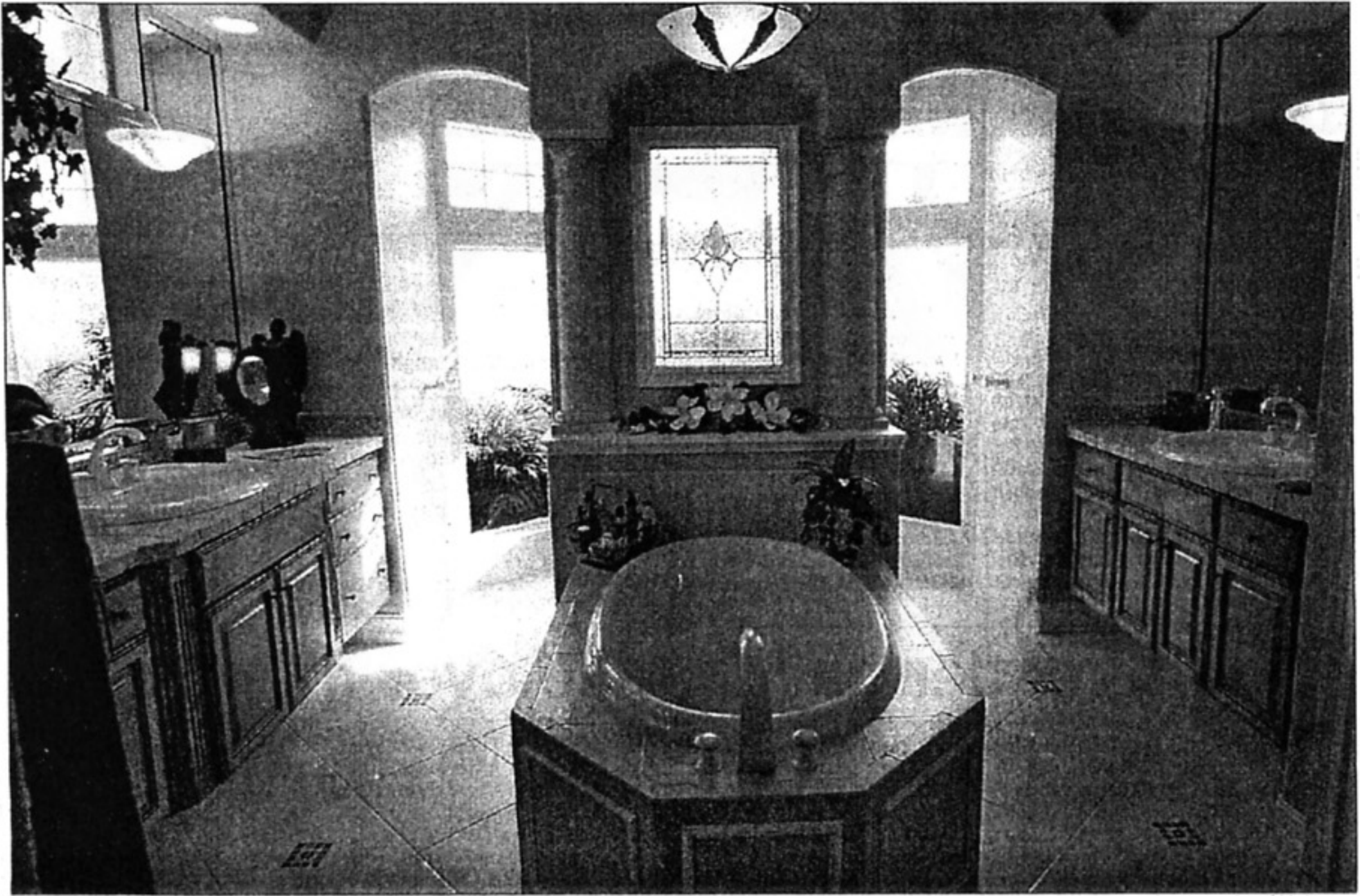


Bathrooms become top priority for home shoppers



Photos by Mike Brown, FLORIDA TODAY

SPACIOUS BATHROOM with custom-designed features was built into Dianne and Jay Pettigrew's new Suntree home.

Buyers spend thousands for ultimate experience

By Lyn Dowling
For FLORIDA TODAY

In 1775, an English watchmaker named Alexander Cummings made an improvement to a good idea that changed the course of human habits.

He invented a water trap in a pipe that allowed flush toilets not to back up.

The trap kept toilets odor-free, which meant commodes could be placed near sinks and tubs, inoffensively — all the plumbing in one little room. The seeds of the modern bathroom were sewn.

Cummings probably never imagined the results of his simple little invention.

Always an important aspect of a home because of its function, the bathroom has become a focal point, the place to which

prospective sellers upgrade and prospective buyers gravitate.

Although it once was the kitchen, now when people buy a house, "The first thing they look at is the master bath," said Kirk Kessel, Realtor-broker of the Kessel Group, Melbourne.

"The bathroom and master bedroom — along with the kitchen — are things that sell a house."

The result is that bathrooms have become more decorative, more complex and a great deal larger than they have been in the past.

Even in so-called "starter" homes, master baths sometimes are nearly as spacious as the bedrooms to which they are attached.

See **BATHROOM, 2H**

Commode has long history

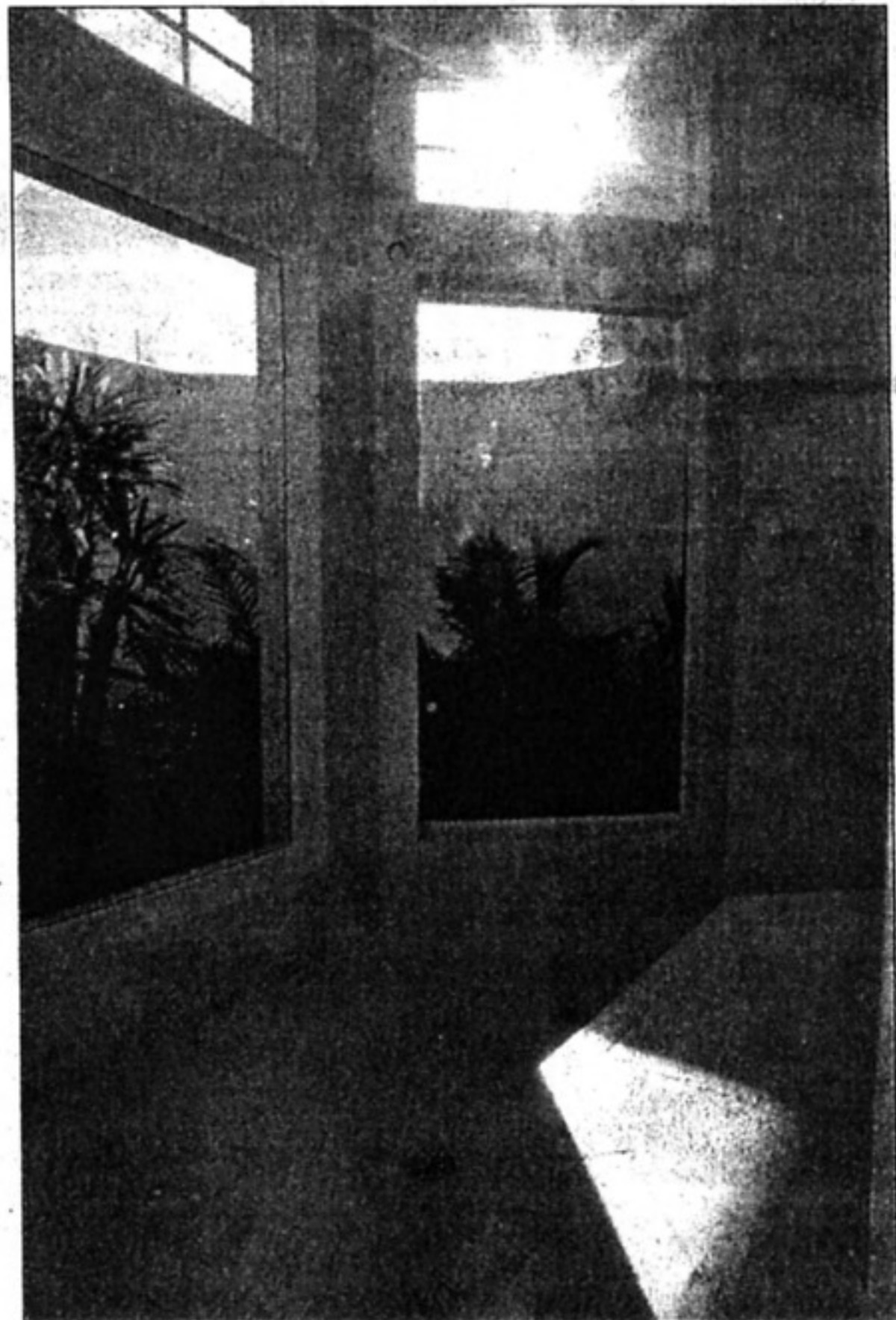
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Sanitary systems actually began in ancient Babylon and were perfected by the Romans, who used water to wash waste into cisterns.

In 1596 an Englishman named Sir John Harington developed a flush toilet, or water closet, for Queen Elizabeth I, and

in 1775 Alexander Cummings improved the design with his water trap.

"The Symphonic Valveless Water Waste Preventer of 1891 allowed toilets to flush with a cistern half-full, the invention of Albert Giblin, who refined sanitary systems with a number of patented inventions.



UPSCALE BATHROOMS these days feature shower that are separate from tubs. Large windows are common. Also, new showers often do not have a door or curtain, but have curved walls.

Bathrooms accommodate today's hectic lifestyles

BATHROOMS, From 1H

"The whole thing is an environment," said Gary Ritterstein of the Home Remodeling Center in Cocoa Beach.

"People are busy and want an environment to come home to, to relax."

togetherness

"It is amazing how different bathrooms are from the way they were 15 years ago," said Dianne Pettigrew, who, with her husband, Gary, recently moved to a custom home in Suntree.

"You have to have a larger bath, and I think one of the reasons is that people are so busy. Both husbands and wives work and they're always busy. We're all running around every which way, so when I want to relax, have some time for myself, you can light a candle, put on a little jazz music and take a bath."

Chances are those baths will not take place in the formerly-standard bathtub. Garden or whirlpool tubs, which are deeper and sometimes much larger than their predecessors, have become the norm in new homes, often set into ceramic tile or marble for the look of a spa or man bath.

"I have sold bathrooms with tubs that look like mini-swimming pools," Kessel said.

Don't expect to stand in the tub to take a shower, either, nor consider that the commode will be in

easy reach.

Homebuyers now favor free-standing showers with multiple heads, and gone is the familiar curtain, replaced by a curving wall of masonry or glass block. The commode rates a room of its own.

"The trend is to showers without doors, and those decorative lights really make a bathroom," said Donna Carse, owner of Creative Interiors by Donna Carse, Inc. in Viera.

But if you opt for a bath, you don't step into a modern tub, you step up to it, and for the sake of reading, relaxing or romance, lighting controls may be nearby, along with music or other entertainment media.

The tub could be placed against a wall, as has been common practice for years, or freestanding, which is increasingly popular.

Remodelers of older homes, and those who wish to emulate them, often go for old-fashioned, claw-footed, steel tubs. Either way, the area in which it all is placed is highly decorative, often with pillars, niches or ledges.

Riverside Builders, which is responsible for Pettigrew's home, offsets its tubs with stained glass windows and, like other custom builders, relies upon relatively new materials such as tumbled marble for vanities and trim, as well as traditional materials such as smooth marble and granite.

Cabinets and vanities are made of wood, sometimes in darker varieties, including as cherry, often of

oak, pine or maple.

Vanities are not aligned on a single level, but are likely to have a variety of heights, with drawers of differing depths.

Money unimportant

"We've got some clients who spend \$25,000 on a bathroom," said Ritterstein, whose company is a joint venture with long-established Petro Plumbing in Cocoa Beach. A recently aired cable television show about decorating showed one in the Northeast that came to \$150,000.

In Brevard, even a \$10,000 bathroom "is a fairly normal thing," Ritterstein said. That cost usually includes the step-up tub, which has some designers and builders wincing at the prospect of children or seniors climbing those stone or tile stairs to step into a tub several feet off the ground. They rarely have handrails. Still, homeowners seem undeterred.

"They don't care," Kessel said. "They just want that big bathroom" and all that goes with it.

"I just put in (such a) bath for a lady who is 81 years old," Ritterstein said. "She wants that environment."

But will a future homebuyer pay the price? Realtors say they most definitely will, that good bathrooms can add greatly to the allure — and the price — of a home.

But they also caution potential sellers, especially those who are remodeling, against becoming too stylish about their bathrooms, as



Michael R. Brown, FLORIDA TODAY

SOME PEOPLE are spending thousands to install or renovate bathrooms that fit today's lifestyle. Bathrooms are built larger than years ago.

personalization might lessen its appeal.

"I didn't want to put too much into my own home because we are aware (of resale value)," Carse said.

"If you put too much of your own tastes into it, it can work against you."

Whatever the case, bathrooms

such as the Pettigrews', which features faux finish, columns, stained glass and a chandelier, have gone over well with their owners.

"We're very pleased with it. When you're sharing a bathroom, it makes all the difference in the world if you have the space. It is that environment. This is a place where you can relax."

Expert lists must-haves

Every good bathroom must have 10 elements, said David Edrington, an architect in Eugene, Ore., who specializes in modern bathroom design.

In *Fine Homebuilding* magazine, he named what he considers the essentials.

■ An entrance transition, with space or an alcove outside the door that allows privacy, if the bathroom is a main, rather than master, bath.

■ Generous proportions, with separate alcoves for separate functions.

■ A large window.

■ Placement of the most private part of the bathroom at the greatest distance from the entrance.

■ "Borrowed views," in which users of one function can see outside across the space of another (i.e., ability to see outside from the tub, through a window near the shower).

■ Commodes should have at least 36 inches of elbow room and counters should be 31 to 34 inches high. Shower heads should be 6 feet 7 inches high; rods 6 feet 6 inches high.

■ Water-resistant finishes. Ceramic tile makes great wainscoting. Woods should be varnished.

■ Enameled cast iron for tubs and china for lavatories. Nickel or chrome finishes also are preferred, although Brevardians in seaside locations favor enameled or coated faucets.

■ Keep accessories simple and related to one another on design and materials.

■ Remember "the lost art" of bathing at leisure.