be easily reached with a drawer – even if it's at your ankles."



SUPERSIZE ME

The Housing Industry Association says new 'super bathrooms' are like a health spa at the end of your landing. For those with a sizeable budget, such a room may include exercise machines, steam cabins, spa baths with mood lighting, a sound system and a retractable plasma-screen TV. Some steam cabins on the market even have extra options, such as a freezing shower for contrast, side jets and an MP3 player. But opting for just one 'super' feature may be more practical for most people.



ROOM WITH A VIEW

Bathroom supplier Reece says that luxuriating in a bubble bath now has added appeal. "Many Australians are designing their bathrooms around large, open windows, which provide a beautiful view – whether it's out to the garden, over a pool or out to the countryside or city skyline. The bathroom is being used to extend the living areas in the home and this trend looks as though it's here to stay."

Under-floor heating through tiles and heated towel racks are also adding to a feeling of luxury. Noonan adds: "Larger bathrooms and sophisticated finishes are being sought as a retreat."