

Where to Live

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Bath fittings fit the taste

SAYEDA AKTER

CLEOPATRA, queen of the Nile, certainly knew how to enjoy a good bath. Massaged in flower oils, soaked in milk and honey in a pool surrounded by handmaidens, she knew how to unwind after a hard day of ruling over Egypt. A long, relaxing bath has been a part of people's lifestyles for a long time now. It is a symbol of stylish and lavish living. Since ancient times, we have moved a long way from natural living, when people used to bathe in spring waterfalls and rivers.

Bathrooms have now become an essential part of any residence. Not many consider cutting their budgets for bathroom materials when moving to a new place or for renovations. Bathrooms these days might be elementary with the most basic fittings available in the market, or be it may be plush, decorated most aesthetically.

An ideal bathroom is functional, clean, conveniently maintained and has a tidy appearance, with separate wet and dry areas. Here, budget plays the most important part, while the rest should be done

according to an individual's taste.

One has to allocate from Tk 1 lakh to Tk 1.5 lakh on materials, such as shower, commode with cistern, bidet and washbasin, for two simple bathrooms in a 900-square feet flat.

Dhaka city has nearly 3.5 lakh buildings, according to BUET Professor Mehedi Ahmed Ansari. This clearly shows the magnitude of the size of the market for bathroom fittings.

MA Baten Khan, managing director of BDDL Properties Ltd, a top local real estate company, said one has to spend at least 15 percent of the total housing budget on bathroom fittings.

"It is a basic expenditure that one must meet before moving into a house. Within one's capacity, one has to think about comfort and convenience whenever constructing a residence," he said.

"Depending on the size of the flat, we spend differing amounts on bathroom fittings and sanitary ware. For example, one has to spend around Tk 1.5 lakh for a two bedroom flat, and Tk 5 lakh or more for plush flats in Gulshan or Baridhara."

"Safety is also a vital issue when planning bathroom décor. People would like to avoid falls or foot slips in the bathroom. This is why they opt for tiles with a matt finish for a safe bathroom floor," said Khan.

The market for bathroom materials is segmented in two divisions -- sanitary ware, including shower trays, washbasins, western and Indian commodes, cistern and flushing devices, bathtubs and steel materials, like towel rails, toilet roll holders and soap dishes, soap case holder, commode showers and washers.

Jacuzzis, which are large whirlpool bathtubs with underwater jets that massage the body, are also gradually becoming popular among the urban people. Some high-end flat owners install them in the master bathrooms.

Although the market is flooded with both local and imported bathroom fittings and appliances, local manufacturers are still moving to grab a greater share.

At present, local ceramic tiles manufacturing has grown from almost nothing to a multi-billion-taka industry in the past decade. There are eleven companies active in the



Accessories are displayed at a bath fittings store in Dhaka. Even with immense growth in sales, industry insiders are yet to get substantial government support.

market with over Tk 1,000 crore in annual sales, said industry insiders.

The existing factories produced nearly 400 million square feet of tiles in 2009, up from 374 million square feet in 2008 and 322 million square feet in 2007.

Industry insiders say the local entrepreneurs, who were mainly importing tiles and other housing materials, considered setting up factories of their own since around 2000, when cheaper tiles began replacing mosaic.

The first tiles factory was set up by Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation, a state-owned enterprise, in 1982, followed by Modhumoti Tiles in 1988 in the private sector.

Sales of locally produced tiles have increased over years, fostered by growth in demand and low production costs.

RAK Ceramics (Bangladesh) Ltd, a UAE-based company set up in 2003, is the market leader in the ceramic tiles and sanitary ware segment. The company currently holds a 70 percent share of the sanitary ware market and around 25 percent of the ceramics market, said an executive of the company.

Located in Gazipur, the company boasts a production capacity of 22,000 square metres of tiles and 3,000 pieces of sanitary ware a day. Other

notable performers in the domestic tiles market are Great Wall, Modhumoti Tiles, Mir Ceramic and ATI Tiles.

Mohammad Giasuddin, a salesman in the Hatirpool area, one of the biggest markets for sanitary ware and other steel materials in Dhaka, said most people prefer locally made sanitary ware over imports simply because of lower prices.

The price of a square feet of tiles ranges between Tk 30 and Tk 200, depending on quality and design, while the basic commode costs Tk 1,500 to Tk 5,000, he said.

The price of washbasins starts at Tk 2,000 and can go up to Tk 80,000. Ceramic bathtubs and shower pans are available starting at Tk 15,000. Prices of imports are much higher.

One also has to spend a good amount on mirrors, which are also used to decorate bathrooms. Mirrors provide an eye-catching backdrop, interior designers feel. A two-feet by three-feet mirror, the size most sold in the market, costs from Tk 300 to Tk 2,000, said salesmen.

The market for steel items, like showers, hand showers, rain showers, faucets, taps, overhead showers, shower heads, towel racks, toilet roll holders, soap dishes, soap case holders and washer is also booming. Industry insiders say the market for

these items stands at nearly Tk 1,200 crore a year.

Accessories and décor items play a good role in making a bathroom look more appealing. One can consider installing customised cabinets made of white board, which are ideal to store bath linen, towels and accessories.

Laminated plastic boards are ideal for bathroom cabinets, as humidity and moisture could dampen wooden fixtures.

The industry people, however, are yet to get substantial government support.

Bangladesh Ceramic Wares Manufacturer Association urged the government to cut import duties on raw materials to a minimum to help the rising industry compete in the international market.

At present, a 7.5 percent duty is applicable on imports of China clay, ball clay, fire clay, feldspar, plaster of Paris, aluminium oxide, aluminium hydroxide, zinc oxide, colouring items and liquid gold, which are used by the ceramic industry as raw materials.

Manufacturers also urged the government to reduce the import duty on zirconium, iron oxide and cobalt oxide to a minimum level from an existing 15 percent.

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Evolution of bathrooms

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EVEN with bathrooms being an essential part of households for more than a thousand years now, the idea of contemporary bathrooms evolved in the last century, mainly after the 1930s.

It is not a common global practice to follow European bathroom styles, with only a few changes that accommodate local traditions, mainly in decorating the bathrooms.

In the 1930s, European bathrooms were quite modest and only very wealthy people could afford this luxury at all.

European entrepreneurs introduced a new business philosophy by producing high-quality faucets at a price that everybody could afford.

During wartime in the early 1940's, the bathroom was still a very functional room, which simply served as a general wash-room. Luxury and comfort for bathrooms were unheard of.

Gradually, bathrooms were becoming more of a key feature in the household during the post world war boom. In 1956, a new innovation surprised everybody --

geysers that brought ready hot water to bathrooms through the introduction of gas and electric boilers.

The 1960's saw the advent of the one-hand mixers offering fast, reliable temperature control put an end to the sudden fluctuations in water temperatures that most households had to endure, and the bathroom was beginning to be seen as somewhere to indulge.

The 1970's saw a complete change in the ethos of bathroom design. Even when functionality was still a key element, the design was becoming an important factor with comfort and reliability that also had to suit customer's individual tastes and needs.

The ecological soundness of bathrooms became paramount in the 1990's. This was especially important in toilets at heavily frequented public or business facilities. With the development of electronically controlled basin mixers and showers, water management was key.

In the 21st century, bathrooms become more comfortable. There was also the introduction of new trends, like freehand showerheads and rain showers.

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Bathroom fittings and other equipment are up for sale at a Dhaka outlet.

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