

Shower Enclosures and Screens

The use of shower enclosures, wet rooms, and shower units has seen rapid growth over recent years. The range of available products is astounding and the choice for the consumer is better than ever before.

Enclosures come in all shapes and sizes. Space saving enclosures with 'bi-fold' door types are popular as are the relatively new 'walk-in' styles with added shelf space. Also increasingly popular are shower cabins which are fully enclosed include such luxuries and body jets and steam generators. The price of these systems has been falling over recent years.

Likewise the installation of 'wet rooms' or wet zones' has been creating interest. Here the entire bathroom is fully sealed so that excess spray from the shower simply drains away into a specially constructed drainage system. The entire bathroom is sealed.

Shower units and controls are becoming increasingly stylish. The 'white box on the wall' is no longer the only choice for a consumer. Instantaneous electric showers are now available in particularly attractive designs using glass and slate fascias and other materials to enhance the look. Thermostatically controlled shower mixers take the biggest share of the mixer market – the added safety benefits have helped increase their popularity. Digital mixers, which can be in pumped or un-pumped versions are also seeing growth.

The use of separate shower enclosures and shower units has gone through a period of rapid growth over the last decade. A wide variety of designs, methods of construction, glass thicknesses, shapes and dimensions are now available and the choice for the consumer is better than ever before.

Most bathroom sizes and layouts can be accommodated. Different enclosure shapes and door closings are available and the most recent designs of 'walk in' or 'walk through' products together with 'wet rooms' and 'wet zones' further broaden the choice.

Enclosures and screens can meet a broad range of consumer requirements and budgets.

Features and Benefits

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Benefit</i>
Hinged screen and/or panels	Provide easy access in confined areas. Ease of maintenance and cleaning.
Outward opening door	Wide and easy access to shower area where bathroom space is not an issue.
Rigid screens/panels	Strong permanent structure giving added use to baths and enclosures.
Sliding or inward folding door	Easy access to shower with no loss of floor space in the bathroom. Doesn't infringe on the rest of the bathroom.



Shower cabinets	All in one showering units which combine all parts of the shower - integrated as one purchase. All factory fitted. Provides a complete showering facility.
Shower screen with a shower head mounted over the bath	Uses existing facilities so there is no requirement for a separate tray. Inexpensive and good for confined spaces.
Toughened safety glass	Essential. In the event of an accident the glass will shatter but stay whole so no sharp slivers of glass are revealed
Two-way opening door	Opens inwards and outwards, offering complete flexibility for access.

Checklist: What to look out for/ things to ask about

- Adjustability – how much adjustability is in the design to allow for out-of-true walls? How fine is the adjustability?
- Bath screen – does it pivot through 180 degrees for easy cleaning and access?
- Bounce out – what seals are provided to minimise 'bounce out' of water from a powerful shower?
- Cleaning – do the door panels swing back with clip-out hinges to allow cleaning?
- Cleaning - Glass surface – does the glass have an easy-clean high-gloss glass coating? (sometimes called nano-technology)
- Cleaning – how easy is the product to access for cleaning?
- Cover caps – do the open ends of the extruded aluminium profiles have cover caps?
- Company pedigree – for how long has the manufacturer and retailer been trading. Is the manufacturer a member of any trade organisation such as the BMA?
- Customer service – what does the manufacturer and retailer offer?
- Door closure – what mechanism is supplied? Is it magnetic or mechanical? How good is the water seal?



- Door handles – how are they designed, are they practical or purely decorative and can they be cleaned easily?
- Door hinges – what material is used in manufacture? Stainless steel, alloy, brass, steel?
- Door seals - what seals are provided to maximise water tightness, particularly when used with a powerful shower?
- Fixings – are they visible or invisible for a sleeker look?
- Frame finish – is it chrome, silver matt, silver pearl, polished silver, white? Other finishes? You will need to know the finish for cleaning purposes.
- Frame type – is the enclosure fully framed, semi framed or frameless?

- Glass decoration – is the glass available with modesty decoration?
- Glass quality – What British or European Standards is the glass manufactured to?
- Glass blade – does the price include a glass wiping blade?
- Glass thickness – what are the dimensions? Is glass thickness engineered to the support frame?
- Guarantee – what length of warranty and what conditions does the manufacturers give?
- Hinge mechanism – does it rise and fall for maximum possible water seal?
- Panel height – what are the glass dimensions? Are they suitable for your household? Will the enclosure fit in your room?
- Shower tray – does the enclosure come with its own shower tray? Is it included in the price? Will it fit a standard tray in the market or must it have its own bespoke tray? Will the enclosure fit direct to the floor in a wet room?
- Sliding door rollers – how are they designed: metal roller bearings, nylon bearing, sliding metal on metal? How are the sliders lubricated?
- Spare parts – what is available and for how long in the life of the product?
- Towel rail – is one provided/integrated with the enclosure?
- Water seals – how good do they do their job and are they replaceable in the future if they wear out?
- Water tightness – is the enclosure good enough for a power shower?

Frequently asked questions

Q Where do I start? There is such a wide variety of designs, styles and prices. How on earth do I start to look for a new enclosure?

A It can be daunting – but it can also be fun and very rewarding when you have chosen a new shower enclosure. First work out how much space you've got in your bathroom and where do you plan to put the new enclosure? Then decide what style of enclosure is best to fit your space. Then set a budget. Next find local showrooms and go and look and feel the enclosures on display. You will soon get to know the differences between the models available and the respective price ranges. Then decide on a manufacturer and supplier and a fitter and strike a deal! Send for brochures, on-line, from www.bathroom-association.org.uk

Q I have an opening between two walls of 830mm - What width of door do I need to purchase?

A Telescopic profiles fitted on the frame of most enclosures allow you to achieve minimum and maximum widths. Check the width of your opening carefully at floor, waist and eye level to determine the tolerances necessary. Your retailer will guide you to the manufacturers' brochures which conform to these dimensions.



Q I have obstructions to the left of the door opening of our proposed shower enclosure. Which type of door would be suitable?

A Any obstruction makes it advisable to purchase an enclosure with either an inwardly folding door or a sliding door. Neither of these open outwards and will therefore not be affected by the obstructions.

Q I have a pumped shower and I'm considering purchasing a bath screen. Would this be sufficiently watertight for a powerful shower?

A No - it is not advisable to use a pumped or powerful shower over a bath with a simple bath screen. Owing to the volume of water and spray created there will always be spilled water in your bathroom. For a power shower over a bath you will need to purchase a special over-bath enclosure which is more water tight.



Q My bathroom is tiny and has a sloping ceiling. I would like a shower enclosure but nothing seems suitable to fit the available space. Any ideas?

A Yes. Although a standard enclosure may not be suitable, some manufacturers will build a special or bespoke enclosure for you. Unusual dimensions and awkwardly shaped glass can be accommodated.

Q Are frameless enclosures safe?

A Provided that the product is engineered correctly with the correct glass thickness, robust hinge mechanisms and other supports you should have no issues over safety.

Q What do the words 'framed' and 'semi-framed' mean?

A The terms describe how much of the enclosure is encased in a frame, typically aluminium. A fully framed enclosure will have a frame around the four sides of the glass. A semi or part framed enclosure will usually have a frame only on the vertical sides of the glass.

Shower Trays

Shower trays, which form the base of a shower enclosure, come in a wide variety of styles, dimensions and materials and are made to match the wide variety shower enclosures available.

Materials include ceramic, enamelled steel, laminated wood, marble, resin stone (sometimes called cast stone), reinforced acrylic sheet, acrylic capped ABS sheet, and acrylic-capped high density foamed resin. Plastics technology is developing all the time and there may be other materials on the horizon.

Traditional trays are available in a ceramic material called 'fireclay.' These are thick-walled and robust and very heavy. Almost as equally heavy are trays manufactured from 'resin stone' - this is a careful blend of resins and chalky stone minerals capped with a highly polished 'gel coat'. Lighter weight trays are available in reinforced acrylic or acrylic-capped ABS.

Trays may be high or low walled and with or without adjustable legs and side panels. Some are supplied complete with waste fittings and there may be a choice of high gloss or silk surface finish.

So the choice for the consumer is huge but generally speaking it is best to pick your new tray at the same time that you buy your new shower enclosure. You need to ensure that the two are fully compatible.



Features and Benefits

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Benefit</i>
Low height tray	Low walls create a very low step which aids access to the shower space.
Riser tray	Adjustable legs allow infinite adjustment of the tray to allow for uneven floors. Allows easy access to the waste fitting.
Slip resist surface	Can help reduce slipping. Check the manufacturers claims.
Top access waste	Allows easy cleaning of the waste fitting which may have become clogged
Upstands	Help create a better water-tight seal within the enclosure

Checklist: What to look out for/ things to ask about

- Cleaning – how easy is the product to access for cleaning?
- Company pedigree – for how long has the manufacturer and retailer been trading. Is the manufacturer a member of any trade organisation such as the BMA?
- Compatibility – ensure the dimensions of your chosen tray match the dimensions of your enclosure. Sometime enclosures come complete with their own tray for a guaranteed fit.
- Customer service – what does the manufacturer and retailer offer?
- Durability - how durable is the tray surface? Compare the different materials and choose the best to suit your particular application.



- Fittings supplied - does the tray come complete with the waste fitting and side panels (if necessary)?
- Guarantee – what length of warranty and what conditions does the manufacturers give?
- Safety – compare the claims which the manufacturer makes regarding the effectiveness of the slip resistant floor pattern it supplies.
- Spare parts – what is available and for how long in the life of the product?
- Water outlet – will the waste cope with the amount of water being sent through it from a power shower?
- Water outlet – is it accessible from the top for easy cleaning?

Frequently asked questions



Q Are shower trays available made to order, bespoke?

A Bespoke trays are not usually available.

Q How can I remove a scuff mark and a scratch in the base of my tray?

A Light scuffing can be removed by careful cleaning with a non-abrasive cleaning agent. Light scratches in an acrylic surface may be removed by gently polishing with 'Brasso' or 'T-cut'. Deeper scratches are more difficult to remove and may require a specialist firm, with the correct tools and materials. In all circumstances a call to the manufacturer will help. Take special care with trays having a 'gel coat' surface.

Q What is the purpose of a tray with "upstands"?

A Upstands on a tray help create a watertight shower enclosure. A tray with 2 upstands is tiled on two walls with tiling going right down over the upstands. A tray with 3 upstands is available when it is to be installed in a recess and tiling is carried out over three walls. A tray with 4 upstands is usually tiled on three walls but on the fourth side the frame for the shower door is fitted inside the upstand giving a completely watertight shower.

Q My ceramic shower tray has a chip in it - what kind of filler do I need to repair it?

A A ceramic tray is not normally repairable. If it is chipped it may also have a hidden crack - and this could be dangerous. The best thing to do is replace the tray completely. Some household insurance policies will cover an accident which has caused the damage. Check your policy.

Q What is the benefit of a 'riser leg'?

A The riser leg, or legs, are fitted to the underside of the tray. They allow the installer to adjust and correctly level the tray by rotating the legs on a screw thread.

Q Which type of trap is best?

A There are two main types of 'waste traps' - top access and bottom access. A top access waste allows cleaning above, so that access to the underside of the shower tray is not needed. A bottom access waste is similar to the type used in washbasins where cleaning is from below so access to the underside of the tray is essential.



Shower Units & Controls

Shower units and shower controls are probably the most technical products used in the bathroom.

They therefore may be the most difficult for a beginner to understand. The range is huge - from a simple hose with a spray head found squeezed onto bath taps; to the most sophisticated and technically advanced, electronically controlled and thermostatic and pumped versions.

The final choice of unit and controls will depend on the available budget and the plumbing system where the shower will be used.

The types of available shower may be categorised as follows:

1. Electric instantaneous shower
2. Manual mixer
3. Pressure-balanced mixer
4. Thermostatic mixer - which may be manual or electronic/digital
5. Pumped (power shower)

Each has its own features, benefits, strengths and weaknesses. And each will have its particular requirements for the domestic plumbing system and electric power supply.

Shower controls are probably the most technical appliance to fit in your new bathroom. It is important to choose the right shower to fit your plumbing system. Most people will seek help from an expert to ensure their new shower will perform as it should before making a final choice.

Some manufacturers belonging to the BMA will have a technical helpline which you can call for more advice.

Features and Benefits

Features and Benefits

Shower Type	Benefit
Digital Shower	Very accurate temperature and flow settings. Electronic control of temperature settings. Thermostatic. Settings memory for different users.
Electric instantaneous shower	Economical in use. Heats water for the shower only when it is required. No wasted hot water storage. Connects only to cold water supply.
Manual mixer	Entry level, economy purchase. Excellent value for money. No electrical connections required. Higher flow rate than electric shower.
Power shower	A pump boosts pressure and flow to give a higher performance and more satisfying shower.
Pressure balancing mixer	Lower purchase price than a thermostatic. Maintains a fairly constant temperature even when water pressure fluctuates.
Thermostatic mixer shower	Safest shower. Optimum control. Prevents scalding. Automatically compensates for variations in incoming water temperature and pressure.

Checklist: What to look out for/ things to ask about

- Company pedigree - for how long has the manufacturer and retailer been trading. Is the manufacturer a member of any trade organisation such as the BMA?
- Customer service - what does the manufacturer and retailer offer?
- Electric instantaneous shower...
is the unit BEAR Approved? All electric showers manufactured by BMA Members are approved by the British Electrotechnical Approvals Board.
- what kW rating does the shower have. A higher value gives greater flow of the hot water does the unit have thermostatic control.
- Guarantee - what length of warranty and what conditions does the manufacturer give for the shower?
- Maintenance - is the shower easy to maintain. Will it need a specialist to repair it or can it be repaired by a good DIY enthusiast?



- Minimum Water Pressure - what minimum pressure does the shower require to give a good flow rate and will it work with your domestic plumbing system?
- Showers can be highly sophisticated pieces of equipment - what service engineer backup is provided?
- Spare parts - what is available and for how long in the life of the product?
- Shower head - How easy is it to clean and remove any limescale deposit?

Frequently asked questions



Q I don't understand the word BAR. What does it mean in regard to showers?

A Water pressure is measured in three common units: Bar, PSI (pounds per square inch) and Metres Head. So 1 Bar equals 10 Metres Head which equals 14.5 PSI. Bar tends to be the most common unit of measurement

Q What is best for cleaning chrome plated shower controls?

A Warm soapy water and a soft cotton cloth is best. Never use abrasive compounds or abrasive sponge pads. Once the surface of the chrome is scuffed it cannot be repaired. Limescale deposit may be removed with the juice of a lemon.

Q I have a young family. What type of shower would you recommend?

A A thermostatic mixer shower is the safest you could install. It prevents possible scalding.

Q I haven't got a hot water tank. Can I still have a shower fitted?

A Yes. You could choose an Instantaneous Electric Shower using mains cold water. Or, a manual, pressure balanced or thermostatic mixer shower using a 'combi' boiler.

Q I have a hot water tank in my airing cupboard and a cold water tank in the loft. But my shower is very weak because the water pressure seems so low. What can I do to improve the shower?

A You could fit a booster pump to your mixer shower or fit a fully integrated power shower appliance with a pump built in.

Q I want a shower but don't want to install any additional plumbing or electrics. What can I do?

A You can install an 'over the bath' shower. Replace the bath taps with a 'bath/shower mixer'. This will have a shower hose and spray head and it can be fixed to the wall on a riser rail. You would also need to fit a shower screen or curtain to keep the spray water inside the bath.

Q What is the most economical shower to run?

A Probably the instantaneous electric shower is the most economical since it only heats the water as it is required. No hot water is stored so none is wasted.

Q What mixer shower should I fit with my new combi boiler?

A You should fit either a thermostatic mixer or a pressure balanced mixer.



Q My shower was installed 4 years ago. It was great at first but the flow has gradually got worse. Any suggestions?

A Sounds like the spray plate in the shower head is gradually becoming clogged with limescale. It needs a " clean and de-scaling - try soaking it in the juice of a real lemon.

Q I heard that if I buy an electric shower I will need some new cables to connect it? Is that true?

A Well, yes, possibly. An electric instantaneous shower does require substantial wiring from your consumer unit (fuse board) to the shower itself. If a suitable cable is not already in place then a new one will need to be fitted. A qualified and competent electrician is required to complete this work. He will need to complete the installation to the IEE 16th Edition Wiring Regulations.

Wet Rooms



The concept of the domestic wet room is relatively recent but the idea is now fully developed. A number of manufacturers have designed "tanking systems" which, when installed correctly, fully seal the bathroom against water leaks.

Definition: A wet room is a fully water tight bathroom with no separate shower tray. The "walk-in" shower area is usually level with the surrounding floor but with a slight slope to the drain which is fitted directly into the floor. The shower unit and controls are fitted to one of the walls within the wet room.

Wet rooms are growing in popularity in the UK in both domestic and commercial properties and are now having a major impact on bathroom layout and design. They are particularly useful where level entry to the shower area is essential - for instance, for use by someone in a wheel chair.

A wet room is more versatile than a conventional shower tray and enclosure and gives additional options in bathroom design. The concept allows the showering area to blend naturally with the rest of the room.

Wet rooms give a feeling of spaciousness and minimalism. They make the best use of the available space and don't, necessarily, require a fixed shower screen.

Furthermore without any steps there are less chances of slips and trips, cleaning is much easier and hygiene levels are excellent.

Some wet room designs include a 'wet zone'. Here, the showering area is raised above the surrounding floor by up to 150mm. Stepping up into a wet zone may be required to meet particular site conditions but in this case the level floor concept becomes compromised.

Planning

Careful planning is a key element in any new wet room installation. The positioning of all water and power services should be considered before the tanking process commences since the sealed area should not be punctured or pierced after installation. The installation process is also quite detailed and time consuming and allowance for the room to be completely out of use for several days should be made.

Installation

Wet rooms are totally water sealed by the application of special sealing tapes, waterproof underlays or membranes and 'tanking compound' which, when fully cured, creates a fully water tight area. The application of the tanking compound is carried out before the installation of the wall and floor finishes. Tiling and panelling alone will not create a wet room since some tiles and grout may be porous.



Wet rooms can be installed by a competent and confident DIY-er or by a specialist. Whoever installs the wet room needs to follow the manufacturer's instructions carefully to ensure correct drainage and no leaks. Joinery, tiling and plumbing skills are required.

All manufacturers supply comprehensive instructions and some supply an installation video to make the whole process so much easier. Manufacturers' websites offer more details.



Important requirements of a wet room:

- Stable (not flexible) flooring
- Correct sloped flooring and floor drainage to ensure no pooling
- Effective water proofing by 'tanking'
- Good ventilation
- Protection of neighbouring rooms from water migration

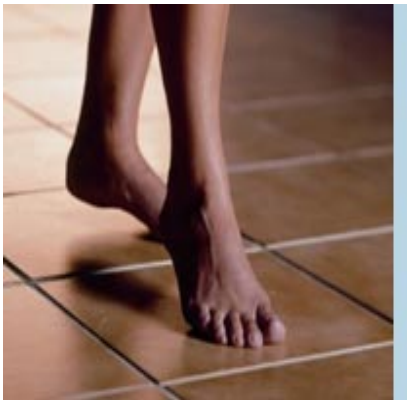
Features and Benefits

<i>Feature</i>	<i>Benefit</i>
Flat and level access to the shower area	Easy and safe access ideally suitable for use by someone with limited mobility or in a wheelchair.
Fully water tight	Protects the building from moisture damage and water leaks. Prolongs the life of the tiles and grout.
No shower enclosure or screen required	Allows the installation of a shower where a traditional shower tray and enclosure may not have been viable. Can be installed on wooden and concrete floors with no predetermined shower sizes or shapes.
Fully tiled or panelled	Opens up the room and creates a more attractive space. May be contemporary minimalist style or more traditional.
Flexible layout and design	There are no space or size limitations to the shower area
Slip resistant floor surface	Safety
No shower tray required	Compatible with underfloor heating

Checklist: What to look out for/ things to ask about

- Flooring – check that existing bathroom floor, whether of wood or concrete, is capable of a wet room installation. Ensure that manufacturers' advice is followed
- Size – decide, early on in the planning process, how big you would like the showering area within the bathroom. Some people choose a shower area about the same size as a shower tray. Others go for a much bigger area.
Image of wet room
- Company pedigree – for how long has the wet room manufacturer and your chosen retailer been trading. Is the manufacturer a member of any trade organisation such as the BMA?

- Customer service – what does the manufacturer and retailer offer? Wet room installation can be complex and a good manufacturer will help solve any difficulties you or your installer may come across.
- Durability - how durable is the tanking system? Compare the different systems, kits and materials and choose the best product to suit your particular application.
- Guarantee – what length of warranty and what conditions does the manufacturer give for its wet room?
- Shower screen – if you decide to install a glass shower screen (to prevent too many splashes in the rest of the bathroom) be sure to choose one which is specially designed for installation in a wet room. They will have special floor and wall mounting kits. Beware that some shower screens and enclosures are designed only for installation with a shower tray. Ensure that the glass used conforms to the latest British Standards
- Repair and maintenance – what is provided in the wet room kit to allow for future maintenance? What access is provided for cleaning the central waste and guttering (if installed)?



- Underfloor heating – check what system is best with your chosen wet room system. Electric Underfloor Heating is ideal for remodelled floors and new construction projects. Electric underfloor heating systems are most suitable for bathrooms, kitchens, conservatories and any general living areas where ceramic or stone tiles are laid.
- A critical element of any wetroom installation is the gradient or 'fall' in the floor of the shower area. Getting the correct angle in the floor is essential to avoid water pooling around your feet.

Frequently asked questions

Q Do I need to obtain planning permission to install a wetroom?

A No, not if it is part of an existing building.

Q Can I fit a wet room myself?

A A competent DIY-er should be able to install a wet room. Manufacturer's instructions should be followed. Joinery, tiling and plumbing skills will be required.

Q Should I 'tank' the whole bathroom or just the area where the shower is situated?

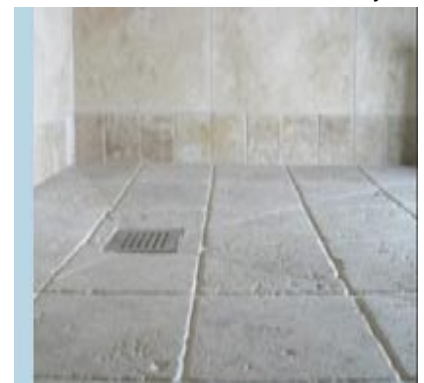
A It is usually recommended that the whole floor is 'tanked' with a turn up of 100mm on to the walls. Fully tanking the walls in the shower area is essential.

Q Can I install underfloor heating in my new wet room?

A Yes some manufacturers will recommend what compatible system to use. Some systems require electric heating some require piped hot water. Check with the manufacturer.

Q What tiles are most suitable for tiling the shower area?

A Mosaic tiles are ideal since they allow easy coverage of the drain slopes without diagonal cutting required for bigger tiles. Bear in mind, however, that smaller tiles have more joints and require more grouting. They can also be more difficult to clean. Grout should be of the waterproof variety and do check that the chosen tiles are suitable for the application.



Q A member of my family is disabled and is restricted to a wheel chair. Is there any advantage in installing a wet room?

A Yes – definitely. A wet room provides a level access to the showering area and is therefore ideal for wheel chair use. You should, however, ensure that the bathroom door is wide enough for wheel chair access and that there is sufficient space created within the shower area if a shower screen is installed. The installation of grab rails at certain points within the bathroom is also a good idea for additional safety



Q Why should I bother tanking my bathroom? Surely straightforward tiling of all the wall and the floor will do the same job.

A Tiling, adhesives and grouts can be permeable and therefore can allow moisture to migrate into the building structure over time causing mould growth, rot, and in some cases resulting in structural damage. Tanking prevents this.

Q Can a wet room be installed in any house or apartment?

A Yes. Wet rooms can be installed virtually anywhere. The style of the wet room may vary depending on your floor type and profile. In some buildings there may be a difficulty installing the drain since there may not be enough space beneath the actual floor i.e. the depth of the flooring screed is insufficient or the wooden joists are not deep enough. Usually the difficulty can be overcome.

Q Are wet rooms expensive?

A Interesting question! Every wet room installation varies, depending floor profile wood or concrete, on drain style, waterproofed area, complexity of room design etc etc. A wet room can be installed cost-effectively by a competent DIY-er or it can be installed by one of the many specialist companies now available.

Q Can a wet room be damaged in any way so that it is no longer waterproof?

A Yes - you must be careful not to pierce the waterproof membrane under the tiles. Should you renovate your bathroom, remove tiles or puncture the membrane your room will no longer be water tight.

Q Can a new WC suite be retro fitted later?

A Yes but you must not pierce the tanking membrane under the tiles. Screwed fixings should not be used - specialist adhesives should be used instead.

Q Does the size and style of tile matter?

A No but it is important to consider the finish of the tile and how slippery it will be when wet. Also some tiles are subject to staining with water penetration. If you have a central drain, smaller tiles are easier to lay on the sloped floor.

Q What is the difference between a wetroom and wet area?

A A wet room is a room that has been fully waterproofed throughout.
A wet area is where the shower area only has been waterproofed.

