

# Putting the Craft Back in a Craftsman Bath

Creative tilework triumphs over sagging floor joists and out-of-plumb walls

BY JERRI HOLAN

**A**s an architect who works on older homes, I spend a lot of time fixing past “improvements” to kitchens and baths. My clients’ Craftsman-style house is a perfect example. During the 1970s, its second-floor guest bath received a makeover that included dark brown floor tiles, laminate counters, and a shadow-casting partition over the tub (inset photo, p. 66). Our goal was to return this bathroom to its Craftsman roots and cheer it up with light finishes, modern fixtures, and new tilework in sympathy with the home’s original look (photo left).

The house was built in 1905, just as the formality of Victorian architecture was relaxing into the Craftsman style. During this period, both styles shared some types of signature finish materials, especially ceramic tile. The 1-in. hexagonal floor tiles and the 3-in. by 6-in. “subway” wall tiles the homeowners chose for this project fall into this category.

From the outset, we knew that tile was going to set the tone for this bathroom. So we pored over traditional tile patterns for decorative touches and looked at a multitude of color selections. In the end, we settled on white for the field tile as the best way to brighten the



**Bold lines hide the deviations.** The tapered white tiles along the edges of the floor and at the base of the walls barely register (photo above). Instead, you look at the strong geometry of the borders and corner patterns. At the doorway, a tapered threshold reveals the sloping floor (photo right).



“From the outset, we knew that tile was going to set the tone for this bathroom.”



BEFORE

**Light by the window, but nowhere else.** An ungainly partition and a plywood sink cabinet were among the unpleasant details in this 1970s remodel.



AFTER

**Borders and bright finishes.** Striped borders of green and white tiles lead the eye in and around the new bath. Lowering the partition next to the tub lets in more daylight. The shower curtain now rides on an L-shaped curtain rod.

room. And to give the floor character and to emphasize its shape, we devised a border detail of dark green tiles linked at the corners by a detail composed of hexagonal tiles in an abstract flower pattern (photo facing page).

### The frame remains the same as tiling tricks lower costs

Restorations can get pricey quickly, especially when structural and plumbing changes crop up. With that in mind, we decided early on not to relocate plumbing fixtures.

You can expect a few sags here and there in an old house. We had our share, with an out-of-square floor that sloped enough to drain and walls that were distinctly out of plumb. The structure was still sound, however, which was good news for the budget and an opportunity for our tilers (Riley Doty and his associate, Jane Aeon) to use some tricks of the tile trade to hide the framing anomalies.

Before installing the tile, they brought the floor closer to level by adding a base layer of tile backerboard to the subfloor, followed by a tapered layer of mortar. You can see the ex-

tent of the built-up base in the threshold at the entry to the bath (photo right, p. 65).

The out-of-square corners were handled differently. Rows of 1-in.-sq. white tiles between the borders and the walls are tapered as necessary to meet the wall. But because the eye is drawn to the dark stripes in the borders, the skewed wall lines are minimized.

In a similar manner, the horizontal bands of green trim tiles on the wall establish strong, level sightlines. The tiles below them are tapered to adjust for the remaining slope in the floor. The finishing touches were to install compatible fixtures (“Sources,” right).

Our local preservation association liked the project well enough to give it an award in the historic-finishes category. Better yet, the clients are happy with it. This is good, because cost overruns with this phase meant that we’ll have to wait a little longer to take on that 1970s kitchen downstairs. □

Jerri Holan is an architect in Albany, Calif. Photos by Charles Miller, except where noted.

## SOURCES

### Mosaic floor tiles

Daltile Corp.

214-398-1411

www.daltile.com

### Toilet and lavatory

Kohler Co. *Memoirs Suite* collection

800-456-4537

www.kohler.com

### Lavatory faucet

Chicago Faucet model #746-374

847-803-5000

www.chicagofaucets.com

### Wall sconces

Rejuvenation St. Helens collection

888-401-1900

www.rejuvenation.com

### Mosaicist’s tape

A to Z Tapes

888-378-7666



MOSAICIST'S TAPE



ENLARGED SAW CART



SUPPORT TILE EDGES

## Tips for working with mosaic tiles

by Riley Doty and Jane Aeon

Mosaic tiles present installers with a distinct set of challenges. They are fragile to cut, and once they've been separated from their backing, they can be difficult to handle. On this job, we did three things to make the job go more smoothly.

First, we used mosaicist's tape to collate the border tiles into tidy groupings (photo above left). This sticky film allowed us to mount strips or loose groups of individual tiles bottom-side up into custom configurations on the job site.

Second, we enlarged the saw's cart with a piece of Corian countertop (photo above center). This big sled allowed us to rest an entire sheet of tiles on the cutting surface.

Third, we supported tiles from below as we cut them. With a standard tile saw, the blade travels in a  $\frac{3}{8}$ -in.-wide gap. That's OK for large tiles, but for mosaics, it means the edges of the tiles aren't supported adequately. With our custom sled, the blade travels in a narrow, blade-wide kerf. We used a fine-grit glass-cutting blade, which carved gently through the mosaic tiles.

—Riley Doty and Jane Aeon are tilers in Oakland, Calif.