

Small Bath, Big Look

Relocating a closet carved out enough space for an elegant, uncluttered guest bath

BY HELEN DEGENHARDT



Several years ago, I donated ten hours of my services as an architect to be auctioned off at a fundraiser for the San Francisco Zen Center. To my surprise, somebody bought this offering. I was even more surprised when Susan and Darien called me about a year later, wanting to cash in their purchase.

They owned a small house in a nice residential neighborhood in Oakland and wanted to see if I could help them remodel their bathroom, which, they said, was in dire need of some attention. They weren't exaggerating. The room was small, and the layout made it even more awkward (floor plan below). Years of deferred maintenance and poor ventilation had resulted in moldy walls and quite a bit of dry rot.

The only way to improve the layout was to annex the space taken by the closet in the adjacent study. And because storage was limited in this little house, we had to replace it somewhere. We did so by adding a closet with sliding shoji doors along the far wall of the study (floor plan below).

As a practicing Zen Buddhist, Susan had an aesthetic sense shaped by Asian principles of simplicity, transparency and no clutter. She also liked mostly neutral, warm colors with minimal color accents. All these preferences influenced the emerging room.

Create the impression of spaciousness

Even with the gained space, the bath was still small—only 7 ft. by 7 ft. To give the feeling of more spaciousness, it was important to maximize the actual floor space. We chose a pedestal sink with two small, free-standing cabinets made of vertical-grain Douglas fir (photo facing page). This arrangement created less visual mass than one continuous counter while still providing storage for the usual bathroom paraphernalia.

Instead of shower doors or a messy curtain, we chose a 2-ft. wide partition made of 1/2-in. tempered glass (photo right). It keeps most of the overspray in the shower area without creating a visual barrier. Big mirrors are a time-honored method for expanding the feel of a small space. We used one here, running it tight to the walls and ceiling, and eliminating any distracting trim. Fortunately, our builder, Gene DeSmidt, is used to working

Space-enhancing strategies. A large wall mirror can create an illusion of space in a small room. You can amplify the magic by eliminating any borders or frames around the mirror. Photo taken at A on floor plan.

to the kind of demanding tolerances required by trimless work.

The right lighting

We splurged on the light fixtures over the sink. They are prominent, and because they are doubled in size by their reflection in the mirror, we thought that this spot was one place to spend a little money (about \$340 a piece). Made by Shaper Lighting ("Notable Fixtures," below), the incandescent lights are on dimmers and mounted on both sides of the sink rather than above. This placement guarantees good, even light without shadows where it is needed most: on the face.

Another recessed fluorescent-light fixture in the center of the ceiling provides general light and satisfies the California energy code, which requires that the first switched light in baths and kitchens be fluorescent.

The bath receives soft daylight from opposite sides of the room. One source is a new double-hung window above the tub. The other is the glass door to the hallway. Both openings have sandblasted glass for privacy. □

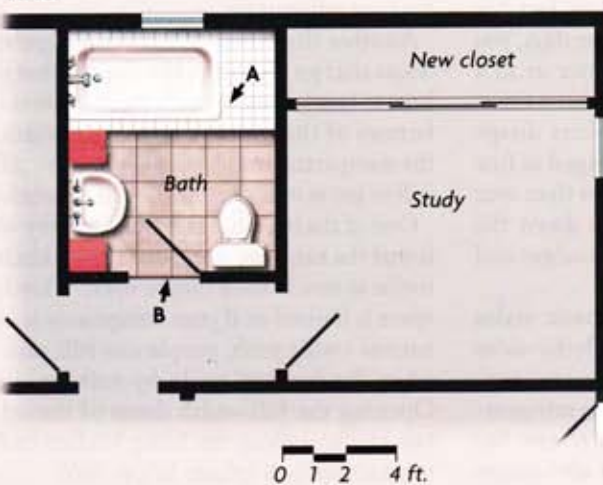
Architect Helen Degenhardt is based in Berkeley, California. Photos by Charles Miller.

Tile inside and out. The tile walls of the shower extend into the rest of the room as wainscoting, which helps to unify the space rather than divide it into two separate areas. And the 2-ft. glass partition instead of a shower door or curtain removes a common visual barrier. Photo taken at B on floor plan.



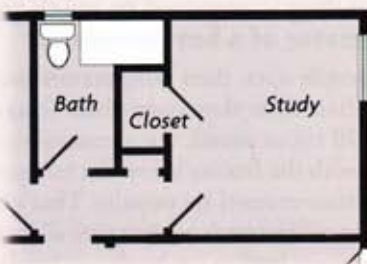
MAKING A SMALL BATH A LITTLE LARGER

After



Relocating the study's closet allowed the bathroom's footprint to grow to 7 ft. sq. A new window over the tub and a frosted-glass door let in daylight from both sides of the room.

Before



Cramped and dark, the original L-shaped bathroom left few options for improvement.

Photos taken at lettered positions.

NOTABLE FIXTURES

Pedestal sink

Kohler K-2096
Cabernet pedestal
(800) 456-4537

Faucet

Kohler K-7304-K
Triton/Finesse with
gooseneck spout

Wall sconces

Shaper Lighting
Vanity fixture 604
(510) 234-2370