

Is a Tub-to-Shower Conversion Right for Your Home?

Making the Call on a Tub-to-Shower Conversion

When we bought our first house, the master bathroom had a deep soaking tub that the previous owners clearly loved. It was a selling point. But after about six months of living with it, I realized something simple: nobody in our family used it. We were all shower people. The tub took up a huge footprint, the shower head was mounted low, and stepping over that tall side to clean it was a chore. That is when I started looking seriously at a tub-to-shower conversion. It is a decision that touches on daily routine, long-term resale, and the actual cost of the work. I have now done this in two homes and advised friends on a few more, so I want to walk through what I have learned.

A tub-to-shower conversion, at its simplest, means removing the existing bathtub and replacing it with a dedicated shower area. That can be a walk-in with a curb, a low-threshold roll-in, or even a full wet room. The key is that you gain space, accessibility, and usually a cleaner look. But you lose the option of a bath. For many people that trade-off makes sense. For others it does not. The trick is knowing which camp you fall into before you start demo.

The Biggest Reasons Homeowners Make the Switch

I have seen three main drivers behind this kind of remodel. The first is aging in place. A standard tub with a 15-inch step-over height becomes a real hazard as we get older. I watched my father struggle with one for years before he finally had it pulled out. The second reason is daily convenience. A spacious shower with a bench, multiple spray heads, and a glass enclosure just feels better to use than a cramped tub-shower combo. The third is resale. In many markets, especially where buyers are older or families with young kids are scarce, a nice walk-in shower adds more value than a tub nobody uses.

But there are situations where keeping the tub matters. If you have small children, a bathtub is almost essential for baths. If you are in a starter home with only one full bathroom, removing the only tub can hurt resale because future families will want one. And in some high-end markets, a master bath without any tub at all can be a turn-off for luxury buyers. So the context of your home and your neighborhood really matters.

[View the location on Google Maps](#)

What the Work Actually Involves

If you have never done a [tub-to-shower conversion](#) yourself, the process can sound intimidating, but it is straightforward for a good contractor. The first step is demolition: the tub comes out, along with the old tile or surround, and often the drywall behind it. Then the plumber relocates the drain and the water supply lines. The shower pan or linear drain gets set into the subfloor. The walls get waterproofed, usually with a liquid membrane or a sheet membrane system like Schluter-Kerdi. Then comes tile, a glass enclosure or shower door, and a new valve and shower head. If you are adding a bench, niche, or grab bars, that work happens during the framing stage.

One thing that surprises people is the drain location. A tub drain sits in the middle of the footprint. A shower drain typically goes at one end or in a linear channel. That means cutting into the subfloor and sometimes the joists. It is not a huge deal, but it adds an extra layer of carpentry and waterproofing. Another surprise is the electrical. If you are adding a light or a fan above the shower, or if you want a steam generator, you need a dedicated circuit and a GFCI-protected switch outside the shower. Plan for that.

Budget Realities: What You Actually Pay

I tell people to expect a range, not a fixed number. A basic tub-to-shower conversion with stock tile, a standard valve, and a simple glass door can run from about \$4,000 to \$8,000 in most markets, assuming no major structural surprises. If you want a custom tile pattern, a frameless glass enclosure, a rainfall shower head, or a linear drain, that number can climb to \$12,000 or more. And if you are moving walls or changing the footprint of the room, it goes up from there.

Where I have seen people overspend is on the wrong materials. A friend insisted on large-format porcelain slabs, which looked beautiful but required a special substrate and a very flat floor. The install took twice as long and cost an extra \$2,000 in prep work. Another friend saved money by using a prefabricated shower pan and a standard pivot door, and it came out great for under \$5,000. The lesson is to match the material to the skill of the installer and the condition of your space.

Waterproofing Is Not Optional

I cannot emphasize this enough. The single most common problem I have seen in tub-to-shower conversions is failure of the waterproofing system. A tub has a big flange that acts as a backup barrier. A shower does not. If the waterproofing behind the tile fails, water soaks into the wall cavity, rots the studs, and breeds mold. That is a \$10,000 repair minimum. Use a proven system, follow the manufacturer's instructions to the letter, and test the pan for leaks before you tile. That means filling the pan with water for 24 hours. If it holds, you are good. If it does not, you fix it then, not after the tile is up.

Accessibility and Safety Considerations

Even if you are not planning for old age right now, a few small choices can make a huge difference later. A zero-threshold or low-curb entry means someone in a wheelchair can roll in without a ramp. A built-in bench gives a place to sit when standing is hard. Grab bars that are reinforced with blocking in the wall are cheap to install during the conversion and expensive to add later. And a hand-held shower head with a slide bar is useful for everyone, from washing a dog to rinsing off after a beach trip.

I helped a neighbor convert her tub to a walk-in shower after she broke her hip. She told me later that the shower was the single best change she made to her home. She could shower independently without fear of falling. That is the kind of outcome that makes the investment feel worthwhile.

Design Choices That Work in Small Bathrooms

A tub-to-shower conversion can actually make a small bathroom feel much larger. When you remove the tub and replace it with a glass-enclosed shower, the visual line of sight opens up. But be careful with the glass. Clear glass shows every water spot and soap scum. Frosted or textured glass hides smudges better. Also, consider a sliding door instead of a hinged one if the room is tight. A hinged door needs swing clearance that a small bathroom may not have.

Tile selection matters more than you think. Large tiles with fewer grout lines are easier to clean, but they require a perfectly flat substrate. Small mosaic tiles are more forgiving on uneven surfaces but have more grout to scrub. I tend to recommend a mid-size tile, like 4x12 subway or 6x24 planks, for the balance of cleanability and ease of installation.

Permits and Codes: Do Not Skip Them

In most jurisdictions, a tub-to-shower conversion requires a permit for the plumbing and electrical work, and sometimes for the structural changes. I have seen homeowners skip the permit to save time, and then run into trouble when they sell the house. The buyer's inspector flags the unpermitted work, and the deal falls apart or the seller has to pay for a retroactive permit and inspection. It is not worth the risk. Your contractor should pull the permit, and you should ask to see the final inspection sign-off before you pay the last draw.

When to Hire a Pro vs. DIY

If you are handy with plumbing, tile, and waterproofing, a tub-to-shower conversion can be a satisfying DIY project. But I have seen more failed DIY conversions than successful ones. The common mistakes are poor waterproofing, inadequate slope on the shower floor, and misaligned drains. If you do it yourself, spend the money on a good waterproofing kit and a pre-

sloped shower pan. Do not try to build the slope with mud unless you have done it before. And test the pan before you tile. That one step saves months of regret.

For most homeowners, hiring an experienced contractor is the better bet. You pay more upfront, but you get a job that lasts, that passes inspection, and that does not leak. Look for someone who specializes in bathroom remodels, not a general handyman who says they can do it. Ask for references, look at their recent work, and check that they carry liability insurance and workers' comp.

Making the Final Decision

A tub-to-shower conversion is not right for every home, but when it fits, it improves your daily life in a real way. You gain space, safety, and a modern look. You lose the option of a bath. Weigh that trade-off against your own habits, your family's needs, and your local market. And if you decide to move forward, invest in good materials, good waterproofing, and a contractor who knows what they are doing.

If you are in the San Francisco Bay Area and considering this type of remodel, Brother & Brother Builders, located at 3109 Stevens Creek Blvd Ste A, San Jose, CA 95117, can be reached at (888) 412-2632. They have the experience to guide you through the process from start to finish.