

**I**n the closing segment of one of television's classic quiz shows, *What's My Line?*, a mystery guest would appear in silhouette, indistinct and not quite identifiable. Every morning, my client Judy saw a similar apparition in her bathroom mirror: a shadow outlined by the brilliantly illuminated south-facing window behind her.

Unpleasant lighting was just one of the problems in her old bathroom, which has doorways to a bedroom and a study. The bath is in an 1800-sq.-ft. Craftsman-style house built in 1908, but you wouldn't know it. The bathroom had suffered through at least two attempted upgrades, the most recent of which introduced a 1950s-era pinewood vanity cabinet into the décor. It ran most of the length of the north wall, leaving just enough space to open the study door about 40° (floor plan, p. 87). People unfamiliar with the room invariably bounced the door off the vanity when entering. This was our starting point.

#### **Simple changes, if possible**

I began by considering basic, inexpensive changes to the floor plan. But try as I might, the

A box-bay window  
brings light into  
a bath that includes  
a sliding medicine  
cabinet and curved  
mahogany trim

BY ALAN JENCKS



# Garden Bathroom







room resisted. One thing I absolutely didn't want to do was to relocate the doors, which would have meant tearing out perfectly good plaster, original moldings, built-in shelving, usable wall space, and various wiring circuits.

To avoid the backlit-mirror condition, the locations of the tub and vanity needed to be switched. That made sense for another reason, too. Judy wanted a tub with a shower, so the window over the tub was a problem. Big exterior windows close to a moisture source such as a showerhead, even in our relatively mild Bay Area climate, inevitably lead to condensation that can grow mold and even damage the woodwork.

So a solution started to take shape: Swap the tub and vanity locations, and move the toilet the necessary 1½ in. out from the wall to comply with the building code (15 in. from the center of the toilet to a finished wall).

This change left two problems to solve: one old and one new. First, the new bathtub is even wider than the pinewood vanity, so door clearance was still an issue. And second, the new pedestal sink I had in mind would be located beneath the window. Where would the mirror go?

The bathroom was getting more complex, and hence more expensive. But Judy agreed that a little more money well spent was better than a little less money poorly spent.

### Finding space in surprising places

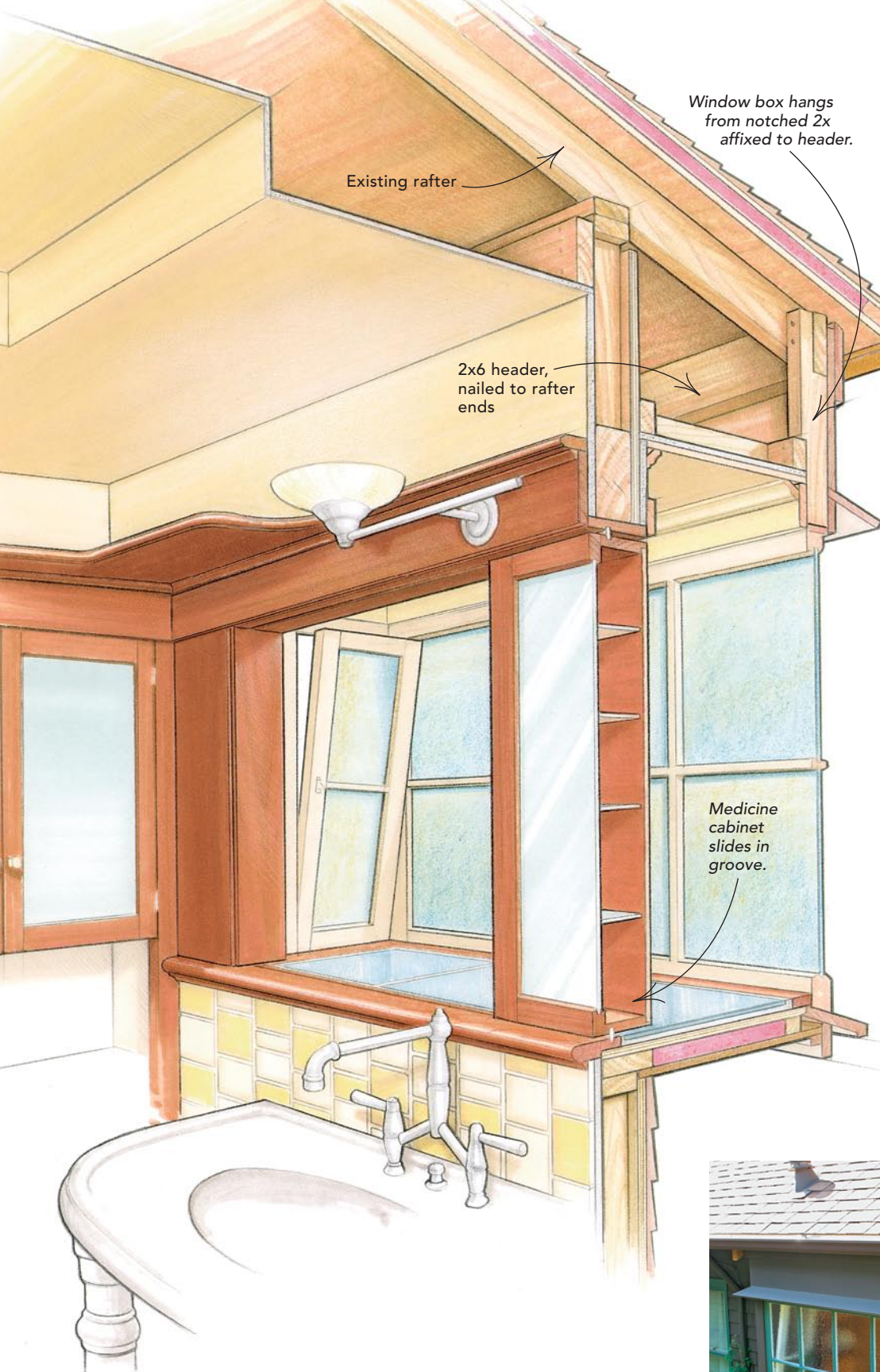
To make enough room for the tub, I would have to annex the former linen-closet space, as well as expand into a portion of the closet in the study. But pushing the corner of the wall into the study's closet would render it largely useless. The solution was to curve the wall behind the tub, eliminating the sharp corner that would have impinged on the closet opening.

Initially, my design called for centering a mirror over the pedestal sink and surround-



**A mobile medicine cabinet.** The main mirror is mounted on a shallow mahogany cabinet that rides on a waxed rail in a corresponding groove. Windows at each end of the bay tilt inward, allowing screens to stay in place when windows are open for ventilation. Photos taken at A on floor plan.





ing it with a multi-lite window in an inverted U-shape. But I concluded that the upper windows would provide a view of only the underside of the roof overhang, thus putting the kibosh on that approach.

Another option was to gang three casement windows together and glaze the interior face of the center window with a mirror. This second idea would work, but it still felt wrong. I wanted to promote a greater feeling of spaciousness in the small room and bring in as much natural light as possible. Judy and I also wanted the option of turning the mirror into a medicine cabinet because storage space was already at a premium. These priorities led us to our eventual solution: a box-bay window with obscure glazing.

This window is similar to commercially available greenhouse windows, which have frames made of vinyl or aluminum and typically are topped with a shed roof. Judy's window is framed with wood and extends up the wall to be sheltered by the existing roof overhang (photo below).

For several reasons, a box-bay window turned out to be the right solution. First, moving the window about 16 in. beyond the plane of the wall increased the amount of glazing, and therefore daylight, in the room. It also had a large impact on the sense of space. At about 60 sq. ft., the bathroom is pretty modest in size. The deep window draws the eye toward the light and makes the space feel generous. The extra depth also made room for a sliding medicine



**Shallow bay tucks under the roof.** Protected by the roof overhang, the box-bay window extends just far enough from the house not to intrude into the adjacent pathway. Photo taken at B on floor plan.

## RAFTER-HUNG BAY WINDOW

cabinet in front of the window, freeing some space on the adjacent wall for a tall, thin storage cabinet.

I think the most important feature of the box window is Judy's garden. The bay has turned out to be the ideal environment for her orchids, staghorn ferns, and violets. In addition to diffusing the light and affording a measure of privacy, obscure glass in the window keeps the focus on the plants, much the way stained-glass windows in a cathedral keep attention focused inward.

### Mahogany trim and high shelves

Varnished or oiled woodwork is a hallmark of Craftsman-style houses. Here in the Bay Area, many of them are detailed with tight-grain old-growth redwood, a gorgeous wood that is in short supply and very expensive. I decided to use mahogany instead, which has the same rich color of redwood along with an extra measure of durability; it's much harder than redwood, yet easy to work. I bought the mahogany, which came with Forest Stewardship Council certification, from PALS (www.pals4wood.com).

I used a quick-drying oil-based urethane finish called ProFin (www.dalyspaint.com) on the mahogany. This wipe-on finish is great for on-site applications when you don't have a spray booth and want to avoid brush strokes. One coat seals the wood but leaves a very open grain. You can add successive coats until you've got a mirrorlike semigloss surface, if that's what you're after.

A detail that consistently shows up in my work is a high shelf that runs around the room above the window and door headers. I'm not certain where my affection for this device originated, possibly from exposure to the intricate interiors of sailing ships and trains: small worlds where space is precious. These kinds of shelves inevitably become combination storage/display areas.

In Judy's bath, the 12-in.-deep shelves hold a row of rolled-up bath towels and a couple of fancy watering cans. The shelves are deep enough to feel a bit like soffits, adding a border of lower ceiling around the edges of the room. Over the pedestal sink, the shelves swoop back into the wall, making a curvy notch for the two-shaded wall sconce to splash light on the ceiling. □

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**Curved tub, curved wall.** Instead of square corners behind the tub, curved ones minimized incursions into the closet space on the other side of the wall. Photo taken at C on floor plan.

## SOURCES

### FAUCET AND TUB FILLER/WAND

**Dornbracht,**  
Madison tub filler  
800-774-1181  
www.dornbracht.com

### LIGHTING

**Metro Lighting,**  
Chanterelle double sconce  
888-638-7620  
www.metrolighting.com

### PEDESTAL SINK

**Whitehaus, model no.**  
BTZ 34-GB001  
800-527-6690  
www.whitehauscollection.com

### TOILET

**Toto, Clayton**  
888-295-8134  
www.totousa.com

### TUB

**Porcher, Epoque**  
800-359-3261  
www.porcher-us.com

### Radical changes, but not too radical

Improving the lighting, function, and feel of the bathroom was the overall goal of this remodel. But equally important was limiting unnecessary changes. Keeping the doors in their original locations was key and was made possible by borrowing a bit of the closet in the study in order to make room for a new tub.

