

## HOME REMODELING

# Seamless showers

## Tired of cleaning tile grout in the bath? Here's an option

By Kathy Maynard

**Q:** *The grout in our tile shower kept getting black and moldy, no matter how many times we treated it, so we called a tile setter to come give us an estimate to replace the tile. He said there was extensive water damage behind the tile and we needed to hire a general contractor to tear it all out, replace the sheetrock, wood framing and any other damaged material they might discover before he could install new tile.*

*We've decided against another tile shower because I'm tired of cleaning grout. We want something seamless, but I think acrylic shower stalls look cheap and we can't seem to find one that will fit in the existing area, anyway. Is there any other type of smooth and seamless shower stall that looks attractive?*

**Sandra Anderson**  
Sacramento

**A:** Smooth shower walls can be made from many different materials, including cultured marble, natural stone like granite, quartz surfaces such as CaesarStone or Silestone, or solid surface materials including Corian, Avonite, Hi-Macs and Gibraltar, according to Ramiro Martinez, president and founder of Signature Surfaces, Inc., a kitchen and bath dealer in Sacramento.

"However, because those materials all are usually installed in sheets, there will be seams in the corners and on the bottom along the shower pan. And those joints create areas where you get mold, mildew and possible leaks because water could go through them just like grout in tile," he says.

"So about 15 years ago I developed a way to make totally seamless, water-tight shower stalls from Corian and other solid surface materials that are as attractive as they are easy to keep clean."



This custom-made frameless shower door does not collect water so it is as easy to keep clean as it is attractive.

Signature begins the process by installing a Corian shower pan custom made to fit in the existing floor space. There is no need to add waterproofing to the area, as is the case under tile, because water cannot penetrate solid surface material.

Also, Corian shower pans can be retrofit into older homes where premade shower pans often won't fit because they are custom made with the drain holes cut wherever necessary.

The next step is to put up separate sheets of Corian on each wall and bond them with a bead of silicone, as do other fabricators.

"What sets us apart is the coving method we do on site, by gluing extra pieces of material into each corner, then routing and sanding them so there are two invisible joints in each radius," Martinez says.

Competitors will call me to make custom Corian pans so they can install their own walls around it, but when I



This seamless shower features a bench, window coving, handrails and a hand-held spray unit.

explain we can do the whole shower with no visible seams or joints, they often have us do the whole job because they

## Seamless showers continued...

come out looking so much nicer, he adds.

Signature can further customize a shower by coving around windows, adding seamless shampoo ledges and benches and even inlaying decorative strips of tiles or other colors of Corian high in the shower.

With more than 130 colors of Corian available, Signature can even create seamless showers that resemble natural stone such as granite or marble, but are much easier to maintain.

Acrylic and cultured marbles must be cleaned with foamy cleansers to avoid scratching. Natural stone like granite is porous, so you have a problem with soap scum and need to keep it sealed.

“What’s nice about Corian is that it’s all custom made so you get exactly what you need,” he says. “We actually heat the material to 400 degrees in the oven to make it pliable so we can create a slope into the drain and bend the material around curves. We often make showers for the handicapped that you can roll a wheelchair right into.”

That’s what led Bob Ross of Davis to Signature Surfaces.

“Our old tile shower had developed a leak that spread under the shower pan and out into the surrounding room, ruining the carpet and the walls,” he said.

After that experience, we didn’t want to go with another tile shower. Grout tends to dry out and crack, and it also builds up a lot of mold and mildew so we were looking for a solid surface without seams or grout, he says.

“At the same time, we were also looking for a shower that you could just walk or roll a wheelchair into. My 95-year-old father-in-law lives with us and he was having difficulty stepping in and out of our shower and he can’t get in and out of the bathtub,” he says.

Ross went to four different Corian distributors, starting with the remodeling company that had done such a great job installing Corian countertops in their kitchen a few years earlier, but was disappointed to find their showers were all jointed in the corners.

“They looked almost like fiberglass or acrylic and there were actual seams in the floor and walls that I thought negated



**Corian can be heated to 400 degrees to make it pliable enough to bend the material around curves and create slopes into to drains of shower pans.**

the whole idea of a solid surface Corian shower,” he says. “When I heard that Signature Surfaces made a completely seamless, low threshold shower that served both of purposes, that seemed like the thing to do.”

The Rosses were so impressed with the shower and jetted tub in Signature’s showroom that they chose the very same color of Corian for their shower.

They also decided to have decorative grooves etched around the sinks in the matching Corian vanities they had installed in both their master and hall bathrooms after seeing them on display.

Martinez worked with Ross to design a long 7 by 3½ foot shower with a wall mounted shower head on one end and a bench, handrails and hand-held shower unit on the other.

He went out to measure the area that the general contractor had roughed out, came back with the custom shower pan he had prefabricated in his shop, cut each piece for the walls, windows, shelf and bench out on the Rosses’ patio, then assembled it on site.

“Now my father-in-law can get in and out of the shower himself,” says Ross. “If he ever gets to the point that he needs a wheelchair, it’s plenty big enough to roll one in. We’ll be able to transfer him to the bench with the help

of the handrails and he can shower himself with the hand-held unit.”

The custom frameless etched glass shower door is also as attractive as it is functional. There is no metal around the edges to catch water or build up mold the way the old shower did, he says.

“It may sound kind of silly, but I really look forward to stepping into that shower every morning,” he says.

Ross was as pleased with the remodeling process as he is with the final product.

I can’t say enough about Ramiro, says Ross. He is such a pleasant man to work with, he was always available to answer any questions that I had and he is so conscientious that he personally came out to supervise the fabrication and installation of the shower himself.

“That shower is the center of our remodel and the highlight of the job,” he says.

“Everybody we bring in to see the remodeled bathroom is very impressed with the shower and the quality of the workmanship. They all say they’ve never seen anything like it.”

**For more information contact  
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