Brighten Up a Small Bath

Eight ways to fashion a bathroom that will put a smile on your face every morning

BY MAAIKE LINNENKAMP

The only bathroom in this small ranch-style house was cluttered, dark, and uninspiring. Besides changing the aesthetics, the main challenges were bringing in more daylight, increasing storage, and giving the bath a much-needed sense of spaciousness. The bold stroke is a 2-ft.-deep bay that extends beyond the original exterior wall. The bay created space for a shower bench, room for a towel rack out of the spray pattern, and a place for a generous frosted-acrylic window that offers privacy, light, and ventilation. Storage is provided by a custom cabinet recessed into the bay. A totemic floor-to-ceiling glass-tile inlay surrounded by alabaster floor and wall tile injects a prominent centerpiece.

These elements are the most obvious changes that transformed this bath. But they are only part of the story. A supporting cast of less obvious details and principles is making quieter contributions. Here are the lessons, both large and small, of this little bath.

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1 MAXIMIZE DAYLIGHT WHILE MAINTAINING PRIVACY
Acrylic-block windows are lightweight and unbreakable; this awning-style version lets in fresh air. Tubular skylights are another great way to bring daylight inside. They are less expensive than conventional skylights, are less prone to leakage, and can eliminate the need for electric light during the day. Both options maintain a high level of privacy.
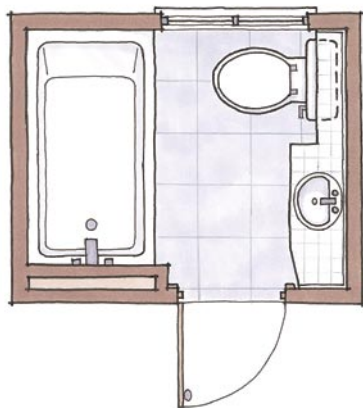
Before

After

North ◄

0 0.5 1   2 ft.

3 REPLACE THE CRAMMED TUB/SHOWER COMBINATION

Bathing has become less popular, so the argument that you need a tub for resale value doesn't wash anymore. Compared to a bathtub that visually divides the room, glass shower doors make the space seem larger and more inclusive. A code-compliant shower also uses less water than a tub.
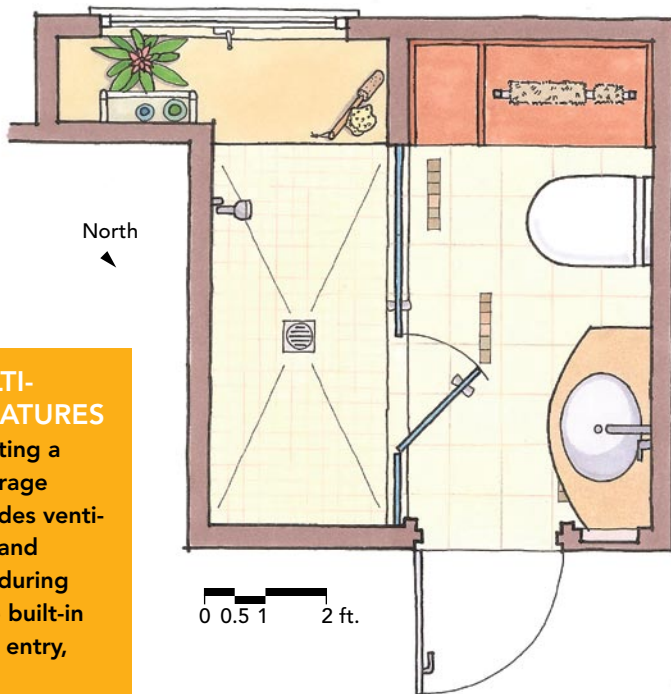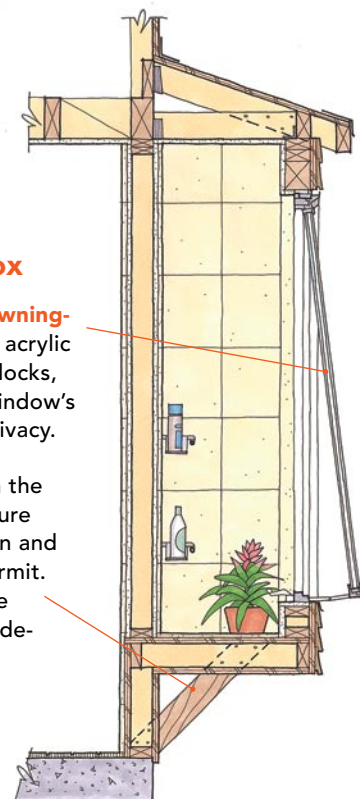
2 CREATE MULTI-PURPOSE FEATURES

Besides accommodating a seating area and storage space, the bay provides ventilation, natural light, and extended sightlines during the day. The storage built-in is a focal point upon entry, especially at night.

Push outside the box

In the bay bump-out, an **awning-style window** glazed with acrylic mimics the look of glass blocks, without the weight. The window's wavy pattern preserves privacy.

Support brackets bear on the original foundation, a feature that simplified construction and made it easier to get a permit. The foundation didn't have to be extended into the side-yard setback.

Drawings: Martha Garstang Hill. Photos top: Maaike Linnenkamp.

4 INSTALL A DUAL-FLUSH TOILET

The amount of water that goes through in a regular flush is significant. A dual-flush option is available on many models now, so efficiency doesn't have to entail a design compromise.

5 USE LARGE TILES

In small baths, large tiles with very thin grout lines make the room look bigger. Plus, the tile is easier to clean.

6 HANG THE CABINETRY AND THE TOILET

Elevating the cabinets and the commode makes everything easier to clean and saves space. The room looks larger if the floor tile is undisturbed throughout the footprint of the bathroom.

7 GET CREATIVE WITH CABINETRY

Stereotypical kitchen cabinetry doesn't have a place in the bathroom. Instead, the cabinetry can be a distinctive feature, both functional and good-looking.

8 PAIR A HARMONIOUS, NATURAL COLOR PALETTE WITH SOPHISTICATED ACCENTS

This design approach will make the bathroom personal, timeless, and comfortable, and will reduce the chances that you'll become annoyed at some point by either blandness or an overpowering color choice.

SOURCES

Fixtures Hansgrohe Axor Series faucet, model No. 38117821; shower valve, model No. 35375801; shower bar, model No. 27941800, www.hansgrohe-usa.com • **Toilet** Duravit bowl, Starck 3, www.duravit.com; Geberit tank, www.chicagofaucets.com • **Tubular skylight** Solatube, www.solatube.com • **Window** Hy-Lite's acrylic-block awning style, www.hy-lite.com