



Pink baths: Are they hot or not?

Color has some fans, many foes

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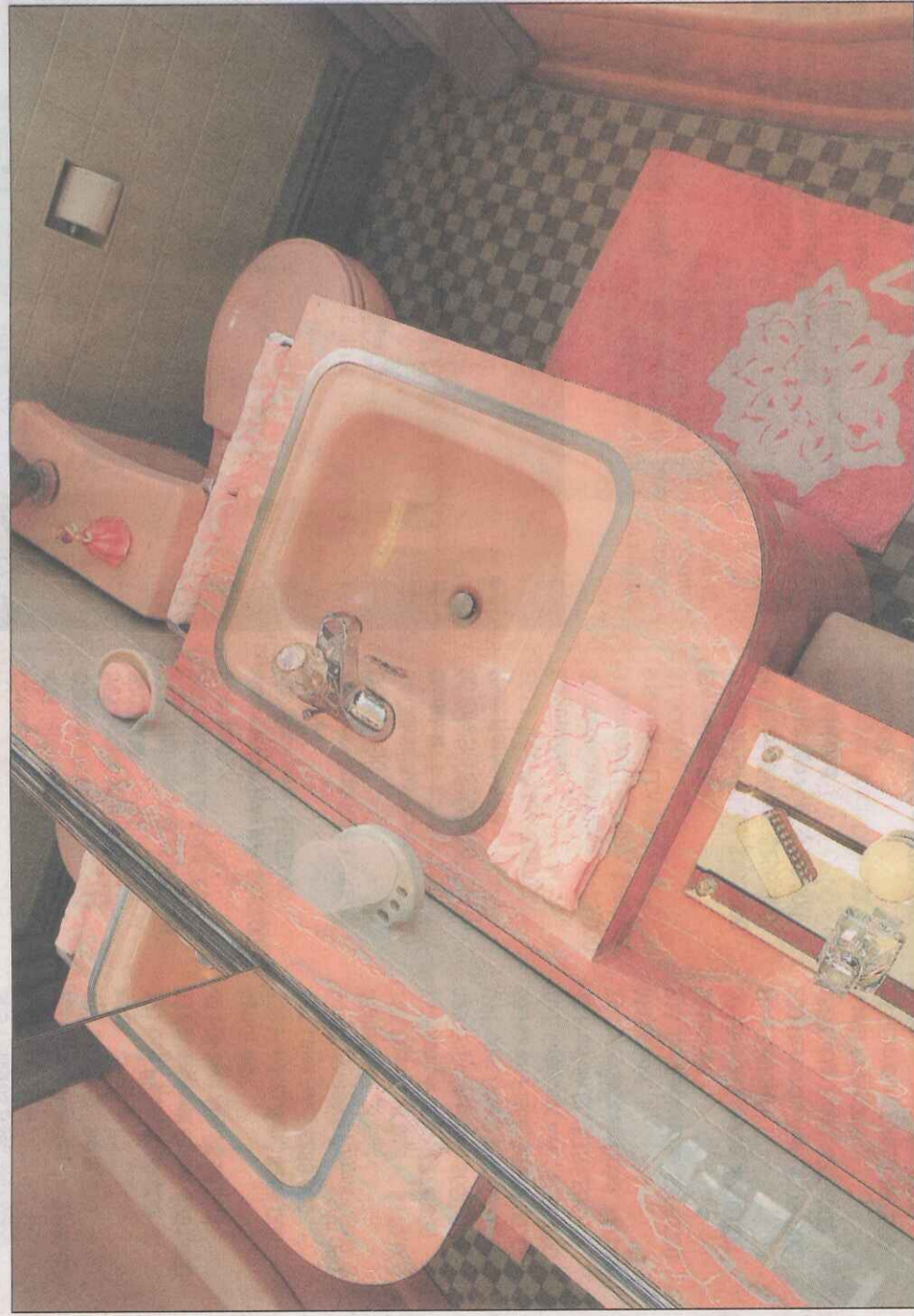
When Stacey Lopis' friends see the bathroom in her 1960-vintage Hawthorne ranch, they all say the same thing: "You have to get rid of the pink tile."

Pink bathrooms. They were built by the millions in 1950s and 1960s ranches, Capes and split-levels, but they get no love from today's home buyers — even the young buyers who are drawn to other midcentury styles in architecture and design.

"As much as the midcentury modern look is back, it's still something that people are not going to find appealing," said Gary Silberstein, a real estate agent with Keller Williams in Woodcliff Lake. "Barbie's not back."

But one lover of 1950s design says pink bathrooms deserve more respect.

"Pink bathrooms are emblematic of the design of the period," said Pam Kueber, who started the websites savethepinkbathroom.com and retrorenovation.com after buying a 1950s ranch in Lenox, Mass. "If people could get their heads around pink bathrooms, they'd understand why something that looks so shocking today is actually a very appealing and wonderful thing."



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Pink tiles, popular in the 1950s, are maligned today but praised for their construction. Some find the color attractive.

Kueber said developers of suburban tract homes started installing pink bathrooms after first lady Mamie Eisenhower popularized the color when she wore a rhinestone-studded bluish ball gown to her husband's inauguration in 1953.

Kueber started savethepinkbathrooms.com after watching people rip them out with "sledgehammer glee" on TV

rooms that were yellow, blue or green, often with black trim. "They'd throw the toilets out and people chose these colors," Kueber said. "Walking into a pink or yellow or robin's-egg blue or turquoise bathroom is going to be more uplifting than walking into a greige bathroom, don't you think?"

Many home buyers who shun pink will accept the other 1950s pastels. In her house hunt, for

example, Lopis saw a yellow and black bath that she loved.

"Yellow and black totally work," Lopis said. "You could make it funky and fun. But pink is a little much for me. Pink just wasn't really in my repertory of colors. Pink, to me, is like a little girl's room."

"It's usually the man who re-acts," said Maryanne Elsasser, a Coldwell Banker agent in Wyck-

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off. "They're opposed to the fact that it's a female color."

Jean Armstrong, a retired chemistry professor, has lived for years with a pink bathroom in her 1950 Bogota condo.

"I really don't like it," said Armstrong, who is now selling the condo.

But she's always been too thrifty to replace the bathroom. "Why should I?" she asked. "Nothing is wrong with it... I knew that if I took care of it, it would last another 50 years."

On that point, everyone agrees: These bathrooms were built to last. The tile was generally sturdier, and set into concrete.

"Much of tile from that era was literally twice as thick as the tile of today," said Ron Aiosa, a Coldwell Banker agent in Butler. "They don't make materials like that anymore, that's for sure."

Elaine Jochmann's parents bought their Rochelle Park split-level when it was brand-new in 1957. The house, which

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Jochmann is selling, still has the original bathroom. The floor and wall tiles are gray; the tub and toilet are pink, and the vanity is a Formica faux-marble swirl of pink and gray. The bath is still in excellent condition.

"Are you going to get 58 years out of anything you buy today?" asked Jochmann, an accounting and project manager at a pool construction company.

George Rosko, a real estate agent with Coccia Realty in Lynnhurst, recalls how difficult it was to rip out the pink bathroom in his North Arlington Cape Cod two decades ago.

"What a job," he said. "The tiles were on concrete embedded in a heavy steel mesh. I was bleeding trying to remove them."

"I have to say in many cases, they're in really fantastic shape," said Robin Baron, a Re/Max agent in Saddle River, who helped Stacy Lopis find her home in Hawthorne. "I say to people, if it's not in your budget to take it out, you can make it work with new curtains, towels and decorating. Or you can paint the tile and tub."

Changing the color of the tile and tub requires special paint. It costs from \$1,000 to \$1,500 to refinish a tub and tile in a typical 5-by-7-foot bath, said John Emmons of American Bath Resurfacing in Boonton, who often works on "pink, blue, yellow or green" baths from decades ago.

Lopis is making plans to have her pink tile painted white. For now, she has tried to dilute the pink with a delicately patterned white-and-gray shower curtain. That kind of decorating is the approach often recommended by real estate agents and stagers trying to sell homes with pink baths.

"For today's buyer, we generally try to combat the pink," said Maria Rini, a Re/Max agent in Oradell. She recommends neutral wall paints and shower curtains.

Bernadette Flaim, a home stager and designer based in Leonia, said she has toned down pink bathrooms by bringing in more "contemporary, updated elements" while at the same time



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acknowledging the color.

"Let's bring the problem into the solution," she said. For example, she has used a shower curtain with stripes of pink and khaki. "It was very subtle and neutral, but still connected with the pink."

She has also had sellers leave the tile in place, but replace pink vanities and toilets with white versions — much cheaper than a gut job.

"You want to get [a reaction of] 'This is so charming, it's retro,' rather than 'I'm going to have to rip it out; this is going to cost me thousands,'" Flaim said.

And she recommends that sellers make sure the rest of the house is very clean and freshly painted, with gleaming hardwood floors. If the house is move-in ready, Flaim said, "it makes it easier for them to live with the pink bathroom."

For her part, Pam Kueber is convinced homeowners can learn to not only live with, but love, their pink baths. For one thing, the rosy glow can be very flattering.

"You go into that pink bathroom, with all that pink bouncing off your face, you look 10

years younger," she said.

Julie Lee, senior vice president of marketing at the Christian Health Care Center in Wyckoff, can see the charm of pink bathrooms. There's one in the center's DeRoo House. The house was the home of a late employee and trustee of the center, Clarence DeRoo, and is now a guesthouse for visitors.

Keeping the pink tile, tub and sink was part of preserving the home's history, Lee said.

"It's so adorable," she added. Kueber hopes more people will come around to that point of view.

"I hear stories from people who start out hating pink bathrooms and go on our site and come out loving them," Kueber said. "Here someone gave them permission to love something that's not necessarily popular. Once you understand why the color was popular, I think it's really easy to love a pink bathroom."

"I have readers looking for houses with pink bathrooms," she continued, "so get with the program, people."

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Pink bathrooms such as these were ubiquitous in the 1950s and 1960s, but some homeowners can't wait to tear them out. Right, home stager Bernadette Flaim shows a little creativity goes a long way. She diluted the pink in this bathroom with a neutral paint color and a striped shower curtain. Center, a pink bathroom in Bogota.