

Kitchen & Bath

Quick Tiled Shower Bench

by David Sorg

Some time ago, I built a large walk-in shower with an open, door-free design and lots of decorative tile work. I wanted to install a tiled bench in the shower, too, but I didn't want it to detract from the shower's visual impact or to create a waterproofing headache. So, instead of building the bench frame with pressure-treated lumber, cement board, and membrane, I decided to try Better-Bench (Innovis Corp., 800/382-9653, www.innoviscorp.com), a preformed product I thought might save a lot of time and aggravation.

Available in a triangular shape for corner mounting or an adjustable rectangular shape, Better-Bench is a self-supporting aluminum frame that can be used in both wet and dry areas. The seat attaches to most substrates;

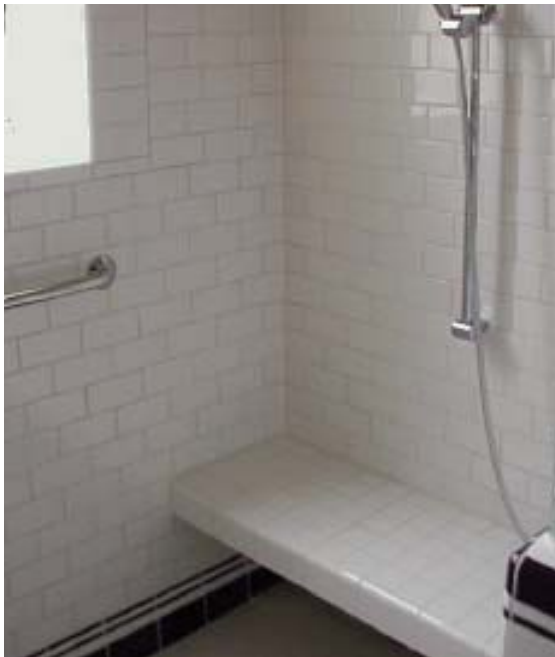


Figure 1. Installed after the rest of the shower had been completed, this tiled bench is supported by a lightweight aluminum frame; it required neither extra framing nor a waterproofing membrane.

it can be installed either before or after finish tile; and according to the manufacturer, it has a 400-pound load capacity, even with hollow wall anchors.

Once the frame is in place, it's filled with mortar, then tiled conventionally (see Figure 1).

Installation is simple. Although the bench frame can be installed early in the construction sequence, I waited until after I had tiled, grouted, and sealed the entire shower. It just seemed much easier to add it later in the process, when it wouldn't get in the way of tiling; also, this approach eliminated any need to trim tiles around it. While the manufacturer claims that the bench doesn't need solid backing — hollow wall anchors are actually supplied with the unit — I knew when I was framing the shower that I would eventually be installing it, so I added plenty of 2-by blocking. The bench itself is impervious to water and moisture, so it doesn't require any kind of special membrane protection.

The 14½-inch-deep rectangular frame (about \$120) adjusts from 33½ inches to 62 inches long, but any span greater than 36 inches requires the manufacturer's midspan corbel support (about \$42; Figure 2, next page). Since my shower is 48 inches wide, I needed to use the corbel, which is basically the company's triangular shelf modified slightly to accept mortar on both sides.

After determining the height of my bench, I held the frame in position on the wall (allowing for a slope away from the back wall of ¼ inch per foot), then marked its outline and the mounting holes on the tile. With those marks for reference, I located the position of the midpoint corbel and marked its mounting holes. Then I drilled holes through the tile and substrate into the blocking — holes large enough for the stainless steel lag bolts I would use to fasten the frame and corbel into place.

Next, I mounted the midspan support corbel, injecting caulk into the holes before fastening it to the wall with lag bolts. I knew it would be easier to access the corbel before adding the bench, so I went ahead and

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Figure 2. Bench spans of greater than 36 inches require a triangular corbel. To simplify tile installation, the author filled the corbel with mortar and tiled it before installing the bench top.



Figure 3. Measuring 14½ inches wide by 3½ inches deep, the bench's aluminum frame adjusts from 33½ to 62 inches long. While it can be attached to walls with hollow wall anchors and adhesive caulk, the author used lag bolts that fasten to blocking installed during framing.



Figure 4. Once the frame was installed, the author filled the tray with deck mud and screeded off the excess to create a level setting bed for the tile. After setting and grouting the tile, he sealed the perimeter of the bench with a color-matched caulk.

filled both sides with mortar, allowed it to set for a couple of hours, then tiled it. (I waited to grout until I'd tiled the rest of the bench.)

Finally, I installed the bench frame (Figure 3), dumped a couple of buckets of deck mud into the tray (Figure 4), screeded it, and let it set up for a few hours before tiling the bench with thinset. Two days later, I grouted the tile and caulked the edges where the bench and corbel met the wall, using a caulk that matched the grout color.

The bench was a fast and very straightforward installation. The slowest part was my finicky (and tasteful, I like to think) arrangement of tiles on the corbel, which is now nearly invisible but makes me smile whenever I glance its way. In use, the bench feels absolutely solid, and I'm confident it won't leak.

David Sorg is a professional wood finisher in Denver.

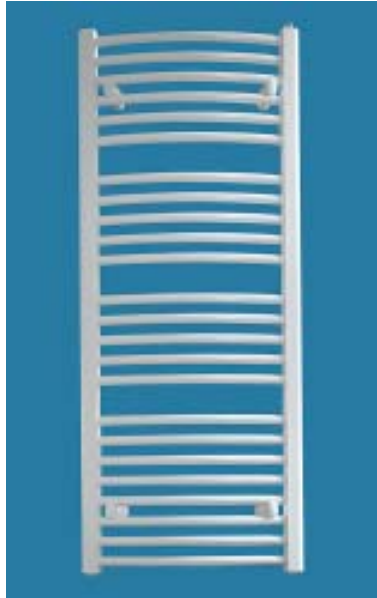
Kitchen & Bath | Towel Warmers



Instant Indulgence.

Available in both electric and hydronic models, *WarmiTowel* units add luxury to any bathroom. Plus, by keeping towels dry, they discourage mildew and funky odors. Customers can choose from a variety of styles and metallic finishes; prices start at \$599.

Sussman Lifestyle Group, 800/767-8326, www.mrsteam.com.



Paint to Match. The powder-coated steel *DiaNorm Noblesse NB* can be ordered in an array of factory colors — or simply painted to match the bathroom decor. The water-heated unit packs a thermostatic control and comes in three sizes; prices range from \$436 to \$698.

Heatlines, 603/437-1667, www.heatlines.com.



Preheatable. With a programmable thermostat as a standard feature, electrically heated *Janda* towel radiators provide homeowners with a nice warm bathroom whenever they need it — including first thing in the morning. The units come in three sizes and offer eight heat settings, seven-day programming, and six on/off sessions per day. With a painted finish, they cost \$899, \$999, or \$1,049, depending on size; metallic finishes cost more.

Zehnder America, 603/422-6700, www.zehnderamerica.com.



Roll Out the Wraps. If the bathroom already has a radiant floor, you don't need a wall-hung towel warmer overheating the place. Instead, borrow a great idea from the kitchen and install a *Warming Drawer*. That way, your clients can keep their buns toasty in both rooms. The drawer costs \$794.

Dacor, 800/772-7778, www.dacor.com.

Kitchen & Bath | Cabinet Lighting

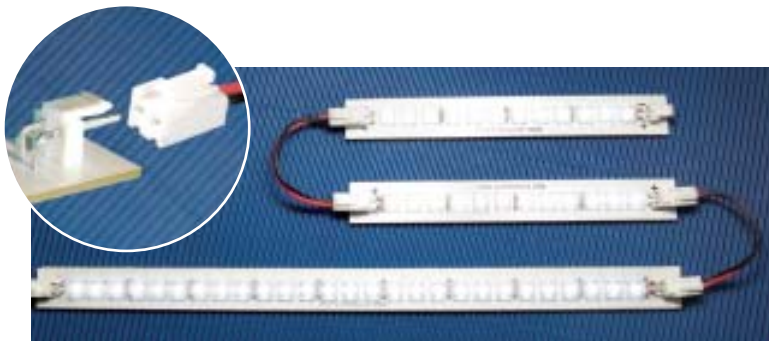
Easy Connection. This *Xenon Light Bar* takes a lot of the hassle out of hookup. “Poke-home” connectors eliminate wire nuts, and end-to-end interconnectors make daisy-chaining multiple fixtures a literal snap. The low-voltage lamps dim with standard incandescent devices. Units come in one-, two-, three-, four-, and six-lamp configurations; prices range from \$85 to \$180.

W.A.C. Lighting, 800/526-2588, www.waclighting.com.



Small and Adaptable. Whether you want to light the inside of a display cabinet, highlight a toekick, or task-light a countertop, the *Lumere* system promises to adapt. Unit lengths from 4 to 24 inches suit small spaces, and gap connectors allow cornering and custom spacing. The fixtures use low-voltage xenon lamps and cost \$9 to \$52.

Task Lighting, 800/445-6404, www.tasklighting.com.



Long-Lasting Light. The *Super White Hi-Flux LED Light Strip* runs on 12 volts and produces little or no heat. A 24-inch strip consumes a mere 2.8 watts; lamp life expectancy is 100,000 hours or 10 years, says the maker. The interconnectable strips measure 1/2 inch by 3/4 inch and come in 6-, 12-, and 24-inch lengths; they cost \$14.50, \$27.50, and \$48.50, respectively. Power adapters cost \$18 to \$88, depending on the total wattage installed.

LEDtronics, 800/579-4875, www.ledtronics.com.

Light Fare. Perfect for lighting a kitchen island or countertop, *Ambiance Line-Voltage Pendants* deliver a warm glow of color while spilling a milky splash of light directly below. The glass fixtures can be used as part of the Ambiance rail system or independently; they come in a variety of patterns and colors for \$170 apiece.

Sea Gull Lighting, 800/347-5483, www.seagulllighting.com.

