

the great escape

The winning bathroom in this year's HIA housing awards transformed a dark and oppressive room into an opulent space. Amanda Williamson reports.

The winning bathroom in the HIA Bathroom of the Year Award 2010 proves the old adage that if at first you don't succeed, try again. The owners of the property had built the house several years earlier, but as soon as they moved in realised that the dark, oppressive bathroom was a mistake. Determined to rectify it, and armed with a very detailed list of wants, owners Martyn and Judy commissioned Bubbles Bathrooms of Victoria to design and build a bathroom that was an opulent, elegant and warm 'place to escape and relax'.

The award judges were effusive in the superlatives used to describe the winning entry. They said that the quality of workmanship was 'as close to perfect' as they had seen, and singled out the 'meticulous attention to fine detail' the design showed.

This wouldn't have come as a surprise to the owner of Bubbles Bathrooms, Owen Barnes, who says he has practically lost count of the number of HIA awards his company has won in the past 10 years, estimating it to be at least 31.

He puts the company's success down to being well established in the market and 'therefore getting lots of good quality jobs that challenge our designers and tradespeople to do things that are cutting edge and very different all the time'.

The homeowners wanted a large shower, spa bath, double vanity basins and maximum storage, all in warm tones. Owen, a qualified bathroom and kitchen designer and licenced builder (although he rarely designs now), worked closely with them and Paul Hutchison, one of the regular designers at Bubbles Bathrooms. Together they came up with the mixed travertine tiles that act as a wall feature between the floating left- and right-shaped hand basins in white stone, and in the recessed shelf behind the Hoesch Foster double-ended spa bath, which highlighted the different zones of the bathroom.

'Basically it's "less becoming more" (with) shower screens now'

The judges said the finish of this feature, where the exposed end grain is 'masked up' to ensure no grout could penetrate the unfilled cross-cut travertine, was typical of the detail found with Bubbles Bathrooms. They also agreed the ▶

Below: Owen Barnes (left) and Sheriffah Barnes (middle) from Bubbles Bathrooms with Tony Rusten – group marketing manager, GWA International.