
Los Angeles shower code — how I build it

Northridge is City of Los Angeles. The inspector is LADBS. The plumbing book is California Plumbing Code Chapter 408, with LA amendments. This is how I explain it to a homeowner standing in a gutted bath — not a copy of the code.

Who has the last word

I build to the book and to what LADBS actually signs off. If the inspector wants a detail called out on the card, that detail wins. Codes cycle (LA is on the 2022 California books with 2023 city amendments as I write this). I pull the permit. I meet the inspector. You keep a copy of the card.

How big the stall has to be

Finished inside of the shower: at least 1,024 square inches, and a 30-inch circle has to fit. Those sizes are measured at the top of the curb and have to hold up 70 inches above the drain. The valve, head, soap dish, and grab bars are allowed to stick into that circle. A 30-by-60 stall is an exception — it does not have to hit the 1,024 / 30-inch-circle rule.

If I can't fit a 30-inch circle after tile, the stall is too small. Niches and benches are extras. They do not shrink the legal stall.

Slope — the number I actually use

Finished shower floor: not flatter than $\frac{1}{4}$ inch per foot, not steeper than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch per foot, uniform to the drain. That is two to four percent. Under a quarter and it ponds. Over a half and it is out of code and feels like a funnel.

The lining under the mud pitches $\frac{1}{4}$ inch per foot to the weep holes. That is a separate plane. I do not dump the whole pan to one corner and call it slope.

Accessible or adaptable units are a different limit. Those floors max out at $\frac{1}{2}$ inch per foot, and some public showers are $\frac{1}{4}$ inch per foot maximum. I do not use hall-bath slope on an ADA stall.

The curb

If there is a curb: at least 2 inches and not more than 9 inches, measured from the top of the drain to the top of the curb. The curb sits at least 1 inch lower than the sides and back of the receptor so water stays in the stall. Door opening 22 inches minimum.

Curbless is legal. Then the whole bathroom floor is a wet area. Waterproofing has to run out past the glass, not stop at a line of silicone. I tell you that before we demo, because it changes the floor outside the stall.

The drain

Shower waste is 2 inches. Not an inch and a half. Flanged drain, clamping ring, weeps that I keep open so the liner can drain. Pack those weeps with mud and the pan has nowhere to go when a tile joint weeps.

The pan — how I meet the lining rule

Code wants an on-site receptor watertight, reinforced, lined, pitched to weeps, liner carried up at least 3 inches above the finished dam or seat and turned over the outside of the curb.

I do not hot-mop unless the job makes me. I use AVM 700 fabric and paste for the pan and waterproofing. It is a listed system. The listing goes in the packet so the inspector is not guessing. Paper and metal lath on the walls, inspected, then scratch, then brown, then tile. That sequence is how a mud shower lives longer than a board sandwich.

Hot mop, if they require it, I sell at cost and still inspect the pan.

Walls

Shower walls and walls over a tub that has a head get a non-absorbent finish at least 6 feet up from the floor. Tile does that. Paint does not.

The valve and the head

Every shower and tub-shower gets its own scald / shock valve — pressure-balance, thermostatic, or both — listed to ASSE 1016, installed at the point of use. Two cheap stops are not a shower valve.

California Green / LA: showerheads 1.8 gallons per minute at 80 psi. A handheld counts as a head. The valve has to be rated for the head you actually hang.

Glass

Glass in and next to the shower is tempered. The door still has to leave that 22-inch opening. I measure glass after the tile is up, not off a sketch.

When accessibility rules apply

Not every remodel. Covered or adaptable dwellings: at least one shower in the unit has to hit a CBC 11A size — for example 42 by 48 with a 36-inch entry, or 30 by 60 with a 60-inch entry. Grab-bar backing in the walls 32 to 38 inches off the floor, continuous, 6 inches high. Threshold 2 inches max if there is one, sloped.

A commercial restroom is Chapter 11B — transfer 36 by 36 or roll-in, seat, 59-inch hose. That is not a hall bath in Northridge. I price and draw those separately.

Inspections I plan for

Plumbing rough. Shower pan / waterproofing before tile. Lath and paper on the walls when that is part of the card. Final. I meet the inspector. Simple express permits I pull at no charge. Layout changes, curbless whole-room, and commercial go through plan check.

What actually fails

Slope under a quarter inch. Curb measured to the mud instead of to the drain. Liner not turned over the curb. Weeps packed. Inch-and-a-half waste. No listed mixing valve. Stall that will not take a 30-inch circle after the tile goes on.

Look up the book yourself: CPC 408, LA Residential non-absorbent walls, CALGreen 1.8 gpm, CBC 11A / 11B if the unit is accessible. Then look up my license — 990845 — and call me if you want it built that way.

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