

Behind the screens

We answer 10 common questions on wetrooms and walk-in showers

Words: **Sophie Baylis**



A walk-in shower maximises space in this Art Deco-style ensuite, which features stunning Elite marble floor tiles, priced £414 per sq m. For a similar bathroom by Devon & Devon, set your budget from £10,000.

020 7221 5127 or www.devon-devon.com



Should my wetroom be waterproofed?

In a word – yes. It's easy to assume that the tile adhesive and grout in the shower area will be enough to stop water penetrating, but this isn't the case. For a wetroom to be completely watertight, you'll need to install a self-adhesive waterproof membrane across the floor. You'll also need to waterproof the walls with a paint-on membrane.

"This should overlap with the self-adhesive membrane on the floor to stop water penetrating any gaps," says Christopher Hewitt of Majestic Showers. "What's more, all tiles installed into a wetroom must be fitted onto a full bed of tile adhesive, rather than using a dot and dab method. The solid bed of adhesive will make sure that water can't track back underneath the tiles." These specialist techniques mean that a wetroom is best installed by a professional fitter, which will add to your costs. However, you risk water damage and far greater costs if the job isn't done properly.

The brief for this family bathroom (below) was to design a child-friendly space that also serves as somewhere adults can escape to and relax. Deana Ashby's wetroom solution means that the kids can splash around without worry, but the addition of Duravit sanitaryware, Vola and Samuel Heath brassware and polished marble from Mandarin Stone ensures a stylish, sophisticated aesthetic. A similar bathroom by Deana Ashby would cost around £10,000.

01761 202010 or www.deanaashby.co.uk
0844 800 1500 or www.majesticshowers.com

Where can I install a wetroom?

With no shower tray or screen, a wetroom is a completely open showering space that is stylish as well as practical. "The continuous floor results in a sleek, luxurious finish, meaning cleaning and maintenance are much easier," explains Christopher Hewitt of Majestic Showers. "The level-access showering area is ideally suited to those with mobility issues or the elderly, and means a wetroom can offer a future-proof design for a dream bathroom."

You can have a wetroom anywhere in your home, on timber or solid floors, but you'll need to create a gradient to channel water to the drain. Either put in a sub-floor and tile it over, or use a former – a floor panel with a built-in fall. This sits under the floor and is then tanked (waterproofed) and tiled for a smart finish. Size and style needn't constrain you either. "Stock wet-floor trays are readily available in a wealth of sizes so you can usually find one that will fit off the shelf," says Leanne Robey at Ripples. "However, it may be worth considering a bespoke option if you need a specific or unusual size or shape, or you need the waste to sit in a certain position. This will help if you're working to a specific tiling pattern and you want to control how the grout lines will look."

Shown above is an ensuite wetroom featuring Silver Shadow honed marble wall and floor tiles (610 x 406 x 12mm) from Floors of Stone, priced at £45 per sq m.
01509 234000 or www.floorsofstone.com
0844 800 1500 or www.majesticshowers.com
0800 107 0700 or www.ripplesbathrooms.com





What if I have an awkwardly shaped bathroom?

Buy your shower screen from a specialist shower enclosure manufacturer to ensure you have a full choice of sizes and even bespoke options. That way, you'll be able to work around common obstacles such as baths, half-height walls and internal pipe chases. Look at angled glass cuts, cut-outs and increased height panels to create unique layouts. Your first step will be to check how the panel will be fixed to the wall and floor. "Suppliers who use only silicone to fix the glass to the base are providing a structurally insufficient and potentially hazardous solution," warns Christopher Hewitt of Majestic Showers. "The aluminium wall and base fixings should be of excellent design and engineering, as they are literally supporting your glass."

In terms of thickness, Christopher says that 8mm or 10mm glass is sufficient. "More than this can present weight issues, plus you may need additional support from bars and brackets," he says. "Always seek out an established shower unit provider to make sure you get safe and aesthetically balanced design and engineering." The Madison fixed panel (left) features an 8mm glass frame in aluminium with a choice of finishes including matt black. Prices start from £1800 at Majestic Showers. **0844 800 1500 or www.majesticshowers.com**



Do I need a shower screen?

A shower screen will keep bathroom fittings and accessories dry. "In small bathrooms, items such as towels and toilet rolls can easily get wet from the shower spray, so it may be a good idea to install a glass screen," advises Raffaella De Vittorio at Geberit.

To limit shower spray further, invest in a return panel, which will be narrower than the main shower screen and attached at a right angle to form an 'L' shape. Look for return panels with a hinge for ease of access to the shower area. Pictured above is Matki's 10mm Twin Entrance wetroom panel (priced from £1014), teamed with 8mm-thick return panels that offer an extra layer of splash protection.

"To make glass easier to clean, all screens should come with specialist protective coating," says Nicholas Cunild of Matki. "This allows water to form minute beads which easily trickle off the surface of the glass. It doesn't need to be cleaned as frequently, but it does need occasional maintenance." Avoid harsh chemicals and detergents on shower glass as they can be abrasive.

Also shown (left) is Merlyn's Twin Shower Wall, available in 8mm and 10mm safety glass, with prices from £354 per panel.

**01926 516800 or www.geberitcollection.co.uk
01454 322888 or www.matki.co.uk
0808 101 1429 or www.merlynshowering.com**



Do I need to tank my bathroom even if I have a shower screen?

Yes, always tank (waterproof) the floor and walls in the shower area. Extend tanking to at least 600mm outside of the shower area. Some installers even recommend going further and tanking the whole floor. "This will help prolong the life of your floor tiles and protect the floor and room below," says James Clark of On the Level. Marble steals the spotlight in this luxurious bathroom by Dariel Studio, priced from around £40,000.

**+66 2162670005 or www.darielstudio.com
0843 777 0180 www.onthelevel.co.uk**

What if I can't install a former?

You may not be able to install a former (sloped under-floor panel) if you can't create enough fall for the waste pipe. The same will be the case if you're working with a solid floor that you can't chase into. "In this instance you are still able to use the wet floor tray, but you may need to raise the floor and have a step up into the shower," says Leanne Robey at Ripples. "You can easily disguise this as a design feature and even add marker lights along the front of the step for extra detail."

In this walk-in shower by Ripples Solihull (right), the waste channel is at the front so the tiles can slope up towards the back and a former isn't needed. A similar design would be priced on application. The shower below is priced £2339 and includes the Unidrain Slope Wetroom shower base complete with linear waste and waterproofing kit. From Alternative Bathrooms, it is teamed with a 10mm glass screen.

**020 3375 9002 or www.alternativebathrooms.com
0800 107 0700 or www.ripplesbathrooms.com**



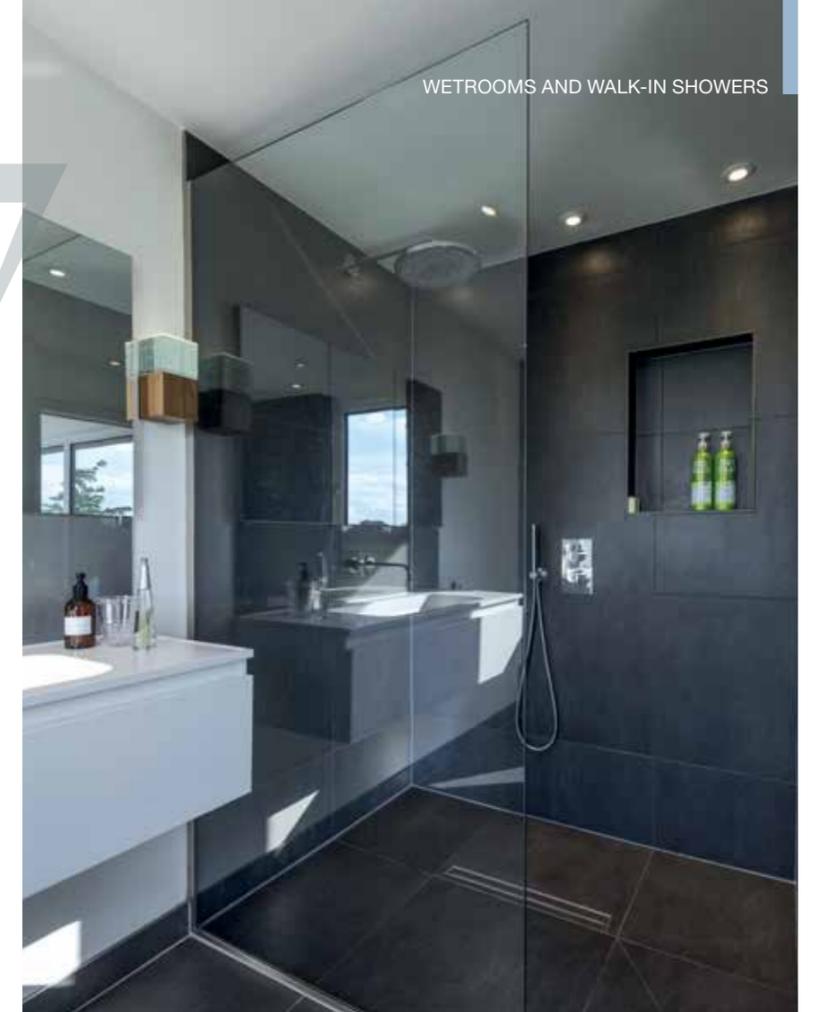
Which tiles are best?

Porcelain tiles are perfect for use in wetrooms and walk-in showers. They're impervious to water and they won't be damaged by detergents or any of the other chemicals to which we expose our shower surfaces. They're also easy to match to your chosen look and simple to maintain. "Today, porcelain is available in many different styles and effects – including wood and stone – so it's possible to achieve the look you want without the challenges and maintenance issues natural materials can bring," says Chris Grainger of Stone & Ceramic Warehouse. "Tiles can be supplied in large sizes, which reduces the potential for leaks. Also, large-format tiles have fewer grout lines, meaning less grout to keep clean while creating a stylish, seamless surface."

Discuss slip resistance with an expert and think about your lifestyle – including your enthusiasm for cleaning – before you make a final selection. "The most slip-resistant tiles tend to have a very rough surface with grooves and indentations," says Chris. "These provide an ideal space for dirt and substances to collect. Over time, a build-up of this dirt can actually make the surface more slippery than less slip-resistant tiles, so it's important you clean them thoroughly and regularly to maintain the tiles' slip resistance. In many instances, a tile with lower slip resistance, which is easier to keep clean, could actually be a better solution."

Pictured, right, are Shanghai Black porcelain tiles priced £47.40 per sq m at Stone & Ceramic Warehouse.

020 8993 5545 or www.sacw.co.uk



What are the benefits of a flush-to-floor shower tray?

This will merge seamlessly with tiling, creating the luxury feeling of a walk-in shower without you needing to waterproof the entire bathroom. "The functionality, ease of installation and long-term reliable performance offered by shower trays give them the edge over a traditional tiled floor," says Angela Ortmann-Torbett at Kaldewei.

A shower tray reduces some long-term problems too. "Tiles are usually installed onto a wooden floor, which can move with the house. This causes the grout to crack and the floor to lose its waterproof integrity," Angela adds. "Grout can also start to look grubby after a short amount of time and, with the use of harsh cleaners, it can become porous, leading to cracking. Again, the floor can lose its integrity and water can get in."

Steel enamel trays are a hard-wearing choice: they're waterproof, easy to clean and don't harbour dirt or bacteria. BetteFloor, left, costs from £595.

**0844 800 0547 or www.bette.co.uk
01480 498053 www.kaldewei.co.uk**

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Will I be able to install a flush-to-floor tray in my home?

It's nearly always possible to put in a flush-to-floor tray, but you may find that your property's layout presents constraints. "The most common issue is an obstruction below the floor such as a critical joist or mass of existing pipework, which make it challenging to locate the new waste and pipework," says Angela Ortmann-Torbett at Kaldewei. "Sometimes, it's necessary to lift the shower tray to provide a fall to the nearest drain."

It's always advisable to hire a professional installer with experience of fitting floor-level showers. "Once he or she has lifted the floorboards to see what joists and pipework are there, it will become apparent what style of shower surface will be best suited to your bathroom, and where the drain can be positioned," Angela concludes.

Shown is the Softstone tray from Pure Bathroom Collection's JT range (right). Prices start from £581 for an 800 x 800mm tray.

0845 634 4321 or

www.purebathroomcollection.co.uk

01480 498053 www.kaldewei.co.uk



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How should a walk-in shower be lit?

The right lighting can create a wonderful effect, transforming your space into a spa-like environment. To achieve this, look for lights that are guaranteed to be waterproof. This will be shown by their ingress protection (IP) rating. "Set IP-rated downlights, such as our Waterspring, close to the wall so that they skim down and highlight the tiles," advises Luke Thomas at John Cullen Lighting.

Keep lighting out of the shower tray to prevent water getting into the fittings. Stay away from certain spots on the wall too. "Avoid positioning downlights directly above a showerhead: this causes funny reflections on the ceiling and a shadow into the shower area," says Luke. Instead, focus IP-rated directional downlights towards the showerhead, which will create a feature in the shower.

This walk-in shower was lit by John Cullen using Waterspring downlights (from £118) set very close to the tiles so that light washes down the wall. A similar scheme would cost between £1500 and £2000, including design fees and products.

020 7371 9000 or www.johncullenlighting.com