



A steam sauna, like the one pictured here, requires installation of a steam generator and plumbing to accommodate drainage. Dry-heat saunas use 110v infrared heat. To learn more about saunas, go to sauna.com.

Pump up the comfort factor in your bathroom with these warming options.

Hot zone



You can't see the best part of this bathroom: under-flooring radiant heating. It can be installed in the concrete floor slab, on top of an existing floor or beneath subflooring. Use beneath tile, wood or vinyl flooring.

Bath night at Bobby and Jen Stopka's home finds the couple's two daughters covered in bubbles, splish-splashing in the family's second-story tub. But 4-year-old Keira's favorite part may be after the cleaning and rinsing. She wraps herself in a towel and plops on the remodeled room's floor, letting its radiant heat keep her toasty and comfortable. "We absolutely love the new floor heat and could not imagine the bathroom without it," says Bobby.

He's not alone. American homeowners have taken delight in warming up not just bathroom floors but

also towels, toilet seats and even plain old water. "Clients want their home baths to be what they experience at resorts," says Dennis Gehman, owner of Gehman Custom Remodeling in Harleysville, Pennsylvania. "It's about comfort, pleasure and pampering."

And bathroom remodeling projects pay off for homeowners, says *Remodeling Online* magazine. In fact, a bathroom redo can mean up to a 78 percent return on investment. Whether you're planning a simple



update or a top-to-bottom remodel, there are plenty of add-ons that can turn up your bathroom from cool to hot, hot, hot.

START AT THE FLOOR

There's no need for that first step out of a steamy morning shower to be onto an ice-cold bathroom floor. Radiant heat can be installed on top of an existing floor (if it is then covered with a lightweight concrete floor slab) or underneath subflooring. It will heat up under



Warm up to these ideas

Do you imagine yourself doing some postbath lounging in front of a fire? Try EcoSmart Fire freestanding units (*above*), which require no flue or gas connections and burn ethanol fuel. Price varies by distributor. ecosmartfire.com, 310/914-3335

Steam doesn't have to ruin that perfect shave or a pretty makeup application. Try a mirror defroster, such as ClearMirror, which can be wired into the same power supply as a light or fan or on its own switch. \$103 and up. clearmirror.com, 877/242-5327

Toss the kids' pajamas—and the towels—onto a toasty warmer from Warmrails (*right*). Freestanding, hard-wired and soft-wired versions are available. Wesaunard adds a decorative touch with warmers fashioned into guitars, musical notes or even initials. \$550 and up. warmrails.com, 877/927-6724
wesaunard.com, 540/582-6677

Take a good, steamy shower and you'll feel like you stepped out of your own private sauna. Wasauna makes shower rooms that fit into standard-size shower slots in the bathroom. \$2,500 and up. wasauna.com, 888/846-0661

Warm up your bum with a heated toilet seat from Hogue, Inc. It plugs into a standard outlet and can even be detached and put in the dishwasher. \$80 and up. toiletseat.biz, 800/949-2244

Photos above courtesy of ecosmartfire.com and warmrails.com.



get the look

Heat up with earth tones

Before you call your contractor, you may want to hire a painter. “Colors go a long way to providing a warm atmosphere,” says Dennis Gehman of Gehman Custom Remodeling. “We’re heading back to 1970s earth-tone colors with reds, bronzes and subtle harvest gold.”

Those hues on the walls envelop a room, warming it up visually. It’s an easy change that can carry through to tile, towels, rugs and other decorative accents, says Gehman. If you want to change more than paint, look for new finishes in faucets and fixtures, from rubbed bronze to brushed nickel. “It’s no longer just chrome and stainless steel,” Gehman says.



Earth-tone walls, bright pendant lighting and humidity-loving orchids soften the angular space of a small bathroom.



Turn on the shower faucet and enjoy a steaming shower. A tankless water heater makes a long shower guilt-free because the water is heated as you use it.

nearly every kind of flooring—tile, wood, vinyl—and offers separate controls and zoning. “In-floor heat can really make a difference in the comfort level, and since people feel warmer, they often feel they can turn down their thermostat,” says Gehman.

Radiant heat is either hot water or electric; for hot-water-based heat, pipes run under the flooring. Electric radiant heat relies on a thin wire mesh, also installed under the floor. Hot-water versions require a thicker floor to accommodate the pipe installation. Generally, the operating cost of the hot-water system, at current energy prices, may be less than the electric system. Costs run from \$6 to \$12 per square foot.

The Stopka family chose the electric version and installed it under a new ceramic tile bathroom floor. “Our old marble tiles were always freezing and stayed wet a long time if you did not wipe all water up right away,” says Bobby. “An electrician installed the radiant heating, and now we set the thermostat each morning to warm up the floor. It really takes the chill out of the morning air.”

For bath upgrades, electric heaters—either ceiling, wall or baseboard-style—and ceiling-mounted heat lamps and toe-kick heaters also can raise the temperature.

ADD-ONS FOR ADDED COMFORT

Gehman Custom Remodeling completes about 25 bath projects each year, and nearly all include some sort of warm-up

options. Some land at the high end of the budget scale; others are simple touches that nearly any homeowner can afford. Take a towel warmer; nearly half of all of Gehman's projects include one. Some clients even install a kitchen warming drawer in the bathroom for towels. Traditional warmers hold three to five towels and pass heat through either bars or larger flat surfaces. "Most people are going to include a towel bar of some sort, and towel warmers offer an easy, inexpensive way to add a touch of luxury to even the most basic bath," says Gehman.

At the other end of the spectrum are steam saunas, steam baths and in-bathroom fireplaces. "It's all about luxury," says Gehman. "Many people are asking how to get more out of their bathrooms."

And for instant-gratification types, on-demand tankless water heaters deliver no-wait hot water. This is also a green choice because water is warmed only when you need it, eliminating wait and waste. They come in gas and electric versions. It's also a perfect fit for the impatient or busy bather who spends less time soaking and more time dashing in and out of the room. "Many people don't have a lot of time in the bathroom, and things like a water heater can really go a long way to making a difference for them," says Gehman. ■

Heated towel and drying racks take the chill off cold mornings. Models come in a variety of finishes—chrome, polished brass or nickel—so you can match them to other fixtures in your bath.

