

## **FIX IT UP!**

*Bruce Turner*

### Flush With Success

There's no object in your home with which you get more up-close-and-personal than your toilet, yet the commode often generates little attention in a remodeling project. I've seen people agonize for weeks over the tile pattern for their new bathroom – and then spend two minutes picking a new toilet.

Don't do that – ponder the potty a little. A new throne can be a fast, inexpensive and relatively easy do-it-yourself way of upgrading your bathroom dramatically.

If you haven't changed commodes in a while, you'll be pleasantly surprised with the quality you find. 20 years ago, when low-flush, water-conserving toilets first came out, they were generally noisy and inefficient. But now that the 1.6 gallon-per-flush toilet has become federal law, the engineering curve has caught up. Many new models get the job done quietly, efficiently and in one flush. Some even use a "turbo-flush" mechanism that uses the pressure from the pipe (instead of just gravity), so when you flush you hear a satisfying whooshing noise and the bowl is emptied instantly. My favorite manufacturer right now is Toto, a Japanese company with great engineering, but Kohler, Gerber, American Standard, Eljer and Crane also make good products.

Toilets come in one-piece or two-piece models, either round or elongated. Prices range from \$100 for something basic to over \$1000 for a dual-flush designer model with a built-in bidet. You can shop for price at home supply stores or online.

Most people seem primarily concerned about price, efficiency and noise, but don't ignore the comfort aspect. Your rump and your toidy seat are going to be spending a lot of quality time together, so pick a shape and material that are comfortable for you. The seat can be plastic, wood or even cushioned if you want it. Do some "test driving" at your local plumbing supply store.

The height of the toilet itself can also impact comfort – the standard height is 15 inches, but if you have long legs or physical problems you may want to opt for the 17- or 19-inch models commonly found in handicapped-access public toilets. A friend of mine installed a 17-incher for his grandmother to use when she visited. Grandma never did come over, but when my friend had back surgery he found the taller throne a lifesaver.

Installing a new toilet is an easy do-it-yourselfer if you have basic plumbing skills – just follow the directions. The most important thing is to make sure nothing leaks. Pay particular attention to installing the flanged wax ring that goes on top of the pipe that comes out of the hole in the floor. It creates a seal between the pipe and toilet connection. Make sure it's perfect, because if it leaks, depending on your floor covering you might never know. (I've seen the results of 20 years of dry rot under a bathroom floor from a slow toilet leak, and believe me, it isn't pretty.) Also, current building code requires a bead of caulking between the bottom of the commode and the floor to seal out bacteria and keep it from getting underneath.

If you haven't changed out your toilets in a while – like a couple of decades – give it some thought. It's a fast, easy and inexpensive way to jazz up your bathroom and lower your water bill.

*Bruce Turner is president of TurnerBuilt, Inc. He can be reached at [bturner@turnerbuilt.com](mailto:bturner@turnerbuilt.com).*