



Efficient Bathroom Storage

by Dan Nesovic

Bathrooms are often viewed as areas of budget compromise: Many homeowners would like a large bathroom, but agree to “make do” with a smaller plan. But with the proper use and design of cabinet space, even small bathrooms can provide ample storage.

Small Bath Storage

In a typical small bath, the size of the vanity is often limited to 36 inches or less, and the storage space available is minimal. In these situations, there are a number of methods that can be used to “squeeze” additional storage space out of the existing floor plan.

The easiest and least expensive approach I’ve found to increase storage space is to replace the “standard” 32-inch-tall vanity cabinet with a 36-inch-tall cabinet. This not only provides a more comfortable counter height for adults (see *Kitchen & Bath*, 11/95), but allows for additional draw-

er space — an important commodity when you consider all the small bathroom items that need a place to hide. In many cases, standard kitchen base cabinets can be used, and although the gain in storage space is modest, there are often no additional costs.

Another option is a wall cabinet over the toilet. If the depth of this cabinet is 10 inches or less, the bottom of the cabinet can be held as low as 36 inches from the finished floor, provided that the toilet tank can still be accessed for repairs (see Figure 1). If a standard 12-inch-deep cabinet is used above the toilet, be sure to provide ample headroom for a person seated on the toilet. This clearance will depend on the style and height of the toilet used.

The doors on these cabinets should be hinged so they open away from the user as they stand at the sink. This isn’t a problem with single-door cabinets, but on two-door units, a bifold door should

Small Bath Storage

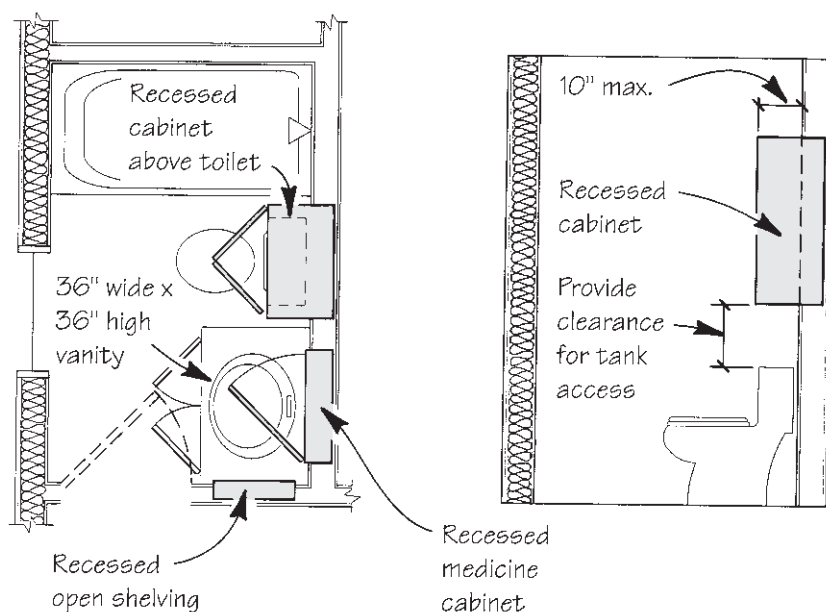


Figure 1. A cabinet above the toilet provides storage space that can be easily accessed while standing at the sink. Whenever possible, recess bathroom cabinets into the stud bays for additional storage.

be used, or two single-door cabinets should be combined into one unit.

Medicine cabinets should also be viewed as a source for increased storage. Break away from the conventional wisdom of one surface-mounted medicine cabinet located above the sink. Install as many medicine cabinets as possible and, perhaps more important, make them as *deep* as possible. Whenever possible, recess standard medicine cabinets in any available sidewall spaces (plan and frame the rough openings in advance), and consider using a deeper custom-made unit above the sink.

Larger Bath Storage

As the size of the bathroom increases, the vanity gets larger and the clients may be lulled into thinking that adequate storage area is no longer an issue. But the additional storage provided by a larger vanity cabinet is difficult to access, and the larger countertops often end up cluttered with hair dryers, electric razors, and other items. In a larger bath, the toilet is located further away (possibly in a dedicated room), so the cabinets above the toilet provide no immediate storage help to the vanity user.

Instead of a large expanse of counter area, I use a counter sized to accommodate one or two sinks flanked by 72-inch-tall wall cabinets equipped with adjustable shelving and electrical outlets (Figure 2). Items used every

day can be placed on the most convenient shelves; electrical items can remain plugged in, ready for use. The shelving inside these cabinets provides much more “counter” space than a “countertop only” design.

I use a few standard details for this type of cabinet arrangement. I suspend the flanking cabinets off the floor, and leave a 12-inch space at the top and bottom of the cabinets, with indirect lighting installed on the top and bottom of these cabinets. I use standard under-cabinet fluorescent fixtures made by NuTone (Madison & Red Banks Rds., Cincinnati, OH 45227; 800/543-8687), and trim the tops of the cabinets with an appropriate molding that matches the cabinet style. I always remove the opaque plastic lenses from the fixtures mounted on top of the cabinets: When this type of fixture is turned upside down, the heat trapped between the lens and bulb will melt the lens cover.

I also connect the two flanking cabinets with a matching lighting valance. In this area, I place fluorescent lighting against the wall, and install miniature recessed cans from Specialty Lighting (P.O. Box 1680, Shelby, NC 28150; 800/966-9579) as task lighting over the sink area (Figure 3). I switch the halogens separately at the sink, using dimmers for greater control. ■

Dan Nesovic is a designer and builder in San Diego, Calif.



DAN NESOVIC

Figure 2. By replacing inefficient counter space with hanging cabinets, the author creates a built-in vanity unit that provides more “user-friendly” storage area.

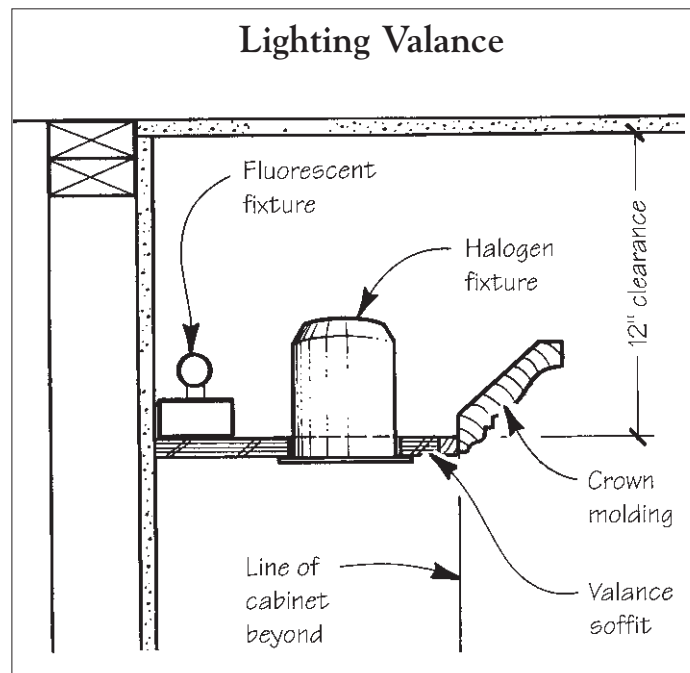


Figure 3. The lighting valance above the sink uses standard fluorescent fixtures for general lighting and recessed halogen fixtures for task lighting.