E73: Vanities - Bathroom Design Essentials

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Hello everyone, and welcome to this episode of Bathroom Design Essentials. I'm Frances Cosway, and I'm your host of Your Forever Home, the podcast. And for those who have been tuning in for the last few weeks you'll know that this special season is all about bathrooms. Last season we did kitchens, and now we're doing the ever-poor important bathroom component of any forever home.

So today I'm going to be chatting through about bathroom vanities. And interestingly bathroom vanities have such a strong focal point in a bathroom from a design perspective that they can really make or break the overall design from an aesthetic perspective. But they can also really make or break the functionality of the way a bathroom can perform for you, and storage is so important.

Now, last week I had a whole episode on storage and how we max out and create very creative and well thought out storage. So I don't wanna talk about that too much today. But obviously when we're talking about vanities, one of the main reasons that we would have a vanity is to add additional storage into our space.

So what I'm gonna be covering today is the different types of vanities available and some of the advantages and disadvantages with going for a custom design versus a basically off-the-shelf design. And then I'll briefly talk about some of the materials. And I suppose some of the material considerations are a little bit different than what you would consider for a kitchen, just because we are effectively in a wet area.

Now there is in the next couple of weeks I've got a very special guest on the podcast, and I'm very happy to announce that Richard Earp from Earp Brothers is going to be joining me, and we are going to do an entire episode on tiles. Now, Richard is an amazing resource and he is so passionate about tiles.

So we will talk about the flooring component and particularly because that is, all part of this story. So that will be coming up very soon. I'm really excited to have Richard on. I've done an event at Earp Brothers in the past and his knowledge is just incredible, so that's gonna be really exciting.

All right, so I'll kick off today with talking firstly about the difference between a custom designed vanity and an off-the-shelf vanity. Now, custom, as it may indicate with the name, is c- completely customizable. So it means that you're customizing the design, the shape, the configuration, and the material the materials that are being used.

So might be the handles, it might be the cabinetry fronts, the benchtop. All of that is completely customized, and it's bespoke to your design and material specifications. Now, what this means is that you are getting something completely flexible in terms of the design that you need. But the reason we love it as interior designers is it means that the vanity that's going to be used in that space is completely to scale for the area and that's one of the disadvantages with off-the-shelf, but I'll talk about that in a moment.

But the other beautiful thing about it is we embark on this process about and how we design your vanity in terms of what are your needs? What are your storage requirements? How do you use your bathroom? Do you like a lot of storage overhead? What do we need to store in this vanity? And so as we do with the kitchen, we do a needs assessment.

We work out what you need to store. And what we find, quite obviously, is the main bathroom, the family bathroom requirements are quite different to the ensuite requirements. And so we're making sure that those vanities are customized for those spaces. So when you're working with an interior designer, they should be assessing your needs so that they can then design the not only the bathroom, but also the vanity around your requirements.

I don't know how many times I've walked into bathrooms that are going to be renovated but even new bathrooms, and you can't even fit a hairdryer into the drawer of the vanity because it hasn't been thought about, so it's either too narrow or it's not deep enough. And so we're making sure that the things that need to be stored in there are actually allowed for, so the right depth of drawers, but also the right breadth of drawers so that you can actually store what you need.

Just like in a kitchen, there is nothing worse than moving in and you cannot actually put what you want to put into the certain area of the vanity, and so use it in the way that you want to use it. So functionality is so key to getting the joinery design of your vanity correct, and that's what a customer design, custom design allows you to do.

Yes, generally they are more expensive. They're custom the joinery design, the drawings. But it means then that you're able to assess those drawings and go, "Yes, that's the look I'm after," or, "That's the the requirements that I need for the storage requirements in that particular vanity."

So because it's a custom size, sometimes we'll be working with a, a bathroom or an en suite floor plan, and the space for the vanity may only be 850 or it may be 970. Now, those are custom sizes.

Now, if budget is a real constraint, you may then compromise on the size and 970 might become nine 900 millimeters.

Or, you might need something that's 1300 millimeters and you might need to bring it down to 1200. Now, that might not be such a big issue but sometimes the compromise on the size can really affect how that vanity looks in the space. So it's something to consider. Now, you are able to see some of the customized vanities.

So for example, in Reece, you can go and actually see a vanity on the floor that is actually completely customizable. So they are working with Zuster and they've got very bespoke vanities that are there. And so the material finish is customized to your requirements, and the actual size and the configuration is customized to your requirements as well.

So I wouldn't quite call that off the shelf. But more often than not, there's not joinery drawings that are g- are generally needed in that instance. But then that's when you need to be really clear about how is everything going to fit and where's everything going to make the assessment as to whether that sort of vanity is going to work for you.

Generally, as interior designers, we work a lot, particularly in forever homes, we're working a lot with custom designed vanities. And that is also because we can choose the exact material that is going to be used. And that not only can affect, the budgetary constraints but it can also affect the complete aesthetic.

We can marry in with anything. We can choose any material that we need to fit the client's requirements. Now, conversely, on the other side of that, we've got vanities that are off the shelf. Now, sometimes you can customize certain elements. So for example, you may be able to ch- choose between different stone tops.

You might have four or five that you can choose from. Solid acrylic surface bench tops, you might be able to choose from a couple of colors. But you're generally working with standard sizes, and the most standard sizes are really 6, 9, 12, 1500, and 1800 millimeters. You may be able to stretch that out a bit.

You may be able to get something a bit smaller, but they're generally the standard sizes. But if you're making do with a standard size, as I was just alluding to before, it may be that the scale is not right for the room, and it may look a little bit odd. It may just not feel right. So make sure you're thinking about that, too.

Now, the other thing with off-the-shelf is you may not necessarily be able to choose the material type that you want your cabinetry to be in. You may like a very specific type of timber finish that you would really like, and there's a particular vanity that you like. You like the style of, the configuration really works for you, but they just don't have the material that you really love.

You need to work out whether that's going to be a compromi- pr- compromise you're prepared to take or make, I should say. But the other thing is because we're working a lot more with color, thank goodness, Australians are finally starting to work with color. But we have been, for example, specifying colored cabinetry.

So that might be navy blue. It might be a beautiful type of green. And so those sorts of colors are generally not as commonly available with off-the-shelf products as what very neutral colors would be, like an off-white, a white and some of the timber ranges, some of the timber tones. So if you are after a very specific color, we're working with a client, she's going to have a bright purple vanity you'd be really hard pushed to find that in an off-the-shelf version Now storage, ha, as I keep alluding to, is really important.

So think about the configuration of the ... And I suppose we're talking here more about off the shelf. So is the configuration that you've seen in the showroom going to suit you? So don't forget that what you need to store is gonna drive the design and drive whether it's going to work for you. So think about drawers that you may need.

How many? What are you going to store in them? Don't just go for something that's got a whole lot of drawers 'cause that's going to work. I think I alluded and mentioned in a previous episode that I actually like a combination of cupboards and drawers and not just all the drawers. I sometimes find that I really like storing particular things in cupboards.

And sometimes the height, I don't wanna have a whole drawer that is going to take up just a couple of things that I've got quite high. And so I'm happy then to have that in a cupboard where I may have a little bit more height in there than if I'm going to have drawers. So think about whether you want all drawers, whether you're happy with really deep drawers.

How deep do you need drawers to store things like your hair dryers, any makeup requirements, bottles, and things like that? Do you want any open shelving? Sometimes vanities don't actually have any cupboards on them at all. They're just basically completely open shelves, maybe in a beautiful timber. I had a An open shelfed vanity in Amsterdam.

It was made completely out of stainless steel, when I was completely obsessed with stainless steel. And I actually showed that in the des- bathroom design essentials master class last week. I went through the decisions that I went through when I was designing my apartment in Amsterdam.

And 25 years later it's still there looking amazing. So that was by the by. But that was all open, and I rolled my towels, and I had those on display. And then I had another cabinet where I stored things that I needed. And I had a, a mirror cabinet and so forth. So think about the combination.

Sometimes you can break it up. With a very long vanity it's nice to have maybe a combination of drawers, cupboard, and open shelves. Or you may just have drawers and open shelves or ... But sometimes it is nice to have some open areas. But again, it's going to come down to your personal preference.

And are those open shelves going to inhibit what you can store? Do you like things to be all behind closed doors, as we've discussed in kitchens, not having glass front cabinetry? The other type of vanity or vanity/benchtop is having just the bench top only. So that is, that does form the vanity, and that might be wall-hung.

And you really just basically have, o- often it's free form concrete. It could just be a piece of stone. And that actually forms the vanity. That is the piece that your that your basin is going to sit on. So that could be something you might want a really minimalist look. It may only be in the powder room, for example, or you just want it in the guest bathroom.

So that is something you can have that doesn't have any storage at all. I would really only use that when it's an area that is not gonna be used as a proper bathroom. So for example, a guest powder room or when storage is really not critical. Not forgetting what I was saying recently about how family powder rooms adjacent to or ve- or next to the family bathroom can really, if designed well, can act as a secondary prep- prep area for kids that are getting ready Okay, so what type of vanities are there?

So we've got custom, we've got off-the-shelf. We talked about the configurations. The next thing I'm gonna talk about is around w- wall-hung and, or, and floating vanities, so that's the same thing. They, those words are interspersed. And then you've got floor-mounted vanities. Now, wall-hung floating vanities are really the way things are moving, and I actually just wrote an article for Inside Out yesterday, and I talked a lot about why floating vanities are such a nicer option.

Now, they create an illusion of space because you can see the floor. So when I'm talking floating, I'm saying that they are ... i'm suggesting that they're at least 25 to 30 centimeters off the floor, 20 centimeters at an absolute minimum. You really, to create the illusion of space, you really need to be able to see, right under that vanity.

Now, sometimes people say to me, "Oh, but it's gonna be difficult to clean." It's not. If it's 100 mil off the floor, yeah, that's gonna be a pain to get under. But if it's 25 to 30 centimeters off the floor, sorry I keep going between centimeters and millimeters and everything else that's not gonna be difficult to clean.

But it also means you just get that illusion of space because you're seeing the floor go all the way to the wall. So that's one reason. They look a lot more sophisticated, so they look really beautiful, but they also create an illusion of space. So when you are in a smaller bathroom area, I would definitely suggest that you have it wall-mounted so that it, things don't feel so blocky and bulky, and that's another reason to use them.

They are a much more superior finish, even in a larger bathroom. They just look much nicer. They look more polished, more refined, more finished. The other throwback that I get the resistance that I get with floating vanities is, "Oh, but I'm going to lose so much storage." Actually you're not. And

often I'll see a floor-mounted vanity which is one that is actually on the floor and where it's got a kicker and obviously the kicker is, 100 to 150 mils anyway, so that's lost storage.

It's not used. So you're not actually using, if we're working off the premise that I'm saying it would be floating about 25 centimeters off the ground, and normally you'd have a kicker that is 150 mil, that's only 10 centimeters that you're really losing. But you're not really losing it. When I go into homes that are going to be renovated, the bathroom's going to be renovated, what I normally find is that they've got a floor-mounted vanity, and then above they've just got a mirror that's adhered to the wall, to, to the wall.

So there's actually no overhead storage at all. There's no storage above the vanity. And I can absolutely guarantee you, and I think I said this in the storage episode, that whatever you've got in your vanity, if you can get that into the shaver cabinet above, that's going to give you more storage than you can ever imagine was going to fit in your vanity.

So please don't choose a floor-mounted vanity because you think you're gonna get more storage in. The other point to note here is if you've got well-designed storage and the configuration of that vanity, that floating vanity, is well-designed, and it's designed around your needs, you're going to get much more functionality and usability than if you've just got some standard floor-mounted vanity.

So floor-mounted is definitely the way to go. The only thing I will point out is a really good builder will obviously read the plans and understand in advance that there's going to be a floor-mounted vanity. You do not need a, a support at the back that is often tiled. It's like a a, a piece of wall that's protruding out maybe 20 or 30 centimeters right at the back of the vanity to support it.

A wall-hung vanity should be exactly that, and the builder should be support- be putting the supports in the wall that will enable you to have a wall-hung vanity that doesn't need that 30 centimeters of protrusion out from the back of the wall to basically support that wall-hung vanity. I don't think that finish is as good so you'd need to have that conversation with your builder.

We certainly don't design them like that. They're just not necessary if it's been built out correctly. So that is a wall-hung vanity. You're going to get amazing storage in there. You're really not gonna lose out. Now, the floor-mounted vanity is exactly that. You've got a kicker at the bottom. It's adhered to the floor.

It looks a lot more bulky. It doesn't look as refined and you're not gonna create that sense of space. It's this big, plonk of cabinetry that's just sitting in the space, where when it's wall-hung, it just feels ... It flows better in the space. It feels like there's more flow in the room, and it just feels less bulky and clunky and chunky.

So I think it's about getting really well-designed cabinetry that's going to suit your requirements that's wall-hung, rather than just opting for floor-mounted because you think the illusion is you're going to get more storage. All right. So hopefully that has given you good insight into the difference

between custom-made, off-the-shelf storage configurations a wall-hung versus a floor-mounted vanity, and then what are some of the advantages and disadvantages of of those.

Now, I might add that a wall-hung vanity, more often than not, will be a little bit more expensive than floor-mounted, and they're definitely more expensive when you go and buy them off the shelf as well. But I just don't find that the ones that are not, that are wall ... sorry, floor-mounted, are really designed with the same the same needs in mind.

Now, I do wanna briefly touch on materials. Bench tops really common in a, in bathrooms these days are stone, whether it's natural stone, reconstituted stone. The only thing I'd highlight is if you don't like the watermarks and all that sort of stuff, you may like to opt for a lighter colored stone rather than a dark like black, because all the little watermarks and all that sort of stuff, not that they're gonna stain, but you might just wanna wipe them down all the time.

That might drive you crazy. So you might wanna go for a lighter colored stone. You can learn all about all the, the myriad of different choices around the different types of stone in terms of paper rock, and recycled stone, and natural stone, and all those sorts of things in the kitchen design essentials episode.

That, that season. There are two episodes specifically around bench tops, so I encourage you if you really wanna understand all the different types of bench tops available. And all of them are really applicable for the bathroom, except for, in certain instances, a laminate bench top. So that's gonna work.

And this is really the same in a kitchen. That's going to work beautifully in a bench top. The only thing you can't do that what's going to restrict you is having an under mounted sink. So if you really like that under mounted sink look, then laminate is not really going to be a great choice for you.

The other thing to consider with laminate is if you do get any water in any of the edges, because it's an MDF product, it will actually start to expand. To be honest, these days, the laminate product is so much more resistant and so much stronger and put together in a different way than what it was, say, in the '60s and '70s, where you had that black gap where water could seep in.

I think you'll find that it's still very durable for a bathroom situation Timber benchtops can be beautiful. You need to be aware though that they definitely need to be sealed. The big difference between the kitchen and the bathroom situation is that a bathroom is a wet area, so you need to make sure that the timber is sealed.

It is achievable. We work with products that are pre-sealed and they don't need to be sealed again, so they're definitely suitable for wet areas. But you can't just get any normal piece of timber and put it in the bathroom thinking it's going to be maintenance-free, because it won't. In terms of cabinetry, again, listen to the Kitchen Design Essentials season.

There's a whole episode dedicated to cabinetry. But the main ones that will end up in a bathroom will be laminate fronts on your cabinetry, two pack or thermo wrap, which is, the name for vinyl wrap. All those work really well in a a wet a wet room setting. But you can get more information on the other different types of materials available in the Kitchen Design Essentials season.

You need to be careful in a bathroom setting when you're using a natural timber product such as a veneer or a solid timber. It will need sealing. I know that people get a little bit worried with a veneer, which is a real premium product anyway it's very high-end. That, the water will end up, which is the steam in the room, will end up affecting that product over time.

And the same with timber. It's better to have that sealed. Some of the varnish, you know, over- I'm talking about many years, may start to peel off. So you may, it may not look as pristine for as long as some of the other options such as two pack laminate or vinyl wrap. Some of the the timber-look laminates that are available now are really amazing.

They're very lifelike and they're going to be a lot more durable in a bathroom setting. So we use a lot of Navurban, which is also a quite a high-end product. It's incredibly lifelike. It's very matte. Durapel's another one that's fantastic. So they give you that beautiful timber warmth but you're going to get better durability in that steamy environment than what you would if you're using solid timber.

Solid timber vanities, having said that, are really popular. People love using natural timbers and hey, they are fabulous. It's great to see natural timber making such a big renaissance. So if that's your thing, absolutely go for it. Timber vanities look absolutely magnificent. And just with a little bit of love, they are definitely gonna stand the test of time.

So we've covered off materials, we've covered off the different types of vanities, and we've covered off having something that's basically off the shelf versus something that's custom designed. So I hope that's given you ... I trust that's given you a lot more information so that you can go away and do your own investigations.

Again, I really encourage you to look at images, go to Pinterest, go to House, go to interior designer websites go into showrooms and just have a look at what's available. Get inspired about what and really look at any colors you may want to incorporate into your vanity. Like we spoke about last week in terms of how do you add color into your space, it could be in your vanity, but it doesn't necessarily have to be in your vanity.

And as always, if you need to get in touch by all means book a chat. You get access to my diary. So book a chat with me. We can have a 15-minute talk about where you may need some assistance.

So that's it from me this week. Next week I'm going to be talking about different renovation budgets. I'm not gonna be talking about budgets per se, but I'm just gonna be running through what can you do for certain amounts if you're doing a, a bit of a, a lick and stick, I like to call it, or sometimes I call it a quick and dirty little makeover.

Really low budget, what can you do just to give your bathroom a bit of a lift? Then we'll talk about mid-priced renos, what you can actually do, and then basically a luxury reno, what w- what would we actually be looking at? So I'm gonna be going through that next week. And then we're going to have the amazing Richard Earp.

So some great episodes coming up all about your bathrooms. I will be here same day next week. Next Thursday, the next episode will launch. Bye for now.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

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