

2023 STATE OF THE SHOWROOM

Showroom pros discuss latest design trends, customer expectations and state of showroom business.

By Natalie Forster

The most recent National Kitchen and Bath Association (NKBA) Market Outlook Report projects 2023 bath and kitchen revenue will reach \$162.4 billion, a 14% decrease when compared to the previous year. With potential recessionary pressure, high mortgage rates and a cooling residential housing market, *Supply House Times* chatted with a few showroom professionals from around the country to gauge what's expected in the 2023 showroom sector.

Despite the challenges listed above, the general consensus is that showroom business is still extremely strong, and the remodel market will remain a key business driver throughout 2023.

Jay Robinson, manager for Irmo, South Carolina-based Bath and Bronze, says he expects business to grow in 2023. "I am seeing more and more customers wanting to buy quality product from a locally owned business rather than big box stores," he says. "We are a newer showroom, so I anticipate growth throughout 2023."

Director of Showroom Operations at Massachusetts-based Republic Plumbing Supply, **Gary Cedrone**, agrees. "Remodeling is strong in the greater Boston area and continues to account for the majority of our showroom business. Customers are still willing to spend money despite climbing interest rates," he explains. "They also realize that they have to exercise more patience due to the availability of contractors and especially those who are doing multiple jobs at once."

Cedrone's remarks are on par with the 2023 NKBA Bath and Kitchen Market Outlook. The report states that, "86 percent of outstanding mortgages are locked in at rates below five percent, so these homeowners are choosing to remodel rather than to move."

DESIGN AND TECH TRENDS

Bold colors, unique designs and mixed metals are back in showrooms, according to these pros. "Color schemes, black, gold and mixed metal finishes are trending up while oil-rubbed bronze is trending down," Robinson says.

Cedrone agrees, noting, "We anticipate 2023 to be a little stronger with bright, bold designs in tile, lighting and colorful cabinetry."

Robinson adds that variety is important to today's customer. "Customers want to see variety, even if they don't like it. At least they can tell you with confidence what they don't want and that helps narrow down what you show them. We have some amazing tubs, with funky colors, right as you walk into our showroom, and they always draw attention," he says. "Whether they like it or not, the customer will always give us their opinion and it opens the door for further communication about their preferences, wants and needs for whatever project they came in for."



Faucet display at Irmo-Lexington, South Carolina showroom Bath and Bronze



Bath and Bronze showroom floor

Gosselin shares the importance of building out all facets of your website. "At ShowroomMarketing.com, we have accumulated search data from hundreds of Google Analytics accounts showing how an About Us page, Meet Our Team page, pages that highlight your brick and mortar locations, a Contact Us page and pages that highlight many of the top geographic areas a business serves get 100X more visitors in one month than any specific product page will see in a lifetime," he explains. "Therefore, having a website that displays the people at your business, areas you service clients, and the causes you support VS solely having a website that is all about the product, product, and more products is a business principle that should be utilized at your company."

SHOWROOM CHALLENGES

One challenge that boutique showrooms are facing stems from the excessive online research customers are doing today. "Many customers come to us after spending hours online looking at products expecting the same pricing and we just can't do that on every product," Robinson says. "We must sell the showroom experience to get those customers to buy from us instead of online. Having extensive knowledge of the products we sell, helping with installation questions and even selling installation labor packages with our products are all items that you cannot get from that online retailer and when a customer understands that, it makes it easier to close the sale."



Kurrent Kitchen and Bath Showroom in Brooklyn, New York makes the most of its showroom space with creative displays.

Cedrone agrees that converting online business to brick-and-mortar showrooms is a top challenge. "The greatest challenge we see for 2023 is how to convert the younger generation buyers from Amazon or Wayfair into brick-and-mortar customers. We rely heavily on contractor referrals to drive this business into our showrooms. We also offer rebates for these referrals if and when it becomes a sale."

Showrooms are not immune the infamous nationwide labor shortages. Cedrone says it is still extremely difficult, but offering flexible schedules is one way showrooms can have an edge over retail stores. "It remains very difficult to find help as it pertains to the showroom business in the greater Boston area. We have tried every way possible—Indeed, Zip Recruiter, LinkedIn, local design schools. The last couple of viable candidates have joined our team used to be employed in retail stores that don't offer flexible hours and competitive pay and benefits."

CUSTOMIZABLE FINISHES

Customization will continue to trend higher not only in tubs, but in almost every other bath product category. Showrooms are seeing customers gravitate to mixed materials for bathroom furniture and mixed materials and finishes for lavatory faucets.

Mindy Sevinor, showroom brand manager for Beverly, Massachusetts-based Designer Bath notes that specialty finishes continue to be hot and will continue to trend in 2021. "The many varieties of brass — satin and unlacquered, matte black and other unique finishes allow showrooms to provide customization options for all fixtures in a bath," she says.



Customers today want plenty of options and variety in the showroom



Luxury and steam showers continue to gain popularity



Three above images: Repulbic Plumbing Supply showroom in Norwood Massachusetts

"Mixing finishes among lighting, hardware and fixtures is a strong trend while mixing fixture finishes — continues to grow."

Stocks agrees, "2020 design trends have been anything but plain. We keep seeing mixed finishes and textures. Not in a 1980s throwback kind of way, but beautiful industrial matte black paired with polished golds or polished nickel paired with copper and rose gold. Our clients love adding texture to their homes, be it in faucet handles or on the outside of a free-standing tub."

Capra's clients in South Florida are gravitating to matte black and gold for bathroom fixtures and hardware. "There are so many great options for gold and brushed brass finishes right now that it makes it easier to find the items you need to coordinate when selecting bathroom materials," she notes.

Barring some unforeseen impactful event, 2021 shapes up to be a banner year for the decorative plumbing and hardware sector. With interest rates not expected to change from near record-lows, and many homeowners not returning to an office in the immediate future, focus on the home, along with health and wellbeing, spells good news for decorative plumbing pros.



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