

GET SHOWER POWER

Damian Barr gets all lathered up at the thought of installing a Deluge or Walk-In

IT'S NOT yet April, but already I'm worrying about showers. The thing sticking out of the wall at the end of my bath is clogged with a decade of limescale. It spits like someone talking with their mouth full. Afterwards I actually feel dirtier. It's more a dribble than a shower.

A second bathroom can increase your property's value by up to 10 per cent, according to a recent survey by the Nationwide Building Soci-

Flick a switch and it suddenly becomes a steamy sauna

ty. And one in five homes now has a second bathroom. But, short of shoving a shower in my wardrobe, I haven't got the space. I must make do with what there is. Which isn't much.

"A shower is no good unless it's in a separate cubicle," insists Max Pike, director of Bathrooms International — the pioneering supplier of the now ubiquitous power-shower. "A shower over a bath is a recipe for disaster — whatever you do, the water goes everywhere."

Pike, who sells lapis lazuli and silver fittings, recommends turning a spare bathroom or WC into a dedicated shower-room. "You can't just pop a shower in the corner of a room and hope for the best," he says. "The room and

the shower should be planned together. It's not a DIY job."

"You need a team of qualified professionals," declares Yvonne Orgill, commercial director of the Bathroom Manufacturers Association. Like I was thinking of doing it myself. "You'll need a plumber and a tiler at least."

Bigger projects, like wet-rooms, might also demand an electrician, and sybaritic solutions, such as Skyshowers, warrant an interior designer, a project manager and probably also an accountant. "Fitting can double or even triple the cost," says Pike. "A good shower is more expensive than a spa bath. Spend as much as you can. If you do it on the cheap, you'll pay for it in the long run."

And so will your neighbours. Uninvited showers are all too common — with faulty seals and badly installed base trays the main culprits.

"Some showers really aren't suitable for British homes," Pike cautions. Doorless glass enclosures are the latest innovation from Europe. They look amazing. Lather up before being beamed up in the futuristically minimal Eau-Zone from Matki. "They're fine in a hot climate, where excess water dries off, but here we have a lot of wood

and plaster — when that gets wet you're in trouble."

The *douche du jour* is the wet-room: a waterproof room with a sloping, often stone, floor with a drain in it. "Done properly, it will cost you £10,000 or more," says Orgill. It's all too moist for me. The very idea gives me TB. Indeed, clearing can be an issue. "They're not always hygienic," says Pike. Having a shower is not the same as getting down and scrubbing. "Rather than stone, we recommend Evolution: a cleanable plastic which is dyed and cut to fit."

It seems that showers, like other domestic fittings, must have some design aesthetic. You can go Roman, African or retro. Go all Gordonstoun with the Epsilon from the Italian manu-

facturer Glass Idromassaggio. It has a Scottish shower function that alternates between hot and cold jets. With seating for two, the chromotherapy creates mood lighting and the radio washes music over you. Flick a switch, and it suddenly becomes a steamy sauna. And you can add aromatherapy oils.

"Consumers want more and different shower heads," says Pike. My cracked and slippery plastic effort is no longer even suitable for singing into. It pales alongside the Deluge, which thunders strong jets at you. The gently bubbling Champagne is glamorous but, according to Pike, it doesn't give you that deep-clean feeling.

"Your shower must be compatible with your home," warns Orgill. Many don't work with combi-boilers. If flat-dwellers have poor water pressure, they will be drizzled rather than deluged.

Showers invariably use less water than baths, but some showers use more than others. "The average is 5-7 litres a minute," says Orgill. But super-power showers can use two or three times that. The eco-showers available now aren't great, but new ones are being developed.

Try to go for an accessible model, such as the 1700 Walk-In from Matki. The person who buys your property may not be so mobile. "They no longer look as if they've been designed for the disabled," says Orgill. Whichever shower you choose, make sure the tiles aren't garish.

"Now you can get wet however you want," says Pike. Providing you have cash, water and space to splash.

Bathrooms International 020-7838 7788, www.bathroomsint.com

Showers, like all other domestic fittings, must have some design aesthetic. You can go Roman, African or retro, but the key is to spend as much as you can afford.

