



Salvaging a Small Bathroom

A donated sink and cast-off roofing slates meet up with a refurbished claw-foot tub in this remodeled bathroom

BY KIMBERLY GOFORTH-GILL

The only bathroom in our small bungalow was in sad shape. Layers of paint over layers of wallpaper were peeling off the walls, the wall-hung sink was sagging, and the subfloor was peeking through the worn vinyl flooring. Newly married and with a limited budget, my husband and I began simply intending to update the bathroom.

After hours of painstakingly steaming off wallpaper, we discovered why it had been installed: It was holding together the crumbling plaster. At this point, there was no turning back. We demolished our wallpaper-free walls, removing the lath and plaster down to the studs. A simple patch-and-paint job had turned into a total remodel.

The project included new electric and plumbing, heating-duct and floor-framing modifications, a new subfloor and all new finishes. The combination of inexpensive, salvaged materials and our own labor allowed us to remodel the bath on a budget of about \$4,000. We did hire out the rough plumbing, tile-setting and cabinetry.

Vintage fixtures add a period touch

The starting point of the design was the fixed location of the door and window, and the desire to retain the claw-foot tub, which came with the house (floor plan, facing page). With these constraints, a standard vanity would have taken up too much floor space, making circulation nearly impossible, so we decided to use a pedestal sink. We wanted one with a simple rolled edge to match the tub, but we had difficulty finding a new one. We finally found a used one in a friend's backyard, where it was serving as a birdbath. Our friend donated it to the project, and we had it refinished ("Feedback," right).

We had the tub refinished along with the

sink and painted the exterior of the tub ourselves. When we reinstalled the tub, we turned it 180°, orienting the faucets toward the bathroom's front wall so that we had a place to mount a shower head.

Roofing slates become floor tiles

The floor tiles are a combination of green slate salvaged from a roofing project and white ceramic tiles found at a clearance sale (more than enough to do this job for \$15). The combination of both color and texture in the tiles set on the diagonal creates a visually active space, as well as the illusion that this 48-sq. ft. bathroom is larger than it is.

The painted wainscot was designed to complement the style of our Craftsman house and to tie the room together visually (photo facing page). It also provides a durable, easily cleaned surface behind the tub and toilet. The panels are medium-density overlay plywood with wood battens hiding the seams.

We had new insulated sash made to fit the existing window frame, which improved the

energy efficiency and reduced the condensation we had with the original single-pane window. For privacy, we used a combination of narrow reed and obscure glass in the insulated units. The new sash and glass cost about \$225.

The remodel of the bathroom was a process of letting found and salvaged objects influence the design. The use of these materials appealed to the scavenger/recycler in us, and we gladly took the trade-off between the lower cost of salvaged materials and the extra labor it took to handle them. The materials and fixtures add to the character of the space in inexplicable ways through their unspoken history. Besides, if any one asks, there are always stories we can tell. □

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FEEDBACK

Is it worthwhile to refinish old plumbing fixtures?

We initially paid \$160 to have the sink and its pedestal refinished and \$240 for the tub. The refinisher used a two-part epoxy paint, spray-applied. To save some money, we delivered and picked up the fixtures, but a refinisher can generally do the work in your home.

Abrasive cleaners, scratch pads or bleach will hurt the finish, and any soap left on the paint will eventually peel it away. The paint will nick when hit with a hard object, such as the tape measure we dropped in the tub as we were finishing the wainscot.

The finish on the tub has held up fairly well. We had it touched up once after about four years. The refinisher came to the house and dabbed paint on the nicks (cost: \$40). The sink, which takes more abuse, has not fared as well. The paint had peeled in depressions where water collected and was badly scratched and nicked from use. It was touched up once and refinished again. In retrospect, we would have been better off buying a new pedestal sink.

—K. G.-G.



A lot of bathroom in 48 sq. ft.

The size of this remodeled bathroom didn't change, nor did the location of the window, the door or the toilet. But the original claw-foot tub turned around, providing a plumbing wall for the shower head, and the door swing was reversed.

