

AT-HOME STEAM SHOWER OR SAUNA?



The Differences and How to Choose
What is Right for You

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PLANNING A GLORIOUS BATHROOM

Over the past generation of homeownership, the once humble bathroom has muscled aside the living room and the kitchen to emerge as arguably the most important room in the house. Anyone planning a remodel—whether to raise the resale value of your home or to get more enjoyment out of living in it—would be wise to turn attention first to the bathroom. And if you're already planning a glorious bathroom remodel, you certainly need to consider the most desirable of bathroom amenities: steam showers and saunas.

Gone are the days when a big jetted tub represented the pinnacle of bathroom luxury. (That's so 1990s.) Sure, everybody loves bubbles, but the unfortunate reality is that jacuzzi tubs require enormous amounts of water and a lot of energy to heat. Taking king tub's place in remodeling projects around the world are steam showers and saunas, which provide all the indisputable wellness and relaxation benefits of exposing your body to heat, in a much more efficient and effective package.

SAUNAS & STEAM SHOWERS:

What's the difference?



You've probably referred to the steam room at a fancy hotel as a "sauna." In casual usage, the words are often interchanged—you say potato, I say potahto, right? But the truth is that saunas and steam showers are different beasts, and nobody actually says potahto.

If you've narrowed your home remodel wish list down to these two options, you're on the right track. Now let's help you decide which one is right for you.

“IT’S NOT THE HEAT, IT’S THE HUMIDITY.”



Invented by clever Finns trying to survive winter in Finland, the sauna produces a dry heat created by an electric (or gas) stove that heats a pile of rocks, which in turn emanate that heat throughout a cedar-wood enclosure. The walls of the sauna absorb the already scant moisture, making for an atmosphere of about 10% humidity, which induces perspiration and enables the body to tolerate temperatures never seen outside Phoenix. Saunas are frequently kept above 150 degrees.

Steam showers, by contrast, boil water in a steam generator located outside the room and pump the resulting steam into a sealed environment. The temperature is lower than in a sauna, typically about 110 degrees, but the moist heat creates a feeling of cozy, permeating warmth. Instead of wood, the walls of a steam shower are ceramic, glass, marble, or another non-porous material to keep the humidity sealed into the room for the user's benefit.

Think of it as a choice between the desert and the rain forest.



INSTALLATION:

Steam showers and saunas are customizable to a variety of shapes and sizes ranging from standing-room-only to cavernous, suitable for any home from the most modest condominium to Kanye's Malibu mansion.

Saunas are generally assembled from a pre-fabricated kit. They are free-standing and must be situated in a room large enough to accommodate them—most often a basement or spare room. They can also be installed in an enclosure outside the home, which means you might find yourself stepping outside in order to access the sauna. This isn't necessarily a bad thing if, like the people of Finland, you want to be able to leap naked from your sauna directly into a giant snowbank. (Don't knock it till you've tried it.) Do-it-yourselfers will not find sauna construction too difficult to manage, but a professional should be hired to handle the electrical wiring (or the gas lines) to power the sauna heater.



A steam shower, by contrast, need not take up extra space in your home because the enclosure occupies the same footprint as a standard shower—and serves both purposes. An existing shower enclosure can be modified to accommodate steam shower installation; an experienced professional should be hired to make sure the plumbing and electrical lines are properly installed. Steam showers can range in size from the spacious rooms you'll find in a hotel or spa to a 3X3 footprint. The steam generator varies in size, but they can usually be housed in a nearby cabinet, under a sink, in an insulated attic, or in an adjacent room.

Both saunas and steam showers are relatively trouble-free and easy to maintain.





THE FINE ART OF *Feeling Good*

Heat is good for the body, mind, and spirit. Both saunas and steam showers have been shown to promote circulation and muscle relaxation. Both will get you shvitzing healthfully, providing detox for the skin and clearing your pores as the serene environment clears your head.

But there are differences. In the dry heat of a sauna, you'll get damp with sweat, which then evaporates, leaving residue on your skin—for this reason, a sauna is best followed by a conventional shower. In a steam bath, additional water precipitates on your skin, which helps purge the filth and mire of day-to-day life, while also moisturizing dry skin.

Steam also has known respiratory benefits, relieving congestion, and clearing sinuses. When you come down with the dreaded head cold, you'll find yourself crawling into the steam shower instead of crawling into bed.



THE SWEET SMELL *of Wellness*

Tricking out your steam shower with amenities may just be the most fun you'll have remodeling—even better than choosing a tile pattern.

[Aromatherapy](#) is a good option to consider. An aromatherapy system vaporizes essential oils into your steam via infusion within the steam. It's a simple add-on that provides head-swimmingly pleasurable aromatic enhancement to the experience of steaming. Choose eucalyptus for an invigorating morning shower, lavender for a calming evening wind-down, or peppermint for a brisk blast of refreshing focus.

Or engage additional senses, such as using [MusicTherapy](#) to bring rich sounds into the steam shower environment. For some, that will mean rocking out in the morning via their favorite FM station or Bluetooth-enabled device, while others will choose nature sounds, spa-inspired music or even guided meditations, to deepen relaxation and increase feelings of wellbeing.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Remodeling a bathroom should be equal parts creativity and pragmatism. Think carefully about what amenities are going to pay for themselves in resale value while also boosting your quality of life. The power of heat is a boon to wellness and happiness in every facet of your life—but how to go about it requires thought, research, and perhaps a conversation with an expert. Below are some resources to get you started.

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