

How to Create a Luxurious Washroom

Sometimes luxury can be found in unexpected places.

Even the restroom. You wouldn't typically associate washrooms with luxury, but as Kimberly-Clark's "Roving Restroom Rater" discovered, some restrooms do merit this distinction.

Late last year, Kimberly-Clark's "Roving Restroom Rater" (John Javna, founder of the Bathroom Reader's Institute) visited Atlanta to bestow awards on three lodging properties. They were The Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, The Westin Atlanta North at Perimeter and The Crowne Plaza Ravinia.

The restrooms at these three hotels were clearly in a league of their own. Yet much of what they had to offer can be easily emulated by others.

In fact, there was one key element that all three hotels had in common – cleanliness. Attention to detail was another. Then there were the extras that made these restrooms truly special: gold fixtures and marble floors at the luxurious and truly first-class Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, marble floors, potpourri and quality products and amenities at The Westin Atlanta North at Perimeter, and a coordinated décor and outstanding overall appearance at the Crowne Plaza Ravinia. Some also offered small touches that can make a big difference – hand lotion, quality soaps, facial tissue, attractive dispensers that coordinated with the overall restroom appearance and full-length wooden stall doors.

But none of this would have mattered if the restrooms hadn't been paragons of cleanliness.

Surveys Find Cleanliness Counts

In surveys conducted by Opinion Research Corporation International on behalf of Kimberly-Clark during the past year people continually emphasized the importance of finding a clean restroom when they were away from home.

Here are some highlights:

- 71 percent of respondents said it was extremely important to find a clean restroom when they were away from home.
- 69 percent said after they used a dirty restroom once they would avoid going there in the future.
- 92 percent said that a dirty public restroom in a hotel or motel would give them a negative impression of the property as a whole.
- 57 percent said a germ-free restroom was the one innovation they would most like to see in the restroom of the future.
- And despite the fact that many respondents said their own personal cleaning standards had declined in recent years, a whopping 83 percent said their bathrooms at home were cleaner than those at work.

If ever there was evidence that cleanliness matters, there it is!

Product Selection is Key

One way to make the restroom more attractive and create a sanitary and hygienic environment at the same time is by choosing the right products and systems. Start by selecting those that make the best impression possible on restroom visitors. Consider offering “home-like comfort” by providing brand-name bathroom tissue and facial tissue comparable to the top-quality products people are used to purchasing for their homes. A 1998 Opinion Research International/Kimberly-Clark survey found that when traveling away from home people overwhelmingly prefer to find brand-name products in their hotel rooms, rather than those from unknown or less familiar manufacturers.

Another way to upgrade the look of a restroom is to purchase attractive dispensers that coordinate with the existing décor. Look for aesthetically pleasing dispensers, perhaps with decorator strips, that enhance the image of your restroom.

But looks aren't everything. Dispensers also have to function properly. For instance, if you choose a folded towel system, make sure it dispenses one towel at a time, without tabbing, tearing or allowing bunches of towels to come out at one time. The litter created by a poorly functioning paper towel dispenser will result in an unkempt washroom. Even if it's clean, it won't look that way.

And your maintenance staff will have less time to devote to actual cleaning tasks if they are constantly picking up paper debris. Remember, too, that towel dispensers that don't offer controlled dispensing lead to increased consumption and increased costs.

Don't Overlook Soap

Soap is another area that can detract from the overall appearance of the restroom. Watery, leaky soap systems can leave a real mess in sinks and on counters. Make sure to use a soap system that doesn't clog or leak and dispenses a high-quality, thick soap. Amenities like soap with a nice hand feel and scent can make a positive impression on restroom visitors. Offering an antibacterial soap, similar to those people use at home, can provide an additional measure of comfort.

The Kimberly-Clark surveys also found that concerns about dirty restrooms were linked with a fear of contracting germs from unsanitary restroom surfaces. One way to address this is by installing no- and low-touch systems. These can eliminate a major source of concern: picking up germs by touching handles, levers and other surfaces. No-touch systems can range from sensor-activated faucets and toilet flushing devices to card-entry devices that allow someone to enter the restroom without even touching the door. Other types of no-touch products include enclosed bathroom tissue and paper towel systems that enable users to touch only the product they will be using. These enclosed systems reduce the potential for cross-contamination because people touch only the product they use. Since the product is enclosed it is also protected from dirt and moisture.

Not every restroom can achieve the opulence and glamour of The Ritz-Carlton Buckhead, nor is this appropriate for every location. But for those that do, remember, the "Roving Restroom Rater" could soon be headed your way!