

Tight Bath Tricks

by Jamie Fisher

To glance through plumbing fixture catalogs, you might think the bath has become the biggest room in the house. Where do they find room for fountains and fireplaces?

In the real world, most bathrooms are small, and for good reason: Once a bathroom meets their basic needs, most people would rather devote any extra space to a larger

closet or bedroom, or perhaps to another bathroom altogether. Bathrooms tend to get shoehorned into whatever small, irregular-shaped space is left over after other program areas are accommodated. This can work, but only with care and the willingness to be creative. Here are two innovations I've used to make small baths work.

A Sink in a Tight Spot

In one remodel, both the stair and the bath needed to occupy the same space. Seemingly impossible, but we did it by cutting away the bottom and back of the vanity cabinet and setting it over the ceiling above the stairs below. The stairs get the headroom they need, and users of the sink above are none the wiser (as long as they don't look in the cabinet beneath).

It worked like a charm. The plumber did some plumber magic to fit the trap in above the slope, then snaked the drainpipe down along the side of the stair into an unfinished area of the basement. When the cabinet arrived, the installer measured carefully, then grabbed his circular saw and cut the bottom third of the cabinet at an angle. Once it was all trimmed out and the marble top went down, the cabinet looked normal. The only downside is the loss of undercabinet storage — a small price to pay for a relatively generous and conventional bath layout.

Shower Under a Slope

In another case, we had to fit a shower beneath a sloping second-story ceiling. Toilets and bathtubs work quite well backed up against a kneewall, but a shower — which requires enough headroom to raise your elbows above your head — generally does not.

Since the layout in this case necessitated it, we won the needed headroom by stealing from the thickness of the roof structure. With new construction and R-30-plus roofs, that can amount to a foot or more. In this house, we just had 2x4 rafters, but a wide skylight set above the tub saved the day. Between the 4-inch rafter depth, the 3½-inch height of the skylight curb, and the 6/12 roof slope, we gained the foot of headroom we needed. It also gave us great light and ventilation. An S-shaped contraption brings the shower head up into the skylight well (we could also have used a hand shower or one of those articulated contraptions). A pair of steplike tiled shelves (slightly sloped, and underlaid with a waterproof membrane) makes the shower feel roomier and provides a place for plants to enjoy the light and moisture. ■

