

MTI WHITE PAPER

You Might Not Need a Walk-In Tub After All.

The number of walk-in tubs on the market has rapidly multiplied, and their sales have skyrocketed. No wonder. The oldest Baby Boomers celebrated their 65th birthdays in 2011. And according to government projections, by 2030 nearly 26% of the U.S. population will be age 65 or older, compared with just 17% in 2011.

With statistics such as these, the growing “popularity” of walk-in tubs is certainly no surprise. The necessity of their purchase, however, is quite a different story. Although there are situations where walk-in tubs are necessary or beneficial, they are often purchased when alternative products would be equally, or perhaps, even more appropriate. And this is precisely the subject of this paper. Specifically, we will look at the advantages, merits and benefits of showers of various types compared to walk-in tubs.

Before continuing, however, if you are unfamiliar with the rising trend toward Universal Design, it will be helpful to gain some understanding of the broader societal context that is driving these changing needs.

The Need for Multi-Generational Design

Within the last few years there has been an increasing amount of attention given to a design approach referred to as “Universal Design”, or as MTI prefers to refer to it, “Multi-Generational Design”. It is a design approach that addresses and accommodates the needs and abilities of people of all ages, and it applies to the design of a living space as well as the products within it. Multi-Gen Design combines safety and comfort with style and beauty to create an environment and end product that is attractive, versatile and practical.

The reasons behind this growing trend are varied.

- Rising housing costs make it more economical for families to share housing expenses.
- Many seniors opt to live with family members instead of living in a retirement center.
- New immigrants may choose to follow cultural traditions of living with extended family.
- Middle-aged adults find themselves in the “sandwich generation” as they live with and care for both their children and their aging parents.



In addition to these factors, there is a phenomenon known as “aging in place”, a term used to describe 50-year-old-plus Americans who intend to remain in their own homes for as long as they possibly can. These people want to know that they will be able to live comfortably and independently in their homes. With a little planning, homeowners can make smart choices now that can make all the difference later.



Regardless of the motivating force, all inhabitants of the household want an environment that will meet the needs of everyone thru the years with safety, comfort and style. And nowhere do these principles apply more than in the bathroom, a space that even the most able-bodied person can find difficult to navigate at times. Furthermore, properly designing the bathroom is so important because of the vital role that the power of water plays in our lives. Bathing is a daily necessity and a critical element in maintaining the health, wellness and appearance of all household members.

Just remember, universal design is good, smart design.

For in-depth coverage of all of the factors behind the strong trend of Multi-Generational Design, visit mtibaths.com, where you can access “Designs for All Generations”, a special section devoted specifically to this subject.

So Where Do You Start?

To properly select products for a universally-designed bathroom:

1. Don't assume anything.
2. Assess your needs.
3. Consider all possibilities.

1. *Don't assume anything.*

- If you are building a new home, don't assume that every bathroom should have a tub. For example, do bathrooms for teenagers or guests really require tubs?
- If you have a bathroom where an old tub needs to be removed, don't assume that it should be replaced by another tub. Maybe not.

2. *Assess your needs.*

- Take a hard look at the current and projected needs of the people who will be living in the space.
- The design of the space and the selection of product should be a reflection of those who will live in and use the environment.

3. *Consider all the possibilities.*

- Take your time and explore all of the product possibilities.
- Weigh the needs of the person(s) who will be using the product against the ability of the product to meet those needs.

Shower Bases vs Walk-In Tubs

With everything that has been said thus far as a backdrop, let us now compare the merits of shower bases to those of walk-in tubs in a residential multi-generational household. Our comparison will focus on 3 areas:

- I. DESIGN
- II. UNIVERSAL EASE OF USE
- III. RETURN ON INVESTMENT

I. DESIGN

Shower Bases. Without a doubt, a shower base will make a more positive contribution to the design esthetic of a bathroom than a walk-in tub. MTI offers over 55 different models of shower bases available in a variety of:

- **Sizes and shapes,** including some with integral seats.
- **Materials:** Lucite® cross-linked cast acrylic and MTI's Engineered Solid-Surface (ESS).
- **Variety of threshold types:** moderate in height, low-profile or zero-barrier.

Shower bases can be complemented by various materials such as tile, stone and marble and either left open or enclosed by glass in a variety of configurations and with a selection of complementary hardware. They can be equipped with a simple shower head, overhead "rain" shower, multiple body sprays and hand shower. Accessories such as a teak shower tray can introduce an additional material into the scheme and contribute to creating a spa-like environment. Moreover, a teak shower tray used with a low-profile shower base recessed into the floor creates a completely barrier-free threshold.



MTI also offers a **Barrier-Free Shower Base**, whose design is specifically intended to provide a flat, smooth, zero-barrier transition from bathroom floor to shower. Constructed of durable Lucite® cross-linked cast acrylic with slip-resistant bottom, MTI's Barrier-Free Shower Base incorporates a special drain design with stainless steel grate cover to efficiently drain water to the center.



Conclusion / Shower Bases on Design: From a design standpoint, showers have the ability to integrate with -- and positively contribute to -- the bathroom's design.

Walk-In Tubs. In contrast to shower bases, walk-in tubs tend to look very boxy and bulky. By their very nature they are tall in order to provide as much soaking depth as possible for the bather. This height tends to make them appear rather imposing in the bathroom space.

Since walk-in tubs are designed to fit within a standard 60"-wide alcove opening, they are manufactured slightly shorter than that in order to allow the tub to be maneuvered into position within that 5' opening. For this same reason the selection of sizes and shapes is restricted, which constrains the creative integration with the rest of the bathroom environment.



An additional limiting factor in the design of walk-in tubs is the door required for access. It must be easily accessible, which also means it is visible, and it must be large enough to accommodate people of various statures.



Conclusion / Walk-In Tubs on Design: In general, the functions that walk-in tubs are required to perform seriously limit the design flexibility of their construction as well as their artistic contribution to the whole bathroom setting.

II. UNIVERSAL EASE OF USE

Shower Bases. A shower base can be used by virtually anyone in the household, from young children to senior members. And showers are used so regularly across the US that many people are installing showers instead of tubs in the secondary baths in both new constructions as well as remodeling situations. Children, teens and adult household members generally take daily showers, not baths, as do house guests visiting for the weekend. While there are definite therapeutic benefits from a good relaxing soak, air bath or whirlpool, hectic lifestyles and busy schedules are making showers the go-to, everyday preferred method of bathing.

In designing a bathroom that is truly multi-generational, or universally user-friendly, showers emerge not only as an attractive choice, but also a versatile and functional solution for three good reasons:

1. **Transfer ease.** By their very design, shower bases are easy bathing vessels to enter and exit. And to make the transition and use more secure, MTI's shower bases are slip-resistant.
 - MTI shower bases are available with a modest, low-profile or zero threshold, requiring little dexterity, regardless of bather age.
 - Any shower base threshold is easier to step over than climbing over the wall of a normal tub.
 - Additionally, when entering a normal tub, the bather also has to maneuver and lower him/herself into the bath water, all the while exposed to the ambient air of the bathroom.
2. **Transfer time.** Because shower bases have a greater transfer ease than tubs, shower bases have a lower transfer time. Especially for a person with mobility issues, it simply takes less time to step over a shower threshold than climb over a tub wall and lower oneself into the bath water. Furthermore, a shower allows one to start the water running and adjust it to a comfortable temperature in advance of disrobing. This is especially important for individuals who have mobility / dexterity issues that require that they move more deliberately and slowly.



Low-profile shower base shown with Shower Shield.

The combination of **High Transfer Ease and Low Transfer Time DECREASES the amount of time the bather is** subjected to the ambient air temperature of the bathroom while **unclothed**. While this is a less critical factor for most household members, this is significant for those who have mobility impediments, which slow down the process.

3. **Resting possibilities.** Showers afford a variety of options for providing **seating areas as a resting place** during transfer or during the actual showering process. Seating areas with showers are a very considerate feature and sometimes even necessary for those who would find it challenging to stand while showering or difficult to lower their bodies into a regular bath tub. This is also a very nice convenience for other members of the household. For women, for example, when shaving their legs.



One of MTI's seated shower bases available in various length / width combinations.

A seating area can either be integrated in the shower base itself, or seats can be positioned inside as well as outside the shower proper. One **benefit of a separate seat**, wherever located, is that it can be wall-mounted in the most convenient location and at the most comfortable height for the primary user. Most seated shower bases, while compact, will have the seat set at 17"-19" high in order to comply with ADA requirements for public commercial use.



Teak seat and shower tray.

Conclusion / Shower Bases for Universal Ease of Use: Shower bases lend themselves to easy, quick access for people of all ages and afford flexible possibilities for resting areas.

Walk-In Tubs. Now let us use the same three qualities applied to shower bases as a framework for evaluating the performance of walk-in tubs. Namely, High Transfer Ease, Low Transfer Time and Flexible Resting Possibilities.

1. Transfer Ease and 2. Transfer Time. Walk-in tubs are designed for ease of entrance. Generally, they have a low threshold and a conveniently located door. So the actual transfer into the vessel is relatively friendly in terms of ease and little amount of time, and certainly more friendly than climbing over the wall of a normal tub. This is positive as far as it goes, but here is where the downside of walk-in tubs becomes apparent. **Once** the bather has entered the tub and latched the **door closed**, **only then** can he/she turn on the **hot water to begin filling the tub**. So while the entrance access and time of walk-in tubs are user-friendly in and of themselves, **walk-in tubs do not permit the bather to enter pre-heated water, which is the case with showers**. The bather must sit there and wait while the tub fills with water to the desired level.



MTI's walk-in tub.

To be fair, a bather may choose to enter the walk-in tub wearing a robe and stay covered until the water height reaches the bottom of the robe. Even with this, however, there will still be a period of time while the upper portion of the bather's body is exposed to the ambient temperature of the bathroom until the tub fills.

The same situation exists after the bath, only in reverse order. All of the water must drain out of the tub before the bather can exit. **After the bath, the bather sits, wet, while the water drains.**

Recognizing these inherent operational drawbacks of walk-in tubs, **MTI designers and engineers** have specified **Standard and Optional features** for the **MTI Walk-In Tub to help compensate** for these factors.

Standard Features such as:

- High-quality hot and cold **high-flow valves** with handles to **fill the tub as quickly as possible.**
- **Fast drain** with quick-release drain stopper and chain to **drain the tub as quickly as possible** after the bath.

Options such as:

- **Radiance® heating system** that uses radiant heat to **warm the seat and backrest area** of the MTI Walk-In Tub before, during and after the bath.
- **Inline heater** available for soakers, whirlpools and air bath to **keep the bath water warm** during the bath.

It is also noteworthy to mention **other features of MTI's Walk-In Tub** which help create a very attractive package:

- Sturdy stainless steel structural frame with leveling legs.
- Hand-held shower with diverter for rinsing and hair washing.
- Virtual spout high-flow tub filler eliminates the potential obstacle of a filling spout for mobility-challenged individuals.
- 2 acrylic grab bars for security.
- Slip-resistant textured bottom.
- Choice of available hydrotherapies: soaker, air bath or whirlpool.



Flush-mounted virtual spout.



Air bath therapy.

The availability of different forms of hydrotherapy will, for some, be a deciding factor in selecting a walk-in tub. The remedial value of a hot soak, or an air bath or whirlpool for certain ailments and conditions can be significant. **The walk-in tub** has the edge over showers to **deliver** the benefits of these specific **hydrotherapies** for the mobility-challenged.



Whirlpool therapy.

To learn more about the importance of water, hydrotherapy and the applications / benefits of its various forms, go to mtibaths.com where you can access "Learn about the power of water", right from the home page.

MTI has gone to great lengths to make its Walk-In Tub the most user-friendly, comfortable, therapeutic and affordable possible. However, even as considerate as the MTI Walk-In tub is, this is not a product that everyone in the household will want to use, and it is hardly inviting to an overnight guest. **Walk-in tubs are for people who prefer bathing to showering, or need some form of hydrotherapy AND have these mobility challenges:**

- Have **difficulty climbing over** the side of a tub, and / or ...
- Have **difficulty lowering** themselves into a tub, and / or ...
- Have **difficulty raising** themselves up from the floor of a tub, and / or ...
- Have **difficulty climbing out** of a tub.

3. Resting Possibilities. While showers offer the flexibility of a separate seat that can be wall-mounted at the most comfortable height for the primary user, **walk-in tubs have an integrated seat that is pre-set in the manufacturing process.** Like shower bases with integral seats, the seat is **generally set at 17"-19" high in order to comply with ADA requirements for public commercial use.** While this height might be satisfactory for most people, individual physical conditions may require a seat set at a higher level.



Conclusion / Walk-In Tubs for Universal Ease of Use: In contrast to shower bases, there is nothing universally-friendly or multi-generationally-oriented about a walk-in tub. While transfer ease and time are favorable, there are inherent drawbacks, and seat height is restricted. This is a product designed to meet the needs and wants of a very specific group of people.

III. RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Every house will eventually be sold: somehow, to someone, at some time, for some reason. So selecting a shower base for multi-generational bathroom application is a sound investment because, as we have demonstrated:

- A shower is the most universally-friendly, not only for the current household situation but also for the next individual or family purchasing the house.
- It will not detract from the equity of the house or deter someone from purchasing it.
- And depending on the type of shower, how it is equipped and how it is installed, it may very well enhance the value of the house and increase its appeal and sale-ability.



This is not quite the case with a walk-in tub. Even if a walk-in tub was installed that is as well-constructed and thoughtfully-engineered as MTI's, it still remains that:

- The likelihood of a potential buyer wanting or needing a walk-in tub is very slim.
- Remember that walk-in tubs are for people with mobility issues who:
 - Prefer bathing to showering, AND ...
 - Have difficulty climbing over the side of a tub, and / or ...
 - Have difficulty lowering themselves into a tub, and / or ...
 - Have difficulty raising themselves up from the floor of a tub, and / or ...
 - Have difficulty climbing out of a tub.
- If the potential buyers don't need it, they won't want it. Think of a young couple considering the house. Especially when young, do people want to be confronted with or reminded of what may lie ahead years later?
- Lastly, if the potential buyer does not want or need the walk-in tub, the seller could have to either pay for it to be removed and replaced, or adjust the selling price downward in some way in order to compensate and close the deal.

The Bottom Line

At this point it may seem that MTI is intent on making its own Walk-In Tub sale-proof by trying to discourage the purchase of walk-in tubs in general. Not at all. In fact, MTI would like people to purchase many of its high-quality, well-engineered products. Most importantly, however, MTI wants individuals to purchase the best and most appropriate products for their particular household situations.

The purpose and focus of this white paper has been to not only heighten awareness of shower bases as a most viable and versatile product for use in universally-designed bathrooms, but also demonstrate that shower bases can in many cases be an even better alternative than a walk-in tub.

In the end, all inhabitants of the household want an environment that will meet the needs of everyone through the years with safety, comfort and style. For some, that will be one of MTI's exquisite tubs; for others a handsome MTI shower base; and for certain individuals MTI's considerate walk-in tub.



With MTI's 20+ years of people-orientation and accumulated experience, MTI's products, knowledge and expertise are there to assist customers in making the smartest purchase decisions ... for them.