

Room for a Bath

by Lee McGinley

New homes today are full of luxury-sized baths, complete with whirlpools, bidets, his-and-her lavs, and plenty of floor space besides. But when it comes to adding or upgrading a bath in an existing home, remodelers are often stuck with, at best, a 5x7-foot space. And if you happen to work in an area with a lot of very old homes, as I do, you often find that when the plumbing moved indoors, the bath was stuck into even less space — perhaps under a staircase or in a former closet. So it was a real pleasure for me to design and build a bathroom in a space that had the opposite problem — more than enough room. To use the space wisely on a modest budget was the challenge.

Wish List

The new owners of this oceanside, turn-of-the-century house wanted a master bedroom suite. The existing second-story master bedroom had a com-

manding view of the harbor, but the cramped bath — carved out of a staircase that originally led to the attic — was down a corridor at the opposite end of the house. Since the couple lived alone, there was no need to keep all five rooms on the second floor as bedrooms; we could convert one of them into a bathroom. A door placed at the end of the corridor would create added privacy for the suite of rooms.

The new bath would be located in a 13x15-foot corner room. Each of the outside walls had a large double-hung window which could not be moved for aesthetic reasons (see Figure 1). This somewhat limited our options on the choice and placement of fixtures. For example, although a corner whirlpool tub would have been nice, it would have interfered with the windows. The owners wanted a double-bowl vanity and a tiled tub/shower. Since the master bedroom had no closet, a walk-in closet was a necessity — we would use

this to break up the monotony of the square room. Good ventilation and lighting were also important to the owners. And since the bathroom was just one part of a whole-house renovation, costs had to be closely watched.

Design Solutions

The layout of the room and placement of fixtures presented a challenge to us. In one sense we had too much space to work with, yet we wanted to fill the room. First, we decided to put the walk-in closet against the master bedroom wall, just inside the bathroom door, for convenient access from the bedroom (Figure 2, next page). In order to keep plumbing costs to a minimum, we needed to run the drainpipes for the bathtub and toilet within the same floor joist bay, so we placed those two fixtures at opposite ends of the same wall. We decided to tear out and replace the plaster ceiling so we could install new recessed lighting.

Before



After



Figure 1. While the room was large enough for a bath (left), the existing window placement and direction of floor joists somewhat limited the choice and placement of the fixtures. Putting the tub in one corner (right) and the toilet on the wall opposite allowed the drain lines to share the same joist bay, limiting demo work and plumbing costs.

To stay within the budget, we kept the wide pine floor boards, giving them a new coat of paint, chose moderately priced fixtures, used recessed lighting sparingly, and recycled door trim from other rooms in the house. We splurged with a cherry vanity, but offset that expense with a cultured marble top.

We added a couple of touches that made a strong impact: We recycled a 15-lite glass door for the walk-in closet, and matched it with a new 15-lite door with frosted glass as the entrance door to the bathroom. This allowed for extra natural light, and since the two doors were in close proximity, they made the space feel larger. We also reversed the hinges on the bathroom door so that it would open against the wall rather than against the vanity.

Calling on CAD

So often remodelers work without plans, with very little input from design professionals, and with customers who have few or no visualization skills. Although the owners had input from an interior designer, her role was mostly limited to color choices and the selection and placement of furniture. The hardest problem for the owners to visualize was the location and shape of the closet. The owners and I had several discussions about this, with no resolution, until I showed them a 3-D view created with Chief Architect (Figure 3). After 45 seconds, the owners knew immediately what would work best for the space.

This could have been a potentially dark bathroom, since it's on the west side of the house, away from the early morning light. But the combination of glass doors plus recessed and wall lighting add up to a bright space. The bathroom is nearly as large as the bedroom and, with its separate walk-in closet, allows one spouse to bathe and dress without disturbing the other. And there's enough room so two can share the space comfortably.



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Upstairs Floor Plan

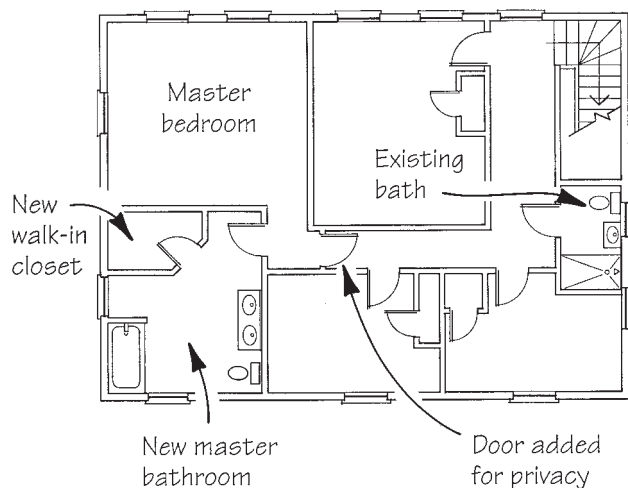


Figure 2. The existing bath was a long way from the master bedroom. Using a bedroom for the new bath creates a private master suite at the end of the hall.

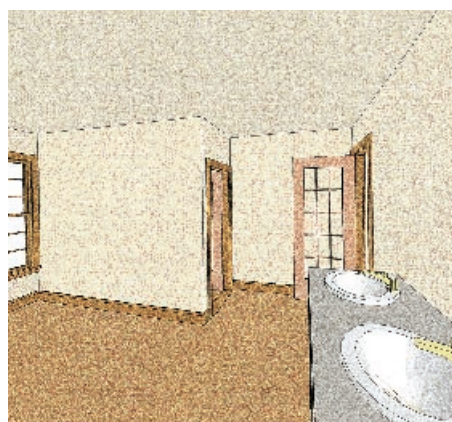


Figure 3. Deciding on the angled walk-in closet entrance (photo, top) was difficult until the author showed the clients these two perspectives (above) created with Chief Architect.