

LINERS CUT COST OF BATHTUB RESTORATION

BY TYRUS REIMAN

Lightweight, acrylic installations from Montreal's Bath-Magic reduce the difficulty of replacing worn out tubs at about a third of the price

When a hotel bathtub is chipped or discolored, replacement costs include materials and labor as well as lost room sales. The sooner a bath renovation is complete, the sooner the room becomes a moneymaker again.

The average cost of a bathtub replacement is \$1,500 to \$2,000. Until recently, the alternatives to replacing worn bathtubs were temporary, cosmetic solutions.

But a Montreal company, Bath-Magic Inc. has come up with the idea of installing an acrylic liner over the old tub rather than reglazing it or replacing the old model.

liners can be installed in about two hours for about a third of the cost of replacing the tub. It takes two days to a week for Bath-Magic to bring an acrylic liner from its factory in Montreal to a customer. No alterations to existing walls and plumbing fixtures are normally required.

Bill Scott, director of technical services at the Inn on the Park, a Four Seasons Hotel in Toronto, believes Bath-Magic's liners are a good option to reglazing old tubs. He notes each bathtub in the Inn is framed by a two-inch solid partition making regular tub replacements difficult and expensive. "In order to change a tub, it is necessary to destroy the tile and knock out the wall which is an inch and a half of sand and cement on one side, and grouting and plaster on the other," he says.

The Inn on the Park has tried reglazing old tubs, but Scott says the epoxy eventually chips and yellows. "We weren't satisfied with that."

The Venture Inn in downtown Toronto had a similar experience with reglazing tubs, says Blair Smith, assistant manager. "We were getting a lot of complaints from our guests," he concedes.

Cotton came up with the idea for relining an existing tub while renovating his home. "I thought it would be a couple of hours work on a Saturday afternoon," he explains, "but I ended up one week later calling in professional help. I just couldn't believe what I got into."

With a background in thermoplastics Cotton pushed his idea for a tub liner into prototype development. Bath-Magic was incorporated in 1984, and it quickly gained credibility with its installations in Ottawa's Chateau Laurier Hotel.

"The costs were going much higher at the Chateau Laurier because of the weight of the original tubs and the type of installation which they were faced with," says Cotton.

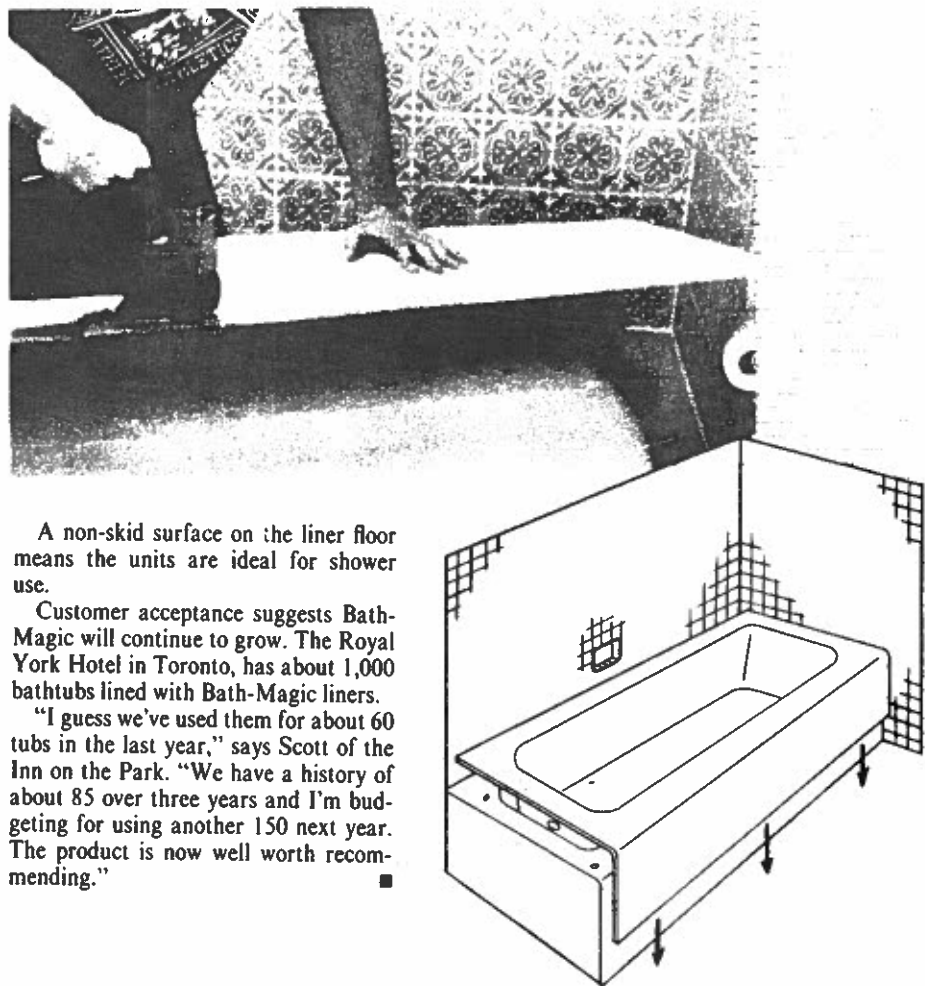
By 1986, the company was expanding production with work on government housing, achieving economies of scale that led to the million-dollar benchmark in sales in 1987.

Most hotel tubs look alike, but a variety of moulds are required to match every form in the market. Cotton's brother Glenn is another partner. He says the Bath-Magic prototype took eight months to develop. From it, more than 100 models have been recreated in acrylic moulds, representing about 80 percent of the varieties in hotels today.

A Bath-Magic liner is formed from the same type of acrylic used in whirlpool spas. Deep lustre, ease of maintenance and thermal resistance keeps tub water warm longer

A conservative estimate for the cost of a liner installation is one third the cost of a traditional tub replacement.

"As far as material goes for a tub replacement, you've got to replace walls, tile and plumbing attachments," says Glen Cotton. "But with our product, you get a brand-new bathtub without disturbing existing plumbing, tiles or floors. And you've got a tub with a lot of features over and above a conventional tub made of steel and enamel."



A non-skid surface on the liner floor means the units are ideal for shower use.

Customer acceptance suggests Bath-Magic will continue to grow. The Royal York Hotel in Toronto, has about 1,000 bathtubs lined with Bath-Magic liners.

"I guess we've used them for about 60 tubs in the last year," says Scott of the Inn on the Park. "We have a history of about 85 over three years and I'm budgeting for using another 150 next year. The product is now well worth recommending."

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