Chicago Bathroom Remodeling Pros

Educational Resources for Chicago Homeowners
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Tub-to-Shower Conversion Guide

Everything You Need to Know Before Replacing Your Bathtub with a Shower

Converting a bathtub into a shower is one of the most effective ways to improve bathroom accessibility, functionality, and appearance. For homeowners who rarely use their bathtub, a well-designed shower can provide easier entry, more usable space, better storage, and a more comfortable bathing experience.

A tub-to-shower conversion can be relatively straightforward when the new shower remains in the existing tub location. However, the project may involve plumbing modifications, drain work, waterproofing, tile installation, glass, electrical work, structural considerations, and accessibility improvements.

This guide will help you understand the planning, design options, materials, accessibility features, construction considerations, and costs involved in converting your bathtub into a modern shower.

Start with a Good Plan

Every successful tub-to-shower conversion begins with understanding the existing bathroom and determining how you want the new shower to function.

Before beginning, ask yourself:

✔Do I actually use the bathtub?

✔Would a shower be easier to enter?

✔Do I need improved accessibility?

✔How large should the new shower be?

✔Do I want a low-threshold shower?

✔Would I prefer a curbless shower?

✔Do I want built-in seating?

✔Do I need additional shower storage?

✔Do I want a handheld shower?

✔Should the bathroom layout change?

✔Do I want to update other parts of the bathroom?

The answers will help determine whether a simple tub-to-shower conversion or a more comprehensive bathroom remodel is appropriate

Evaluate the Existing Tub Area

The existing bathtub area provides the starting point for your new shower.

Evaluate:

.
Tub dimensions

.
Tub surround

.
Wall construction

.
Existing plumbing

.
Drain location

.
Water supply lines

.
Shower valve location

.
Floor structure

.
Existing waterproofing

.
Electrical locations

.
Ventilation

.
Adjacent fixtures

.
Door and fixture clearances

Older Chicago homes may contain multiple layers of tile, outdated plumbing, previous remodeling work, or moisture damage that becomes visible only after the tub and surrounding materials are removed.

Determine the New Shower Size

The existing bathtub footprint is often the starting point for determining the size of the new shower.

Consider:

.
Shower width

.
Shower depth

.
Entry opening

.
Shower door clearance

.
Toilet clearance

.
Vanity clearance

.
Bench dimensions

.
Grab bar locations

.
Shower niche location

.
Fixture placement

A larger shower is not always necessary. Proper proportions and efficient planning can make the existing tub footprint feel significantly more spacious and comfortable.

Keep the Existing Layout

Keeping the shower in approximately the same location can simplify the project.

Benefits include:

✔Less plumbing relocation

✔Less disruption

✔Reduced construction complexity

✔Efficient use of existing space

✔Easier project planning

Keeping the existing layout does not mean keeping all of the existing plumbing. The drain, supply lines, valve, and fixture locations may still need to be modified for the new shower.

Consider Changing the Layout

A tub-to-shower conversion can also become part of a larger bathroom layout improvement.

Potential changes include:

.
Relocating the shower

.
Moving the vanity

.
Relocating the toilet

.
Changing the bathroom door

.
Adding storage

.
Increasing shower size

.
Improving circulation

Changing the layout can provide greater functionality but may increase plumbing, electrical, structural, permitting, and construction costs.

Choose Your Shower Entry

The shower entry has a major impact on accessibility and the overall appearance of the bathroom.

Standard Shower Threshold

A traditional raised threshold separates the shower floor from the bathroom floor.

Benefits:

.
Familiar design

.
Effective water containment

.
Many configuration options

.
Compatible with numerous shower designs

Low-Threshold Shower

A low-threshold shower reduces the height required to enter the shower.

Benefits:

✔Easier entry

✔Improved accessibility

✔Modern appearance

✔Reduced step-over height

✔Comfortable everyday use

This is an excellent option for homeowners who want improved accessibility without necessarily creating a completely curbless shower.

Curbless Shower

A curbless shower eliminates the traditional shower curb.

Benefits:

✔Excellent accessibility

✔Seamless appearance

✔Easier entry

✔Modern design

✔Greater visual continuity

Curbless construction requires careful planning of floor elevations, drainage, waterproofing, and available structural depth.

Select Your Shower Floor

The shower floor must provide appropriate drainage while creating a comfortable and practical walking surface.

Porcelain Tile

Benefits:

✔Durable

✔Water resistant

✔Wide variety of styles

✓ Easy to coordinate with wall tile

Mosaic Tile

Benefits:

✔Numerous design options

✔Easier to slope toward the drain

✔Numerous grout joints

✓ Excellent for traditional bathrooms

Natural Stone

Benefits:

✔Premium appearance

✔Unique character

✔Luxury appeal

Natural stone requires appropriate selection, installation, and maintenance.

Solid-Surface Shower Base

Benefits:

✔Low maintenance

✔Minimal grout

✔Clean appearance

✔Available in multiple configurations

The shower floor should be selected based on appearance, maintenance, drainage, accessibility, and overall design.

Choose Your Shower Wall Material

Popular shower wall materials include:

.
Porcelain tile

.
Ceramic tile

.
Large-format tile

.
Natural stone

.
Quartz slabs

.
Porcelain slabs

.
Specialty tile

.
Mosaic tile

.
Solid-surface panels

Large-format materials can create a clean contemporary appearance with fewer grout joints, while smaller tile formats can provide traditional, decorative, or historic character.

Select Your Shower Fixtures

Your new shower can be customized around the way you actually use it.

Popular options include:

✔Rainfall showerhead

✔Standard showerhead

✔Handheld shower

✔Multiple showerheads

✔Thermostatic controls

✔Pressure-balancing controls

✔Body sprays

✔Digital shower controls

✔Accessible controls

A handheld shower is particularly useful for accessibility, cleaning, bathing children, and providing greater flexibility during everyday use.

Add Accessibility Features

A tub-to-shower conversion is an excellent opportunity to improve bathroom accessibility.

Popular features include:

✔Low-threshold entry

✔Curbless shower

✔Grab bars

✔Handheld shower

✔Built-in seating

✔Fold-down seating

✔Accessible controls

✔Slip-resistant flooring

✔Improved lighting

✔Wider shower opening

Accessibility features should be planned before construction so reinforcement, plumbing, drainage, electrical work, and waterproofing can be properly coordinated.

Add Built-In Shower Seating

Built-in seating can make a shower significantly more comfortable and accessible.

Popular Seating Options

.
Fixed tile bench

.
Stone bench

.
Solid-surface bench

.
Fold-down seat

.
Corner seat

Consider:

✔Seat height

✔Seat depth

✔Location

✔Waterproofing

✔Drainage

✔Shower control location

✔Handheld shower location

A built-in bench should be properly integrated into the shower’s waterproofing system.

Add Shower Storage

Removing a bathtub creates an opportunity to improve shower storage.

Popular options include:

.
Recessed niches

.
Corner shelves

.
Built-in ledges

.
Shampoo niches

.
Multiple niches

.
Recessed medicine cabinets

Built-in storage eliminates bulky shower caddies and keeps everyday products organized.

A recessed niche should be planned before waterproofing and tile installation.

Use Frameless Glass

Glass can make the new shower feel larger and more open.

Benefits include:

✔Open sightlines

✔More natural light

✔Modern appearance

✔Minimal visual obstruction

✔Greater visual depth

Popular configurations include:

.
Fixed glass panel

.
Frameless glass enclosure

.
Glass shower door

.
Partial glass wall

.
Accessible glass opening

For accessible showers, the opening should be designed around comfortable entry, shower controls, seating, grab bars, and water containment.

Upgrade Waterproofing

Proper waterproofing is one of the most important components of a tub-to-shower conversion.

Waterproofing should protect:

.
Shower walls

.
Shower floor

.
Corners

.
Seams

.
Niches

.
Benches

.
Plumbing penetrations

.
Shower valve

.
Drain

.
Transitions

Tile and grout should not be considered a substitute for a properly designed waterproofing system.

A quality shower assembly should provide continuous moisture protection beneath the finished surfaces.

Upgrade the Plumbing

Converting a tub into a shower may require significant plumbing modifications.

Potential work includes:

.
Removing tub plumbing

.
Installing a shower valve

.
Modifying water supply lines

.
Modifying the drain

.
Relocating the drain

.
Installing a handheld fixture

.
Installing multiple shower fixtures

.
Replacing deteriorated piping

The amount of plumbing work depends on the existing configuration and the design of the new shower.

Improve Lighting

A tub-to-shower conversion is also an opportunity to improve bathroom lighting.

Consider:

.
LED shower lighting

.
Recessed ceiling lights

.
Vanity lighting

.
Wall sconces

.
Backlit mirrors

.
Dimmable fixtures

Layered lighting improves visibility while creating a brighter and more comfortable bathroom.

Improve Ventilation

A new shower can increase the importance of effective bathroom ventilation.

Proper ventilation helps manage:

✔Humidity

✔Moisture

✔Condensation

✔Air quality

Evaluate the existing exhaust fan, ductwork, controls, and available ventilation capacity during a major bathroom remodel.

Consider Heated Floors

Removing the bathtub can provide an opportunity to extend radiant heated flooring into the new shower area where compatible systems and materials permit.

Benefits include:

.
Improved comfort

.
Warm bathroom floors

.
Even heat distribution

.
Luxury appeal

.
Greater comfort during Chicago winters

Heated flooring should be coordinated with the electrical system and final floor assembly.

Historic Chicago Home Considerations

Tub-to-shower conversions in older Chicago homes may require additional planning.

Vintage greystones, brownstones, Victorian homes, two-flats, courtyard apartment buildings, and other older residences may contain:

.
Aging plumbing

.
Multiple layers of tile

.
Deteriorated substrates

.
Previous remodeling work

.
Moisture damage

.
Older electrical systems

.
Historic trim

.
Original tile

.
Vintage fixtures

A conversion can modernize the bathroom while preserving meaningful architectural details when practical.

High-Rise Condo Considerations

Tub-to-shower conversions in high-rise condominiums require additional coordination.

Important considerations include:

.
Condo association requirements

.
Building approval

.
Contractor insurance

.
Work hours

.
Elevator reservations

.
Material deliveries

.
Debris removal

.
Water shutoffs

.
Building inspections

.
Common-area protection

Shared plumbing systems and limited access to drains or building infrastructure may also affect whether the shower can be relocated or significantly modified.

Current Tub-to-Shower Design Trends

Many Chicago homeowners are choosing:

.
Low-threshold showers

.
Curbless showers

.
Frameless glass

.
Large-format porcelain tile

.
Handheld shower fixtures

.
Rainfall showerheads

.
Built-in shower seating

.
Recessed shower niches

.
Floating vanities

.
Backlit mirrors

.
Heated floors

.
Accessible shower controls

.
Spa-inspired finishes

These features combine modern design, accessibility, comfort, and practical everyday functionality.

Budget Planning

Conversion / Upgrade

Typical Investment

Basic Tub-to-Shower Conversion

$5,000–$10,000

Mid-Range Tub-to-Shower Conversion

$10,000–$20,000

Premium Shower Conversion

$20,000–$35,000+

Luxury / Custom Conversion

$35,000+

Low-Threshold Shower

Varies by construction

Curbless Shower

Varies by floor and drainage conditions

Frameless Glass

Varies by size and configuration

Built-In Shower Bench

Varies by materials and construction

Shower Niche

Varies by size and tile

Actual costs vary based on bathroom size, existing conditions, plumbing modifications, materials, glass, accessibility features, permits, and installation complexity.

Questions to Ask Before Converting Your Tub

□ Do I actually use the bathtub?

□ How large should the new shower be?

□ Should I keep the existing shower location?

□ Does the existing drain location work?

□ Do I want a low-threshold shower?

□ Is a curbless shower possible?

□ Do I need grab bars?

□ Would built-in seating be useful?

□ Do I want a handheld shower?

□ Where should the shower controls be located?

□ Where should the shower niche go?

□ What type of glass do I want?

□ What shower floor material should I choose?

□ Do I need better lighting?

□ Does the bathroom need improved ventilation?

□ Could demolition reveal hidden damage?

□ Are permits required?

□ Are there condominium or building requirements?

☐ What is my total project budget?

Common Tub-to-Shower Conversion Mistakes

Avoid these common errors:

.
Treating the project as simply removing the tub

.
Ignoring the existing drain location

.
Underestimating plumbing modifications

.
Failing to properly waterproof the shower

.
Choosing tile before determining the shower design

.
Forgetting shower storage

.
Installing grab bars without proper reinforcement

.
Adding seating without planning waterproofing

.
Making the shower opening unnecessarily narrow

.
Choosing glass before finalizing the shower layout

.
Ignoring lighting

.
Underestimating ventilation requirements

.
Failing to investigate moisture damage

.
Forgetting condominium requirements

.
Assuming a curbless shower is possible without evaluating floor conditions

.
Choosing fixtures without considering plumbing requirements

A successful conversion begins with planning the complete shower—not simply selecting the replacement fixture.

Our Recommendations

For most Chicago homeowners, we recommend:

✔Low-threshold shower where practical

✔Properly designed waterproofing system

✔Quality porcelain or ceramic tile

✔Frameless or minimally framed glass

✔Handheld shower fixture

✔Well-positioned shower controls

✔Recessed shower niche

✔Improved shower lighting

✔Slip-resistant shower flooring

✔Grab bars where appropriate

✔Built-in seating when space permits

✔Properly designed drainage

✔Adequate bathroom ventilation

✔Durable, moisture-resistant construction

These features provide an excellent balance of accessibility, appearance, comfort, functionality, and long-term performance.

The best tub-to-shower conversion is not necessarily the most expensive one. The goal is to create a shower that fits the bathroom, works with the existing building conditions, supports the homeowner's daily routine, and remains comfortable and functional for years to come.

Chicago Bathroom Remodeling Pros

A tub-to-shower conversion can dramatically improve the comfort, accessibility, functionality, and appearance of your bathroom. At **Chicago Bathroom Remodeling Pros**, we help homeowners throughout Chicago evaluate existing conditions, plan shower layouts, select materials and fixtures,

and coordinate the plumbing, waterproofing, tile, glass, lighting, and accessibility features required for a successful conversion.

Whether you’re replacing an unused bathtub, creating an accessible shower, updating an older Chicago bathroom, or designing a luxury walk-in shower, thoughtful planning and quality construction can help create a space that works beautifully for your everyday needs.

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