

Beach-House Bath



on a Budget

Off-the-shelf materials dressed up with custom details give this bath a modern look with a modest price tag

BY ANDREW RING

When my wife and I bought this house in 1999, we were so thrilled to have found an affordable vacation home that besides doing a thorough cleaning and some painting, we left the house as is and spent our time on the beautiful Montauk, N.Y., beaches. However, as we started spending more time in the house with guests and watched the real-estate market in the area escalate, our aspirations changed.

We began to look at the house differently. Suddenly, the worn-out shag carpet seemed out of place, and the floor plan felt inefficient. And so the renovations began. To be a guest now meant that you had to pick up a hammer or risk not being invited back. After a few small projects, we decided to tackle the biggest eyesore of them all: the main bathroom.

Although the bathroom, on paper, was well appointed, it was born in the 1970s and clearly had lived a hard life. The strangest part of the old bathroom was a 60-in. by 48-in. powder-blue fiberglass bathtub (with matching stall shower, toilet, and vanity). Despite its imposing mass, the actual tub basin was only 30 in. wide and less than 12 in. deep. At the end of busy beach days, the overused tub leaked into the laundry room below.

The lighting in the bathroom was terrible as well. The only natural light squeezed in through one small (28-in. by 36-in.) double-hung window in the 10-ft.-long east-facing exterior wall. Nonetheless, at 10 ft. by 8 ft., the bathroom had size on its side.

Dreams of a Japanese spa

I've always been drawn to Japanese spas. I like the amount of natural wood they incorporate and their unique layout. A traditional Japanese bath has an open shower or wash station with a waterproof floor and a central drain. A wooden soaking tub often is placed to highlight a natural view, and floor grates treat your bare feet to the warm feel of wood. Using this aesthetic for inspiration, my goals were to improve the showering experience and to design a bathroom capable of handling large numbers of guests without becoming sodden. Of course, I wanted to bring in more natural light as well.

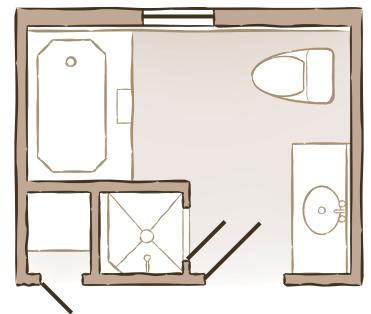
Armed with magazine clippings of my favorite bathrooms, I researched wooden tubs and exotic fixtures only to discover that most of them were either out of our price range, impractical, or both. Preliminary drawings also proved that a large shower, tub, vanity, and toilet would fill up even this large space quickly. I realized that it wasn't going to be easy to achieve a high-end look without an accompanying price tag.

To gain more space, I eliminated a large linen closet that cut into one corner of the existing bath. I replaced this closet with two

A custom look from common materials. Starting with a one-piece countertop-and-sink unit plucked from the shelves of a big-box store, the vanity's custom look springs from a built-to-fit cabinet that floats above the floor. The linen closet (bottom photo) was moved to make room for the shower. Its new location created the opportunity for a laundry chute that delivers dirty clothes to the laundry room in the basement. Photo facing page taken at A on floor plan; photo below taken at B.



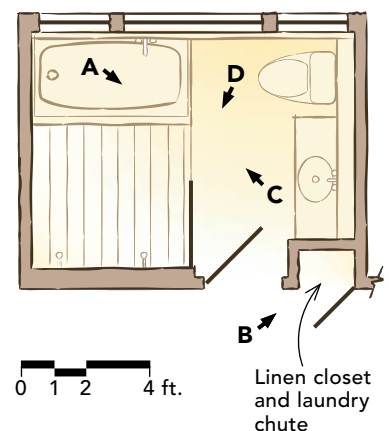
Before



Photos taken at lettered positions.

◀ North

After



THERE'S A WET SIDE AND A DRY SIDE

Moving the linen closet readied the bathroom for a plan based on Japanese spas, where the shower and the tub share a wet area. The dry side of the bathroom, with a marble-tile floor, is home to the vanity and the toilet. New windows on the east-facing wall fill the room with morning sun.

smaller closets, only one of which draws space from the original bathroom footprint. Because the bathroom is above the laundry room, I made the bottom half of one closet a laundry chute. Now, dirty clothes fall right into the washer in the basement.

Embracing the Japanese spa aesthetic, I separated the bathroom into wet and dry halves (floor plans, p. 87). The large shower area now doubles as the tub-access area. When we realized how large the wet side of the bathroom was going to be, we decided to add a second showerhead. Although the dual shower was an unanticipated outcome of the remodel, the additional cost was insignificant, and it has proved to be a real crowd-pleaser.

To increase natural light, I filled the full length of the east-facing wall with windows. A picture window is flanked by two small double-hung windows that also provide seasonal ventilation.

High design at a low cost

One of the unfortunate compromises I made was to forsake the wooden bathtub; it was just too expensive. However, I still managed to incorporate a lot of wood into the design. First, by dressing up an acrylic Kohler drop-in tub from The Home Depot with a Philippine mahogany apron, I managed to capture the look of our dream tub. Second, I decided to clad one of the shower walls and the shower floor in the same mahogany.

I've built many decks from Philippine mahogany and have a lot of respect for its durability and stability. With one coat of amber-colored Cabot's Australian Timber Oil and two coats of Waterlox, it looks great as an interior wood. The challenge was to make a wood wall that would not allow water penetration (drawing facing page). Combined with the wood tub and the duckboard floor, the shower area has a warm, spalike feel while still being low-maintenance and waterproof.

Another potential big-ticket item is a bathroom vanity. I saved some money by buying an inexpensive all-in-one porcelain sink and marble counter (also from The Home Depot) and built the vanity to fit beneath it. The vanity has a birch-plywood carcass and is faced with Philippine mahogany (photo p. 86). To make it seem less imposing, I suspended it above the floor and used an angled piece of aluminum to make the counter appear to float above the vanity.



Good-bye, bath mats! To create the look and feel of a Japanese spa without the intrinsic expense, a common drop-in tub sits in a custom-made mahogany surround (photo above). The mahogany duckboard floor makes getting in and out of the tub a slip-proof maneuver. The second showerhead (photo right) was a welcome afterthought, enabled by the spaciousness of the wet side of the bathroom. Photo above taken at C on floor plan; photo right taken at D.

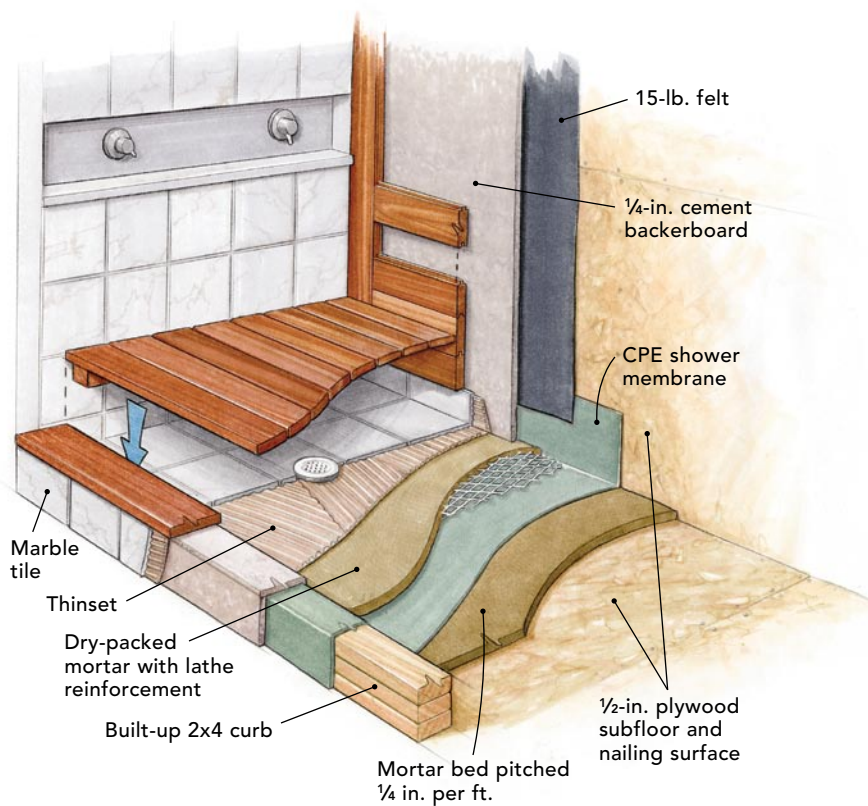


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Because the tongue-and-groove mahogany wall in the shower area is not waterproof, the surface beneath it must be. Both the floor and the wall start with 1/2-in. plywood for a nailing

surface, followed by multiple layers of waterproofing. The bathroom is more than a year old and is leak-free. The mahogany, which was finished on all sides, is holding up beautifully.



To create a more visually interesting room, I varied ceiling, floor, and wall planes wherever possible. For example, a soffit over the vanity hides the exhaust fan and the lights. I made a shelf under the mirror by bumping out the bottom half of the south wall by 4 in., and I pulled in the west wall of the shower area to make a nook for shampoo and soap. Wherever possible, I aligned horizontal trim to make the room seem larger.

Finally, we shopped resourcefully, scouring eBay for deals, including mixing valves from Germany (www.steinberg-armaturen.de) and Thassos marble tile (www.thassosmarble.com). My winning bid for the tile was only \$2.99 per sq. ft. (though I had to buy a full pallet of 360 sq. ft. to get this price, and I have a lot of tile left over). With lots of careful shopping, helping hands, site-built solutions, and some compromises, I managed to build our dream bathroom for less than \$10,000. □

Andrew Ring builds furniture and cabinetry in Brooklyn, N.Y. (www.brooklynbilt.com). Photos by Brian Pontolilo.