
DIY Shower Remodel

Everything you need to know before starting your project.



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Frequently Asked Questions

Solid Surface Wall Panels



Homeowners are looking for better alternatives to what's commonly being used (tile and plastic fiberglass inserts) but aren't too familiar with the options available. Traditional tile showers and one-piece fiberglass tub/shower inserts can look good after they are installed but the maintenance and their looks long term are less than ideal.

With your crazy schedule you may be hoping that there is a better option to get a nice looking shower you won't have to be messing around cleaning all the time (after all you've got kids and parents to take care of and you want to carve out some fun time – imagine that!). Let's take a look at the 9 questions frequently asked about solid surface shower wall panels.

1 What is solid surface and why is it a good choice for shower wall surround panels?

[Solid surface wall panels](#) are thick engineered stone panels which are solid and consistently colored throughout. It is a man-made stone and epoxy aggregate which is durable and dense. This product is used for shower and tub wall panels because it is waterproof, nice looking and easy to clean.

2 How difficult is it to clean solid surface wall panels?

These panels are offered with gloss and matte finishes. The gloss finish is made with high speed buffers in the manufacturing process and are smooth and easy to wipe off. You can use a cloth, sponge or squeegee along with your favorite non-abrasive cleaner to wipe off the surface of the walls. The gloss finish is easier to clean than the matte finish.

3 How does the thickness of these panels compare to acrylic or fiberglass wall surrounds?

One of the biggest advantages of [solid surface shower or tub panels](#) is they are extremely durable and come in a deep 3/8" thickness. Recently I got a call from a Maintenance Supervisor of a University in Virginia who originally called for pricing on 1/8" thick acrylic wall panels for men's dormitories. Since I've got two boys of my own (ages 21 and 17) I know that TLC (tender loving care) and bathrooms don't go together with guys of this age group. I recommended the thicker solid surface units because they are 3x thicker than acrylic, are colored throughout and are virtually indestructible. These panels also make a good long term solution for rental properties because they are built like a tank to withstand the abuse of even the most difficult tenants.

4 Are solid surface wall panels cheaper than fiberglass inserts? Are they less expensive than ceramic tile?

It would be excellent if solid surface wall panels were cheaper than fiberglass one piece inserts, but that is not the case if you are comparing the initial purchase price of these products. If you look at the longevity of the materials (see FAQ #5 below) you can be ahead cost-wise with the better product if you are planning to stay in the property for a while. If you're looking to sell your home the less expensive product may be better.

It can be a bit more difficult to compare the costs of ceramic tile to solid surface because tile product costs and installation patterns can vary greatly depending on what you choose. In general, the initial material plus labor costs between tile and solid surface is pretty comparable.

5 What's the guarantee with solid surface shower and tub wall panels?

Lifetime – enough said.

6 Can these shower wall panels work for a custom sized tub or shower?

This is a huge benefit to a solid surface system vs. a standard store-bought fiberglass kit. You can not only get individual panels for virtually any sized space – but with sizes up to 100" wide by 100" high you can install these panels without worrying about seams between panels (this can eliminate the chance of water penetrating where panels are joined together). If you do get large panels make sure they will fit through the door.

7 Can I use any type of glass enclosure or shower pan system with solid surface panels?

Yes – it doesn't matter if you want to use a framed, unframed or frameless glass enclosure or even a [glass block shower](#) system. The panels can be installed on any base (acrylic, fiberglass, tile pan). To have a completely consistent system pair up the solid surface panels [with a solid surface shower pan](#) (these bases come in standard sizes and custom shapes).

8 Do I need special experience to install solid surface wall panels? Can I DIY this project?

I estimate 50% of the solid surface systems our company sells are purchased by homeowners who are looking to do it themselves. As long as you have standard carpentry saws and drills you will be able to do this job. There are several installation videos available to guide you through the steps of this project.



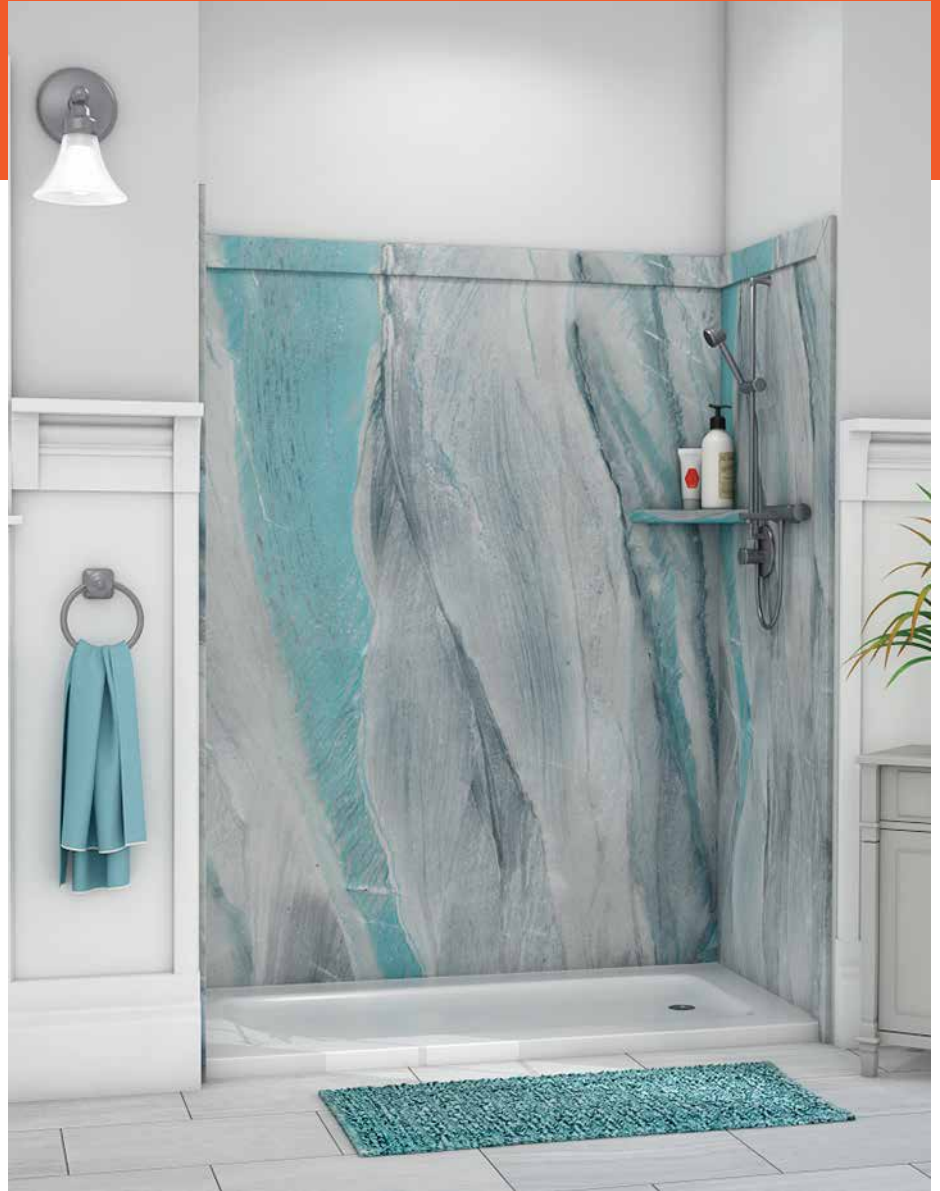
[Watch Our Video](#)

9 What color and textures are available?

With 56 standard colors (in solid and granite options) it will be easy to match your bathroom décor. You can get smooth, slate, stone tile or even subway tile patterns. The range of colors and textures makes these panels a good option in traditional, transitional or contemporary bathroom designs.

7 Tips to save time and money

Shower Kit Checklist



You're excited to begin your DIY shower remodeling project but there is nothing more frustrating than realizing you're unprepared to do the remodeling job. If you're starting a bathroom remodeling project, you want to make sure your (supposedly) DIY-friendly [shower remodeling kit](#) has everything you need so you're not scrambling all over town trying to find the right parts. Check out this checklist to simplify your project and cut your completion time.

1 Get the right shower pan

Buying DIY shower wall panels without having the right shower pan is like framing the first floor of your home without building the foundation first. The shower pan is the structure of the enclosure. You'll want to figure out what base to use and how the shower wall panels and backer board will be placed in relation to this base.

2 Choose the right drain kit and plumbing line

For a proper shower installation you'll need a 2" plumbing line connected to your PVC or cast iron shower drain (note – if your converting a tub into a shower you'll need to change your 1 ½" line to a 2" line). After you've got your plumbing line set you'll want to put on your checklist to pick out your drain cover.

3 Determine if backer boards are needed for your wall panels

When you're buying DIY shower wall panels you've got to first know what (if anything) is needed to back up your walls. There are also some wall panels kits which don't need any backer board because they are designed to go direct to the studs. Know how you need to back up your wall panels before installing any backer boards.

4 Choose the right shower wall panels

There is no one right shower wall panel. I'll be a bit political and say "it depends" on what you like, budget and how long you want the panels to last. I would stay away from cheap fiberglass or multi-density fiberboard panels the guy with the orange smock might show you. Some fun options which are popular are faux marble shower panels, engineered stone solid surface panels.

5 Get the right adhesives and sealant

Having the right adhesive and sealant can be critical to the ultimate success of your shower. The right adhesive protects the panels from coming off or water not getting behind them. A sealant which is not color matched to the wall panels will make the joints stand out (not in a flattering way) and distract from the wall surrounds.

6 Don't forget the glass

Glass enclosures can be a bit more tricky than they may appear at first. There are options in the type of framing – including framed, semi-frameless and completely frameless glass. As you have less framing the glass will get thicker and the price will be higher. You can either get your glass package with “standard” glass which is designed to fit the base (this will be more cost-effective) or have a glass supplier custom make a glass enclosure for you.

7 Think about recessed and niches first

Don't install your wall panels and then think, “where are we going to put our soap, shampoos, razors, and all my wife's showering stuff (that I don't even know what it is!)? If you have a small shower you've got to be strategic and use your (kind of hidden) space wisely. Use wall cavities and install recessed niches so you don't take away any of the valuable shower space with storage.

Conclusion

Installing a DIY shower kit should be done like the Boy Scout's motto – “be prepared in mind and body to do you duty.” While your body might not be as ready today as it was as a kid, your mind can and should be sharper. When it comes to your home improvement projects you're now a DIY veteran! When doing a shower project remember to use this 7-part DIY shower checklist so you won't be unprepared and caught with your remodeling pants down.

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Pros and Cons of Buying at Local Home Improvement Centers

Where to
Buy Your
DIY Shower
Panels



Pros

1 Price

If you know exactly the materials you need, a home improvement center may be able to offer you the best price. Since they buy in larger volume, they buy at low prices and can pass those savings on to you.

2 Same Day Pick Up

When you make the decision to tackle a project like this, many times you want to start TODAY. For a simple, standard job – you might be able to pick up the kit you need the same day you get the idea to redo your shower.

3 Home Improvement Centers Are Very Easy To Find

You know exactly where your closest Home Depot or Lowe's is... but do you know where your closest and most reliable independent dealer is?

Cons

1 Lack of Experience

Buying from a company who specializes in [wall panels](#) can enable you to talk to someone in depth about options, technical installation details and the advantages and disadvantages of various systems.

2 One Size Does Not Fit All

Home center stores stock what will fly off the shelf and earn a nice profit for them. Since special sizes don't sell well they won't be stocked. When you deal with specialized companies who sell (and install) [both standard and custom showers](#) on a daily basis your funky design is actually more fun for them than just selling another standard system.

3 Lack of Project Knowledge

An experienced dealer will know the rest of the items and things you need for your specific project – shower pan, drains, etc. An inexperienced home center employee will not be knowledgeable.

4 Customer service

After you leave the store, your transaction is over. An experienced dealer can answer your [technical and design questions](#) at any time.

For more info, photos, and more... [read the full post here](#).

