

## Locating bathroom devices and accessories

**R**esidential bathrooms are busy places packed with plumbing fixtures and numerous supporting devices and accessories. With these items competing for limited space, a bathroom quickly can become a hodgepodge of clutter with little correlation between an item's location and the function it serves. To simplify bathroom layouts, I follow a few rules to locate and coordinate bathroom devices and accessories. I want to make clear visual sense of switches and outlets; increase the per-

ception of space; and create a comfortable, open, and inviting feeling.

### Guidelines for locating devices and accessories

One of the first considerations for locating devices and accessories is whether there are any special needs. Will children be using the bathroom regularly? Will guests use the bathroom? The room's configuration also will influence locations, but an important rule of thumb is that devices and accessories should be within arm's reach of the task that they support. Another consideration is

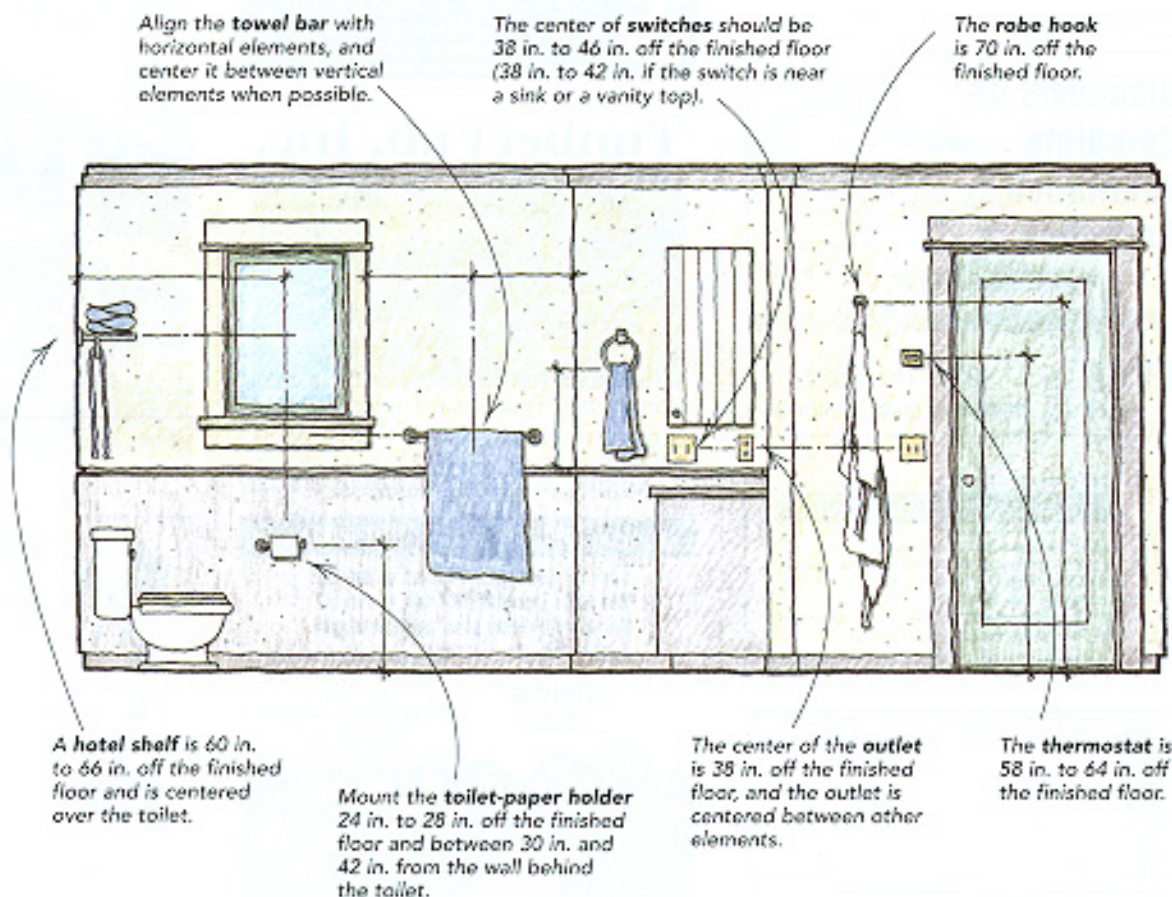
the blocking and backing required for accessories. The rough framing often is complete before all the devices and accessories have been selected, which means the locations have to be anticipated. Use the guidelines in the drawings as a starting point for locating devices and accessories typically found in a bathroom.

### Align switches and towel bars with other room elements

I use the fixtures, trim, and hardware as a reference to align the switches and towel bars, and to tie these elements together visu-

### Bathroom elements should work together

Outlets and switches should be aligned whenever possible. I place general ambient-light switches adjacent to the door and task-light switches either near the door or near the functions they support. To limit the number of wall plates, consider ganging switches and outlets in the same cover plate. Another trick is to orient outlets horizontally in a trim band or between other elements, and if you use battery-operated toothbrushes or razors, recess an outlet inside the medicine cabinet for recharging. One accessory I add to most bathrooms is a hotel shelf above the toilet. Guests will find the shelf a handy place for their toiletries, and it also can be used to store extra towels.



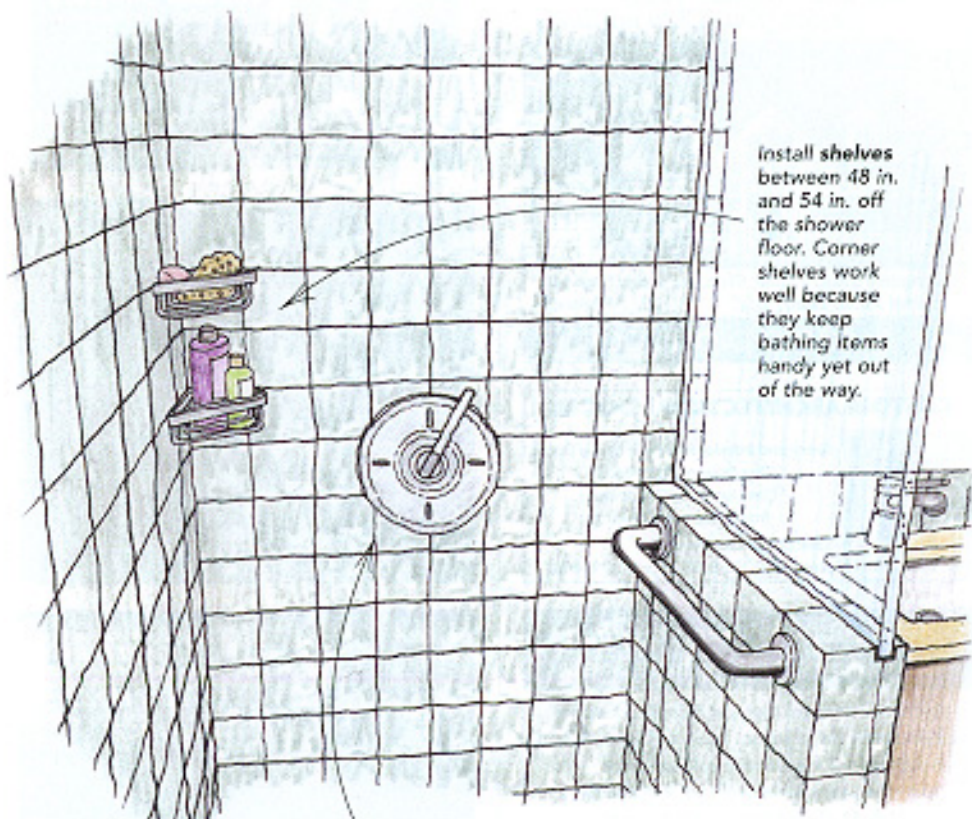
ally. Minimize clutter and distraction with wall-mounted shelves, toothbrush holders, soap dishes, and cup holders to help clear clutter off vanity tops, but set a limit at two or three wall-mounted elements to avoid overdoing it.

### Guidelines for color and finishes

Coordinating the device and cover-plate colors with the finish they are against helps to blend them in with the room and to avoid visual distraction. Light-colored devices should go on light-colored walls, and dark-colored devices should go on dark-colored walls. I like to use GFCIs with trip and reset switches that match the outlet color. I also try to match the metal finish of the plumbing fixtures to the accessories. For example, if the fixtures are polished chrome, I specify the towel bars, hooks, etc., to match. And don't forget the bathroom-door hardware: It's a nice touch when the hardware finish on the bathroom side of the door matches the rest of the room.

Although there are many styles and designs of accessories to choose from, simple and quality items are most often the best choice. Highly decorative accessories tend to distract from the finishes and add to a cluttered feeling. Play down the accessories, and the tile, paint color, trim, and other finishes shine. Spending a little extra money for quality items is well worth the expense. You'll be using them several times a day, so they're worth the splurge.

*Russell Hamlet is an architect on Bainbridge Island, Wash. Drawings by the author. See pp. 54-57 for examples of his work.*



Install shelves between 48 in. and 54 in. off the shower floor. Corner shelves work well because they keep bathing items handy yet out of the way.

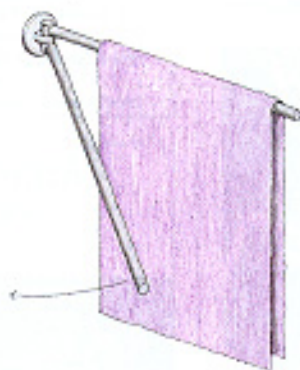
The controls are 42 in. off the shower floor. Above the controls, the shower-head is 76 in. off the shower floor.

### Shower ergonomics

Even if grab bars are not needed for current users, consider installing them now for the future (they make great towel bars). If you choose not to install them now, provide blocking during construction so that grab bars can be added easily later. Two excellent sources of information for locating and mounting grab bars are *ADA Standards for Accessible Design* ([www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)) and "Installing Grab Bars" (*FHB* #136, pp. 90-93).

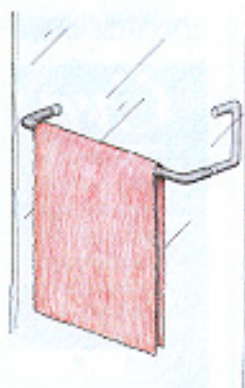
### Towel bars

It always seems hard to find enough towel-bar space, but some good, creative options exist. Ideally, you'll have room for a 24-in.-long towel bar, which is more effective for towel-drying than a shorter one. Also, towels look better stretched out. For hand towels, a ring or hook works well in lieu of a bar if space is limited, but in all cases, keep 18 in. clear below for hanging the hand towel.



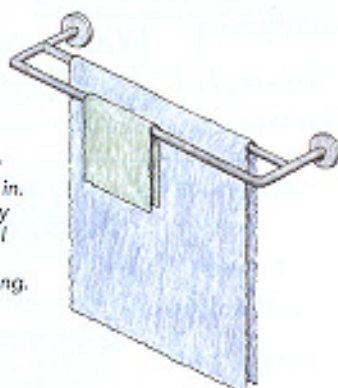
Swing-out towel bars

Install towel bars 36 in. to 48 in. off the finished floor.



Shower-door-pull/  
towel-bar combination

Mount towel bar 3 in. to 4 in. above any horizontal band or wainscoting.



Double towel bars