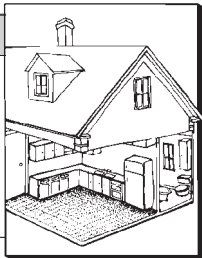


Dressing Up Small Baths

by Nancy Thomas



We all know that bathrooms are expensive to build or remodel. Yet there is an increasing demand by today's client to have a certain amount of luxury in the bathroom, especially in the master bath, or sometimes in a guest lavatory.

The builder's position in all this is that the house must be affordable; even the house that costs "big dollars" must be designed with budget-conscious accessories, fixtures, and so forth.

There are many ways to approach the creative, or unusual bathroom. Let us look at a simple half-bath, in a

modest home or condo. The final touches—wallpaper, towels, flowers, soap dishes—will be those of the homeowner. The builder might do well to put a "design board" together to help the client envision the finished product. But what can the builder do to enhance the small space?

Start with Lighting

A simple place to start is with lighting. Don't throw up the ordinary fluorescent fixture over a mirror, nor install the standard lighted mirror cabinet. Not many medicines are needed in this room. What about wall

sconces, in a style that reflects the style of the house, or of the room itself! Keep in mind that lights at the sink or makeup area must enhance visibility of the face. Lights should be at the sides of mirrors or reflect well enough in a soft, diffused manner, so as not to create harsh shadows or darkness on the face to be viewed in the mirror. The color of lighting is critical: Use incandescent or deluxe warm whites for ambient interior colors. Use lamps that most closely correspond to "daylight." Daylight itself should be introduced whenever possible, via standard windows, skylights, or any other available aperture.

Stick with White Fixtures

Cabinetry is not necessary. One option is to save the purchase price of cabinets and counters, and use one of the pedestal sinks offered by almost every plumbing supplier. Often a very plain pedestal can be enhanced by an attractive faucet. But avoid going for designer colors. White is still more in demand than almost any other color, for all groups or classifications of clients.

Color and Drama

If drama is desired, contrast the white with black (if the room is well lighted), or red. If you don't want to risk making such permanent color statements in a spec house, keep all permanent fixtures, floor materials, and such, somewhat neutral in composition. Whites, tans, greys, and almonds are good working bases from which most homeowners can coordinate a host of themes. Suggest to potential owners they can add glamour by their selection of tiles, wallpapers, faucets, and so on.

If your clients want marble, or you feel a small touch of marble in the house would be a sales advantage, try it in this small lavatory. Marble tiles are available, and they can enhance this small space without getting into the expense of covering foyers, master baths, or other spaces with such an expensive material.

Speaking of tile work, you can create unusual effects with tile. You can install an all-white floor with an inset border detail, or a diamond shape, or a plaid configuration, in a contrasting color to the white, even with a neutral color such as grey. That grey ribbon or pattern could then be repeated in a tile baseboard. Other alternatives might be to tile a full wall with a decorative scene (available from American Olean) or stepping tile up to a pedestal sink base, or perhaps using tile to frame out the mirror, rather than having it framed in metal or wood. Or the tile could simply run from wall to wall.

Mirror, Mirror

Moving on to mirrors, consider alternatives to the recent concept of mirror walls. Framed, or unusually shaped mirrors can create a mood for the room. Possibilities include oval, round, twin rectangles, a square turned at an angle to become diamond shaped, a rectangle capped with a triangle, and so forth. The mirror could also be recessed slightly into the wall to give emphasis to the space. To accomplish this the builder could pad the surrounding wall out with one layer of drywall, or the thickness of furring.

What about tile counters for bathrooms that use cabinetry? Here's an area where you can let the client

make a selection if the house is not already completed. The tile work can be used nicely as a design detail by carrying the edge detail, in tile or painted stock, around the room as a small symbolic "chair rail." If the water closet and cabinet are on the same wall, continue the counter as a ledge over the toilet (known as a banjo counter). Make sure that this ledge is only 5 or 6 inches deep so that the plumber can still remove the toilet cover to service the equipment if the toilet has a high back.

To create storage for small items such as perfumes, shaving lotions, or soaps, recess shelving space between studs, or cut out studs and frame in small storage areas.

The 5x7-Foot Bath

Let's turn to the 5x7-foot bath. Most of the above comments about the half-bath apply, with the exception of medicine storage. Linens, and some storage for soaps, lotions, and medicines, is advisable in the average bathroom. The builder can usually build in a linen closet unless space is at a minimum. But remember that much of what is to be stored in the bathroom is small. To create storage for small items (perfumes, shaving lotions, soap, etc.) recess shelving space between studs, or cut out studs and frame in small storage areas, with or without doors (in non-load-bearing or plumbing walls). The 3 to 6 inches you gain may be perfect, and your client will be amazed at how much they can store in such small spaces. If these "glorified medicine cabinets" are located other than over the sink, it frees up that space for interesting mirror or wall detail.

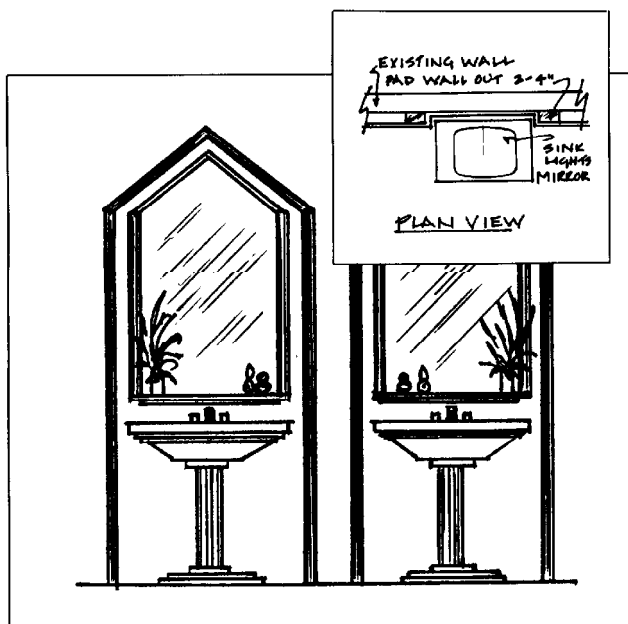
Towels need larger spaces, to be sure, but 9-inches depth is often sufficient if towels are rolled rather than folded flat. Cabinets 9 to 12 inches deep can easily go over a water closet if there is no other place to get that storage. This particular area is often forgotten, yet affords good usable storage space.

Another interesting fact we are all aware of, but pay little heed to: People like to read in the bathroom. How about a light over the water closet? And consider an open shelf for books or magazines.

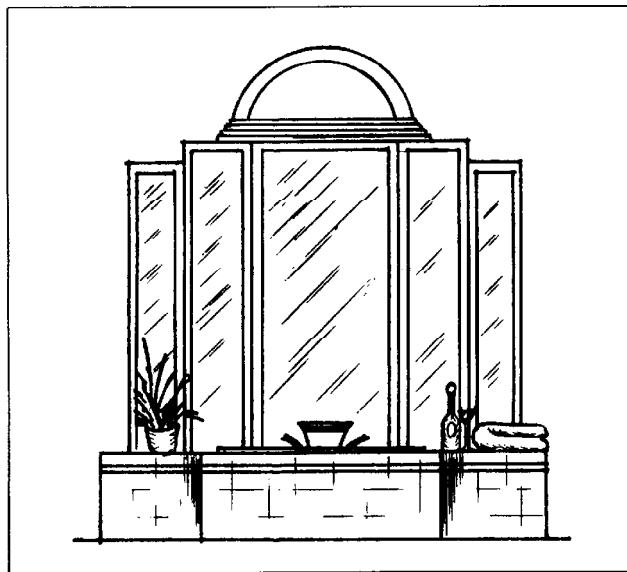
What about shelves or ledges in the shower, for all those miscellaneous items used in the shower? Even a seat in the shower, if it's not a preformed enclosure. Definitely include a moisture-protected light in or very near the shower.

The details, as small as they are, can add to the appeal of a small bath without adding tremendously to the cost. Tiles, mirrors, lighting, fixtures, wall recesses, counter materials, flooring materials are very flexible and can be used in a multitude of combinations. ■

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Pedestal can be accented by setting them in a shallow recess in the wall.



Rather than use a standard medicine cabinet, the area behind the vanity can be dressed up with unusually shaped mirrors.