

Small Baths That Live

Two remodeled bathrooms showcase strategies that make small spaces feel roomy, without big changes

BY RUSSELL HAMLET

The real-estate market has been tight on Bainbridge Island, Wash., for years now. Its location in Puget Sound, just a ferry-boat commute from Seattle, has made it a highly desirable place to live. So those who are shopping for a house on the island have to be ready to pounce on a new listing as soon as it comes up. Either that, or figure out how to fix whatever was wrong with a house that kept it on the market for a while.

The house that Ken and Lisa purchased in 2001 fell into the latter category. Built in the '20s, their attractive cottage-style home is in a desirable neighborhood of modest older homes. They credit the two dismal bathrooms as the Achilles' heel that drove off potential buyers, allowing the house to remain on the market long enough for them to get it. The bathrooms were cramped, chopped-up rooms pasted together from a hodgepodge of materials. After putting up with them for a couple of years, Ken and Lisa decided to create a pair of inviting bathrooms that were in keeping with the rest of the house. But they wanted to do it within a relatively modest budget. We started at \$50,000 for both baths. Once Ken and Lisa decided on finishes and fixtures, the budget grew to \$70,000 max.

To stay on budget, it was important to stay within the existing footprint of each bathroom. This presented an ex-

cellent design challenge: Create rooms that feel larger and more comfortable by reportioning the spaces; by adding light and color; and by simplifying the materials, fixtures, and details.

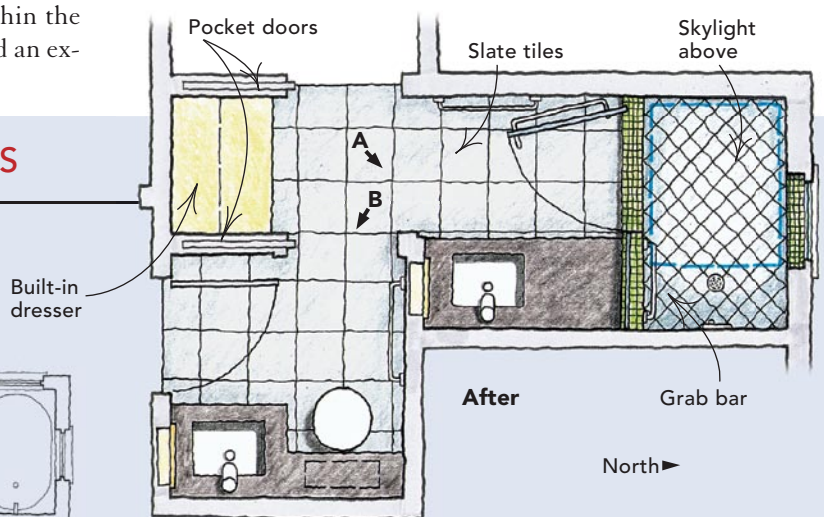
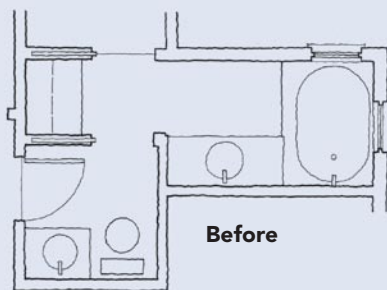
We also kept the parts worth keeping. The existing toilet in the upstairs bathroom was a low-flow model that worked well and was in good condition. Its low tank height fits in with the new, extended vanity top that carries over it. We also kept all of the doors, the built-in dresser/cabinet, storage shelving, and much of the trim.

The upstairs bath

The second-floor bathroom is divided into two areas that are connected by a pocket door. A half-bath opens to the stair hall, and a second space for bathing (also containing a sink) opens into the master bedroom (floor plan below). This multifunction plan combines storage and flexibility into a pretty small package, and it made sense to stick with it. But the sunken tub had to go. It was a deep, jetted tub that required so much water and made so much noise that

THE ORIGINAL PLAN STILL WORKS

This highly flexible plan, which pairs a powder room with another space for bathing and a built-in dresser, was worth keeping. Updating the spaces with new finishes, sturdy grab bars, and natural light literally transformed the old bathroom without moving any fixtures or walls.



Photos taken at lettered positions.

Large



Both halves of the upstairs bath. Green glass-mosaic tiles shimmer in the sunshine admitted by the new skylight in the remodeled bath (photo left). Unifying the walls, ceiling, and trim with a single, neutral color makes the bold fields of tile and the black counter all the more powerful. And big mirrors don't hurt either. Photos taken at A and B on floor plan.

SOURCES

Countertops Richlite, slate black; 888-383-5533
www.richlite.com

Grab bars Ginger, Hotelier series; 888-469-6511
www.gingerco.com

Sinks Kohler Ladena, model no. K-2215; 800-456-4537
www.kohler.com

Toe-kick heaters King, KT series 206-762-0400
www.king-electric.com

Vanity lights Celestial Lighting, Vanitylite; 800-233-3563
www.celestiallighting.com

nobody ever used it. A walk-in shower instead of a tub made a lot more sense.

We opened up the room with a skylight over the shower, infusing the entire room with natural daylight. The skylight well hides the bathroom-fan grille and includes a light fixture that illuminates the shower at night.

A frameless-glass shower enclosure keeps the room as open as possible. Green glass-mosaic tile wraps the shower walls and flows out of the shower, lining the bottom of the walls to the height of the wainscot and visually uniting the two areas of the bathroom. Big wall mirrors in both portions of the bath also help to expand the space.

Black Richlite countertops with undermount sinks sit atop maple cabinets in both rooms. The slate-tile floors lend a substantial feel and warm, gray colors that work well with the other materials.

The downstairs bath

The first-floor bathroom serves as a powder room and occasionally as a guest bathroom. Given the room's minimal size and infrequent use as a full bath, we equipped the tub with a handheld sprayer. As a result, we could eliminate a shower enclosure, making the room feel more open.

The existing bathroom had a ceiling that was almost 9 ft. high. We lowered it to improve the proportions of the room and created a barrel vault with cedar boards. To avoid the eyesore of an exhaust-fan grille on the ceiling, we located the bath's exhaust fan above the cedar boards and cut slots in the 1x4s to allow air to be drawn into the fan's intake (drawing, facing page). The fan can be reached through a hatch on the second floor.

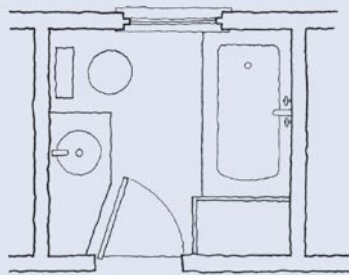
Wainscoting of blue glass-mosaic tile surrounds the room, giving it color and continuity. The tile is topped with a sim-



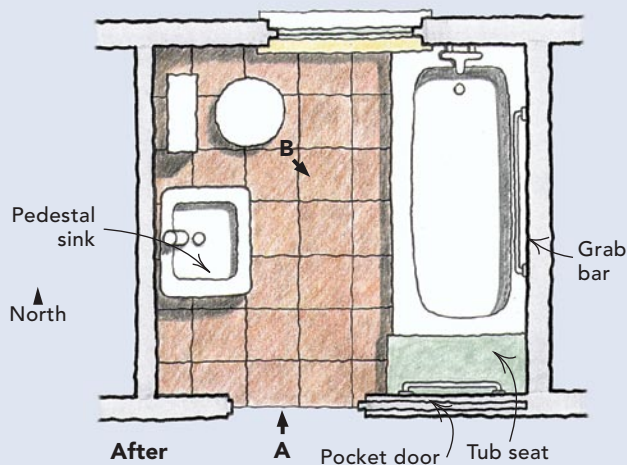
A splash of blue. With its glass-mosaic wainscot, white walls, and arched cedar ceiling, the reconfigured room has a sense of buoyancy. A cabinet at the foot of the tub provides towel storage topped with a bench, which, with the grab bar over the tub, makes the tub accessible to all ages and abilities. A heat register in the toe kick regulates the air temperature. Photos taken at A and B on floor plan.

A POCKET DOOR SAVES SPACE

The fixtures are in the same place, but the space feels more open. Replacing a vanity with a pedestal sink, removing a tall cabinet, and replacing a swinging door with a pocket door were key changes.



Before



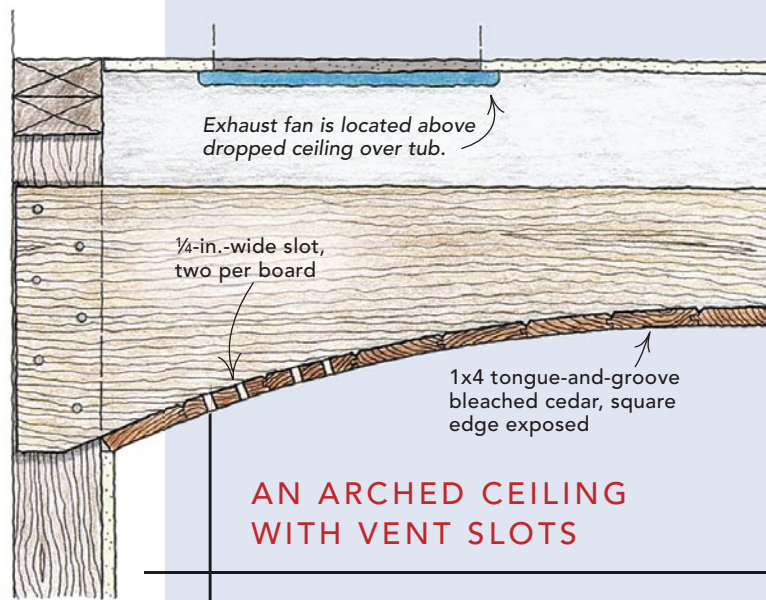
Photos taken at lettered positions.

0 1 2 ft.





Ceiling supports from 2x12s, nailed to studs



Exhaust fan is located above dropped ceiling over tub.

1/4-in.-wide slot, two per board

1x4 tongue-and-groove bleached cedar, square edge exposed

AN ARCHED CEILING WITH VENT SLOTS

Instead of a plastic vent grille, the cedar ceiling has slotted boards above the bathtub and the pedestal sink for evacuating bathroom vapors.

SOURCES

Flooring

Expanko Cork
800-345-6202
www.expanko.com

Glass-mosaic tile

Oceanside Glass Tile
760-929-4000
www.glasstile.com

Lighting

Shaper Lighting,
model no. 673
www.shaperlighting.com

Tub fixtures

Grohe Chiara,
model no. 34472000
630-582-7711
www.groheamerica.com

Ventilation fan

Panasonic, model
no. FV-09VFI
800-405-0652
www.panasonic.com

ple painted-wood nosing. The bathroom has a cork floor, which is soft underfoot and feels nice when you step out of the tub.

We replaced the hinged, in-swinging door with a space-saving pocket door. A sleek pedestal sink takes the place of the bulky old lavatory counter. A cabinet at the foot of the tub now provides room for towels and toiletries, and support for a bench seat.

The check, please

The glass-mosaic tiles for both baths cost \$19,000, including installation, sending the total cost of the remodel past the initial target of \$50,000. The final tally came in at just less than \$68,000, so we still ended up a bit shy of our cap. Some of the other finish materials, such as the Richlite countertops and cork flooring, were also fairly expensive, but because of their high quality and their environmental friendliness, Ken and Lisa chose to use them. The tiles are made from recycled bottles, Richlite is made of paper and phenolic resins, and cork is a readily renewable resource.

One regret Ken and Lisa had about the project was that they did not go for the electric radiant-heat mat under the upstairs-bathroom floor. At a time when we were looking for ways to limit costs, it got cut. Warm floors are a nice luxury for a relatively low cost, but unfortunately, radiant heat is not something that can be added easily later.

On the other hand, the project accomplished the goal of re-creating the bathrooms so that they feel like assets, rather than liabilities. Who knows? The next time the house goes up for sale, a buyer may even purchase it because of the bathrooms. □

Russell Hamlet is an architect on Bainbridge Island, Wash. Photos by Art Grice. Special thanks to builder Geoffrey Hobert.