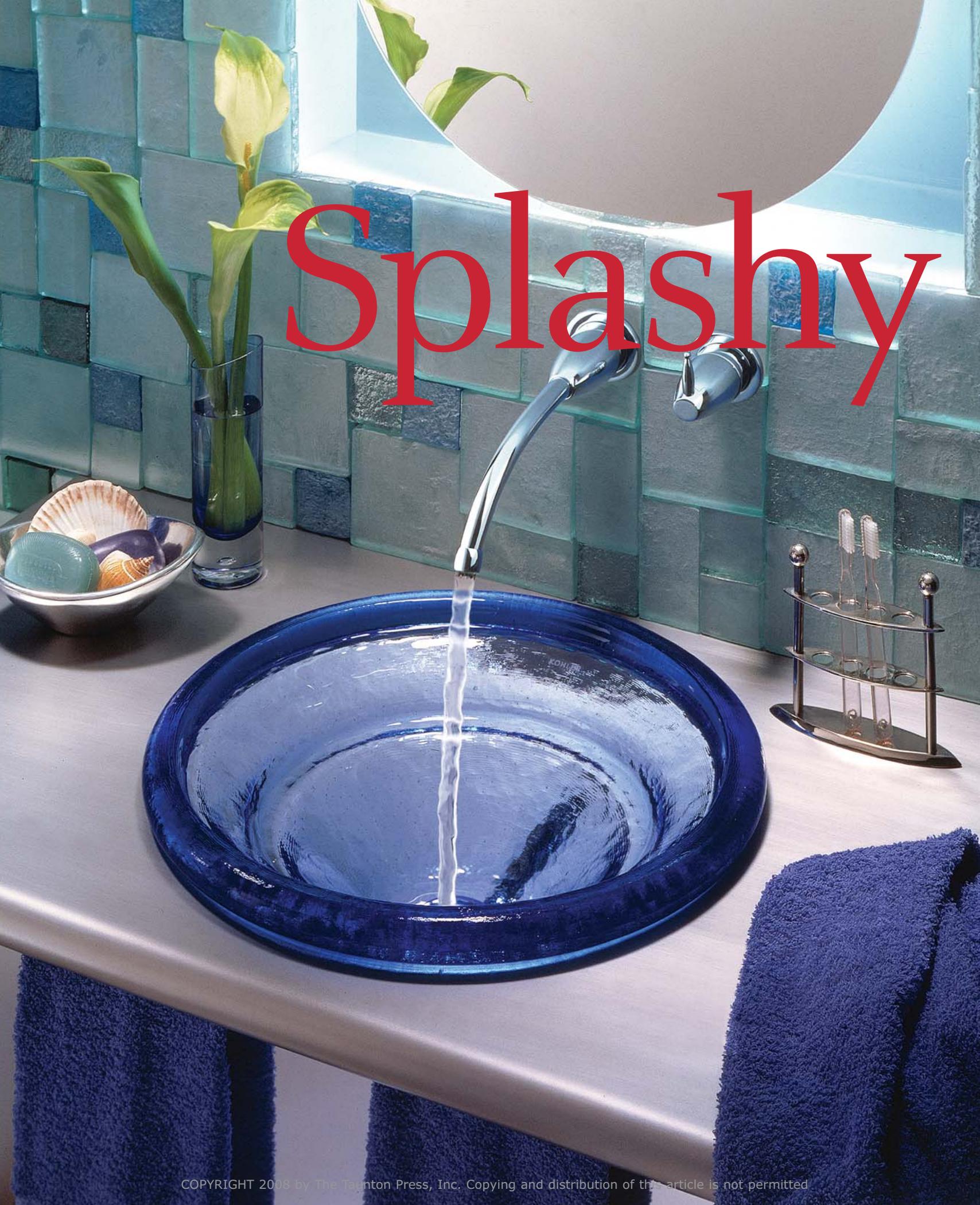


# Splashy



A balance of **beauty and practicality**  
is the key to choosing a lav you'll love

# bathroom sinks

BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

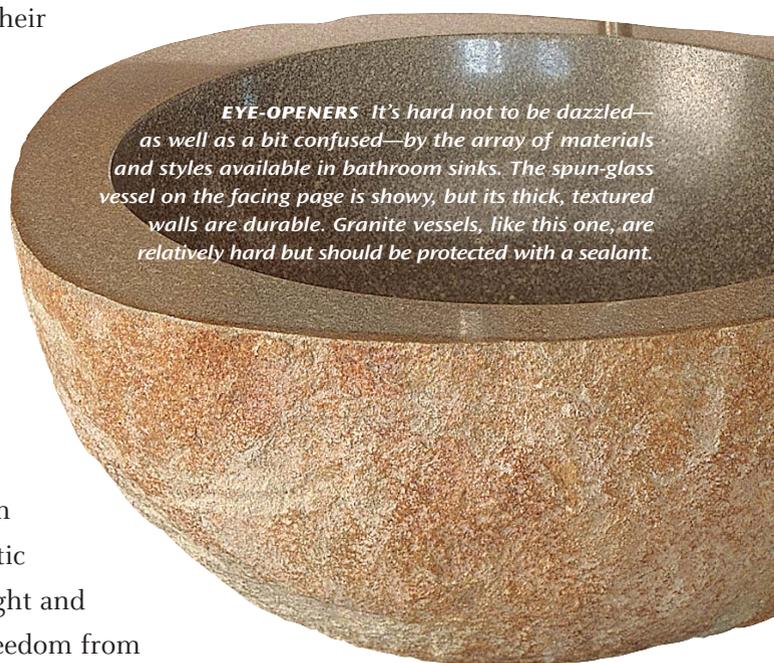
**L**ong a practical necessity, bathroom sinks have evolved into functional works of art. A reinvention of traditional styles coupled with the use of nontraditional materials has resulted in an awe-inspiring—and daunting—array of choices.

Designs that a few years ago were available only in higher-end markets have trickled down as major manufacturers have expanded their product lines in increasingly creative directions.

Selecting a bathroom sink—a lavatory in trade parlance—boils down to two decisions: what style and which material? Finding the right combination means not only weighing the pros and cons of each, but also deciding how well each fits into your bathroom and into your lifestyle.

Style choices, from Victorian pedestals to sleek vessels, are influenced by personal taste but dictated by the size and layout of the bathroom and the needs of those using it. At the same time, today's stunning variety in sink materials offers real options to homeowners whose bathroom dimensions limit their choice of styles. In general, truly artistic sinks are best displayed in a powder room, where usage is light and guests are more apt to marvel. Ease of use, durability, and freedom from maintenance are qualities to value in a family bath.

*To learn more about the sinks on the following pages, see Resources on page 94.*



**EYE-OPENERS** It's hard not to be dazzled—as well as a bit confused—by the array of materials and styles available in bathroom sinks. The spun-glass vessel on the facing page is showy, but its thick, textured walls are durable. Granite vessels, like this one, are relatively hard but should be protected with a sealant.

## SINK STYLES



**Pedestal**



**Wall mount**



**Self-rimming**



**Semi-encastre**

### Pedestals are still high style

Dating from the late 1800s, pedestal lavs, consisting of a basin atop a column, remain a popular choice, with contemporary designs updating them for the 21st century. Prices on pedestals range from just over \$100 for vitreous china sets (most pedestals come in two pieces) to thousands (the list price on Porcher's Glacier glass pedestal is \$3,195). Several manufacturers have updated their traditional white china models by raising them several inches. American Standard's Standard Collection design, for example, is a reissue of a 1922 model redesigned to stand 36 inches tall (past pedestals ranged from 31 to 33 inches). This Right Height design, along with similarly tall pedestals marketed by Standard's competitors, is a bow to baby boomers who'd rather not have to bend over a sink. Visually unimposing, pedestals work elegantly in a small bath but offer little storage.

**Console sinks** are essentially wide pedestals, combining the breadth of a countertop with a pedestal sink's elegance and visual lightness. Their increased popularity may be attributed to this functionality, as well as to the overall trend toward furniture in the bath. Consoles typically come in two parts, with a top of vitreous china or other material matched to legs made of china, wrought iron, or other sturdy metal. Some consoles have four legs; others have two and are braced against the wall.

### Wall-mounts fit almost anywhere

Wall-mount sinks, like pedestals, were always fairly predictable—until now. New designs, particularly those in which a vessel bowl is mounted on a

### MAINSTREAM

*No longer confined to designer showrooms, fashionable countertop vessels are showing up at national retailers. The glass vessel below, for example, can be purchased through Lowe's.*



decorative bracket, have increased creative options. Because they provide barrier-free access and can be mounted at any height, wall-mounts are ideal for use by children or those in wheelchairs. Some—described as “semi-pedestals”—include a shroud that hides the pipes underneath. Wall sinks, especially corner mounts, are ideal for small bathrooms, but because they offer little room for toiletries and storage, a shelf or cabinet may be required elsewhere. Prices depend on materials and style.

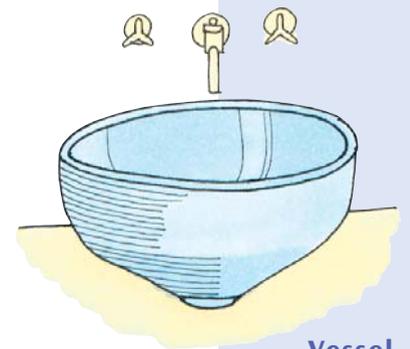
### Vessels are in vogue

Looking more like beautiful bowls than modern sinks, vessels recapture the appearance of washbasins in the days before modern plumbing. Style and material options in vessels are broader than in any other category, ranging from

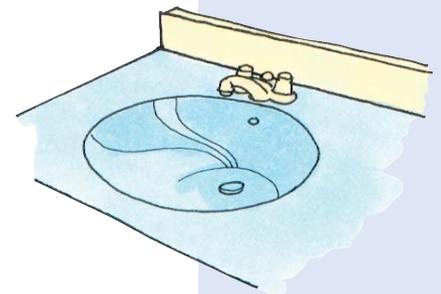
## SINK STYLES



Console



Vessel



Integral



Under-counter



**NEW TWIST, OLD-TIME CHARM** New materials, like stainless steel, give traditional self-rimming sinks a custom look, above. At the same time, the Victorian elegance of vitreous china pedestals and consoles remains popular, left.

clear rectangular glass tanks to hammered copper bowls to scooped-out slabs of granite. Glass vessels can be highly decorative, and prices, which start at about \$200, vary greatly by material and craftsmanship. While most commonly mounted on a countertop, some vessels can also be used in wall-mount or self-rimming applications. Regardless of material durability, the exposed sides predispose a vessel to potentially damag-

ing accidents. Also of note: Many vessels do not have overflow holes, meaning a faucet left running would soon spill over. One solution is a perforated drain. The vessel won't hold water, but accidents will be minimized.

Faucets for vessel sinks are typically mounted on the countertop or wall and should be chosen carefully (see sidebar, p. 50) Likewise, the height of the vessel must be taken into account when selecting the counter on which it will rest—a typical bath vanity base may place the rim too high for comfort. Vessels can be mounted on countertops from any source, but drilling the drain hole requires a template from the sink manufacturer.

### Self-rimming sinks shape up

Self-rimming sinks are fabricated with a rim that sits on a hole in a countertop. Common materials are vitreous

china, porcelain on steel, stainless steel, and other metals. Self-rimming sinks can be shallow or deep; oval, round, or rectangular; with straight or slanted sides. Faucets may be mounted on the basin itself or on the countertop. Vessel sinks can sometimes be used in self-rimming applications.

**Undercounter sinks** attach to the bottom of a solid-surface countertop. More so than with other designs, careful consideration is usually given to the countertop in which it will rest. The demand for natural materials such as granite and marble—in countertops if not in sinks—has helped boost the popularity of undercounter basins. Prices run from less than \$50 for a simple self-rimming china sink to more than \$500 for metal or cast-iron designs.

### Semi sinks fit in small spaces

Partially embedded in a narrow countertop, semi-encastre (semi-countertop) sinks can save space without completely sacrificing counter area, thereby balancing access and storage. More popular in Europe than in North America, semi-countertops are not easy to find, although at least two major manufacturers—Kohler (the Mezzo) and Porcher (the Ebla)—offer them.



### Integral bowls are built in

Integral sink designs—in which the basin is part of the vanity or countertop—can be fabricated of cast polymers, natural or cultured stone, or concrete. Inexpensive polymer combinations by major manufacturers are available in home centers in standard vanity sizes. Oval basins are most common, but more costly—and showy—integral sinks are made by custom manufacturers in a variety of shapes and materials. Material dictates price.

**FINE SHINE**  
Intense color and deep gloss distinguish enameled cast iron, above. Many vessel bowls can be mounted to a wall with brackets, like the enameled one above or the red glass one, facing page bottom. Some can also be used as self-rimming sinks, right.



## FACTORING IN THE FAUCET

**BEFORE BUYING A NEW LAV,** it is important to consider the type of faucet it will need. Vessel sinks, for example, often require extremely tall or wall-mounted faucets to accommodate their high profile. Because installation involves breaking into the bathroom wall and moving pipes, a wall-mount can prove costly. Several makers of vessel sinks now manufacture some above-the-counter basins with a faucet deck, allowing the faucet to be mounted on the fixture. One example is Kohler's marble Botticelli lavatory, which can be purchased with or without a faucet deck.

For sinks on which the faucet is mounted, there are three types of hole configurations. Sinks are drilled for faucets with either 4 inches (called center set) or 8 inches to 12 inches (widespread) between the hot and cold handles. A center-set configuration also accommodates single-control faucets with an escutcheon, or cover plate. Most sinks can also be purchased with a single hole for single-controlled faucets. In the end, it's always best to confirm with the manufacturer of your sink that the faucet you've chosen will match.

# Material considerations

## Ceramic

It's what you think of when you think of sinks: Vitreous china is the original—a durable, nonporous ceramic with a hard, glossy finish. Vitreous china is formed by firing clay at intense heat, a process that fuses the glaze and makes it impervious to water and bacteria. Fireclay is a similar material whose composition results in a finished ceramic that is shinier and sturdier than vitreous china. China sinks are among the least expensive.

## Enameled metals

Sinks of porcelain on steel (POS) and enameled cast iron are highly durable. Porcelain on steel consists of a thin steel shell coated with chemically bonded, glazed clay fired at a high temperature. The smooth finish is colorfast and resistant to corrosion, abrasion, and bacteria. Priced similarly to vitreous china, POS is less expensive but also less impact resistant than enameled cast iron.

Enameled cast iron, because it can be fired at temperatures higher than steel, has a superior finish with brighter colors and deeper gloss.

## Stainless steel

Stainless steel, showy yet durable, won't chip, rust, or stain but can scratch. When shopping, look for 18-to 20-gauge steel (the lower the gauge, the thicker the metal) that has a chromium-nickel ratio of 18/10 (the more chromium, the stronger; the

more nickel, the more corrosion resistant). A good undercoating minimizes noise. Though smaller, stainless lavs are pricier than their kitchen counterparts.

## “Living finishes”

Copper and bronze are among the “living finishes”—so called because they, like living things, show their age. Paste wax will slow but not stop the process. As with stainless, the thicker the copper, the better—and a good copper sink will be copper welded, not soldered. Like copper, bronze sinks can be maintained with paste wax, but newness can be restored only with considerable buffing. They are expensive, starting at more than \$1,000.

## Natural stone

Onyx, marble, and granite are increasingly popular. Granite is the least porous and hardest, but chips can be difficult to repair. Marble can stain. Onyx is similar to marble but a bit more translucent. Most are sealed by the manufacturer, but it is recommended that homeowners reseal the products periodically. Natural stone sinks are priced in the thousands.

## Manufactured stone

Cultured stone, a molded mix of resins, pigment, and pulverized stone, is used for integral sinks at a variety of prices.

Solid-surface polymers like DuPont's Corian are another stonelike option but are available only in solid colors for sinks.

Concrete has also appeared in the bath in the form of integral

## LONG AND STRONG

*Similar to vitreous china, fireclay is strong enough to allow thin walls and wide extensions, above. Granite, below center, can be used in integral designs.*

sink/countertops and cast vessels. Denser and more compact than sidewalk concrete, it can be finished with either a textured or a smooth, polished surface.

## Glass

Despite their appearance, sinks made of glass are fairly durable. Most manufacturers use tempered glass, which will crack but not shatter if struck by a hard object. Nonetheless, it's probably not a good idea to place a glass sink below a medicine cabinet or shelf. Thickness is also a factor in durability and the ability to withstand rapid temperature changes. Prices for glass vessels start at about \$200. 

*Debra Judge Silber is an associate editor.*

## COPPER AND BRASS

*SINKS will darken, spot, and mottle naturally over time. Some people love the patinated look, but those who prefer a new-penny shine are in for considerable polishing.*

*See Resources on page 94.*

