

A \$3,000 Bathtub? It's an Emotional Thing

Marketing green upgrades



By Michael Chandler | May 13, 2009



"What's logic got to do with it?" (with apologies to Tina Turner)
Image Credit: Seth Tice-Lewis

I have a not-so-dirty secret. Every house I have built for the last three years (except one) has a bathtub that cost well upwards of \$3,000.

What is the payback on a \$3,000 bathtub? Is it more or less than the payback on a \$6,000 solar water heater? Are either of these truly rational purchases?

What is the value of the enhancement to your equanimity and marital harmony from that iconic bathtub? Do I calculate the payback on that solar panel based on today's energy cost or that in five or ten years? What about resale value?

Seriously, what has logic got to do with it? It's an emotional thing.

People buy as much green as they can justify—but they work to justify as much as they can afford.

I can work with that.



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It's not about the tub guys

My point here was that we shouldn't try to justify green building options to our customers based on logic because they want them from an emotional rather than logical rationale. As builders we should stop playing along with "pay-back calculations" and present green upgrades from the same emotional perspective that drives the decision to have a luxury bathtub, perhaps with the additional incentive of the future re-sale value. (Though I hate that argument too.)

That said, I do encourage people to buy \$3,000 bathtubs because I believe in living with exuberance. It is common knowledge that most of these are used less than six times a year. But they are iconic in that they represent far more than they embody. To some they mean "I've been schlepping the kids to school and practice for twelve years and now that they are all off to college, I'm going to enjoy a long soak with a good book." To some they mean a commitment to put a new spark in their marriage. To some they are a soothing retreat from a stressful life, cheaper than therapy.

But the really great thing about an iconic tub is that once you've had a couple good soaks just the sight of the tub is enough to trigger a relaxation response. It's bigger than what it is.

Beth and I design a few of these iconic touch points into every house to tend to the emotional health of the family that will live there. We'll put a "family shrine" somewhere to hold photos that celebrate the family having fun and reaching milestones together. and yes, a stone fireplace, with an air-tight RSF Opel fireplace insert with outside combustion air (often tied into the under-slab radon mitigation system.) and a vaulted wood ceiling in the master bedroom to heighten the experience of lying down for a good night's sleep. And we install solar water heaters so you can feel good about filling that eighty-gallon tub with heat from the sun.

It's not a machine for living, it's a home. It's an emotional investment and the biggest purchase most of us will make. As we work to encourage our clients to make greener decisions we need to focus on that emotional benefit.