



A Marriage of Style and Sustainability: Five Top Materials for the Bath

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Sustainability isn't always what springs to mind when one envisions luxury lodging. It's true that the two haven't always gone hand in hand: for some, sustainability paints a stark picture of austerity, while luxury tends to bring to mind lavish extravagance. Thankfully, that paradigm is shifting.

Today, travelers increasingly see sustainable and responsible design as a strong selling point when looking for accommodations; a 2013 Travel Guard survey of travel agents proclaimed that "green travel is here to stay," finding "24 percent of those who responded noted that interest in green travel is currently the highest it's ever been in the last 10 years, and 51 percent reported that interest has remained constant throughout this time period." And, according to a 2012-2013 TripAdvisor survey, 79 percent of travelers globally "think that it's important that accommodation providers have eco-friendly practices." ([Source](#))

As eco-friendly lodgings grow in importance to travelers, so does the selection of luxury products available for those accommodations. Take the bathroom, for example. Many of the vanities, sinks, bathtubs, and countertops available for hospitality projects today have been made first by Mother Nature, then fashioned by man, making them naturally durable and strikingly attractive, too; combined with other important sustainability factors, that creates a win-win in both homes and hotels. Sustainably sourced materials for the bath include those that are recycled or reclaimed, rapidly renewable, and/or certified as sustainable. Durability is supremely important, as a longer-lasting material will not need to be replaced as quickly and thus won't take up space in a landfill. Here, we share our five favorite picks for sustainable materials for the bath: recycled copper, sustainably made concrete, reclaimed wood, bamboo, and FSC-certified wood.

Copper Can Fight Bacteria Growth

Recycled copper: Hammered copper bathtubs and sinks provide a significant "wow" factor—making weary travelers feel sufficiently spoiled in a spa-like bath space. But beyond the distinctive texture and magnificent coloration, recycled copper is extraordinary in the field of sustainability. Less energy is typically used to recycle a material than to extract, mine, or originally produce it, and copper is one of the few materials in the world that retains its performance even with repeated recycling. It's also one of the first metals ever used by humans, dating back more than 10,000 years. Copper's versatility is shown in its ability to be formed, stretched and hammered into sheets without breaking. Sinks and bathtubs made from hand-hammered copper bring beauty and character to a space while also speaking to the culture and heritage of the artisans who crafted them. Need another reason to love copper? It can help to keep shared spaces clean and safe by reducing the risk of spreading harmful bacteria. Studies show that with proper cleaning, uncoated copper can fight the growth of many bacteria which cause food poisoning, colds, and flu.

Sustainably made concrete: Concrete is not only incredibly on-trend, it is one of the least energy intensive materials one can specify in a bathroom design; a hero in today's eco-friendly circles. Still, some types of concrete are made to have less of an environmental impact than others. One way to accomplish this is to replace part of the cement in the mixture with a reinforcement material that is recycled or renewable, such as jute. One hundred percent biodegradable and recyclable, jute that is harvested near the concrete production point can help to support local communities. It also minimizes transportation emissions, which are further reduced by the fact that this type of concrete can be 40 percent lighter than traditional concrete, making it perfect for both sinks and countertops.

Reclaimed wood: Reclaiming and repurposing can give new life to a material destined for the landfill. Reclaimed wood is often deeply textured, with visible wear marks and nail holes and the tacit knowledge of a former "life"—all adding character to bathroom vanities and mirrors built from it. Reclaimed woods aren't susceptible to the same shrinkage, movement, and warping as new wood, making for solid, built-to-last pieces. Generally, processing reclaimed wood has a lower impact on the environment compared to the felling, transporting, and processing of virgin timber.

Bamboo: What other plant can grow several feet in a single day? Naturally water-resistant and extremely strong to boot, bamboo is a prime candidate for bath furniture. Inherently sustainable, bamboo is a member of the grass family, growing new shoots from the same root system for decades, all the while sequestering large amounts of carbon from the atmosphere. Moso bamboo, the most widely cultivated, fastest growing, and strongest of the various bamboo species, reaches full maturity in a mere five to seven years.

Wood with Documentation

FSC-certified wood: Sourcing FSC-certified woods for bath furniture ensures the wood has been grown and harvested with environmentally and socially responsible methods. Among the principles of the Forest Stewardship Council, forest management must respect the rights of indigenous peoples and maintain the well-being of forest workers and the local community; conserve biological diversity, water, ecosystems, and landscapes; and use the forest efficiently to ensure economic viability. That's not just talk—the FSC audits and inspects regularly, making this certification truly legit.

Besides winning the good graces—and dollars—of potential visitors, hotels that concentrate on sustainable design, and communicate that message well, reduce their impact on the environment and create a more unique and memorable experience for visitors.

Naomi Neilson Howard is the founder and CEO of [Native Trails](#), the premier source for functional, earth-friendly products for the kitchen, bath and home. Their new headquarters, located on California's central coast, is home to sustainable bathrooms featuring reclaimed wood and NativeStone concrete sinks.

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