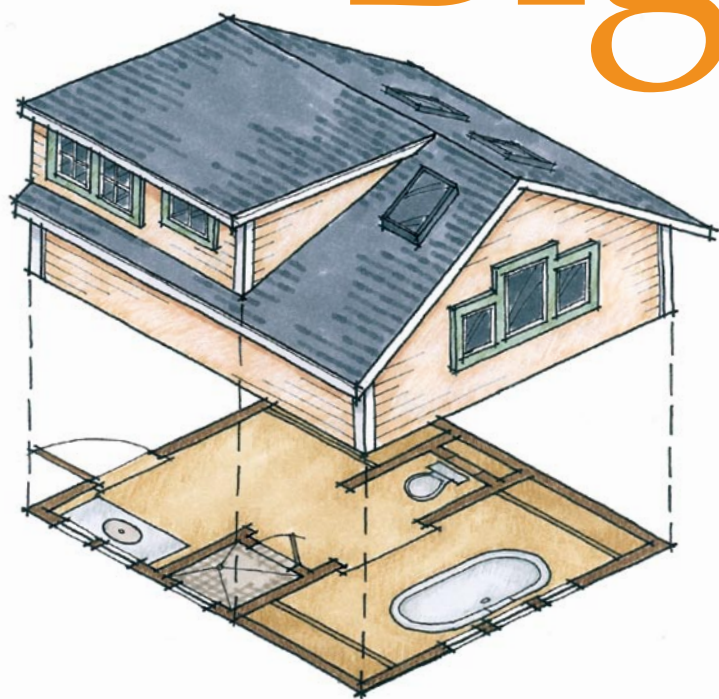




Clever design transforms
an attic space into a
serene master bath

BY DEBRA JUDGE SILBER

Small Bath with Big Ideas



NEW BATHROOM EXPANSION Once confined beneath the dormer, Tim and Gina's top-floor master bath was transformed when they expanded into the raw attic space surrounding it, as shown above. With clever space planning and simple details, they created a serene-if-not-spacious retreat (facing page).

When Gina Porcelli and Tim Kerin decided to remodel the cramped second-floor bathroom in their vintage Victorian cottage, their first thought was to raise the roof. It would have been an obvious solution: The existing bath, added in the 1930s, consisted of a toilet, sink, and tub crammed under a 5- by 8-foot dormer. Expanding the bath into the surrounding unfinished attic space under the eaves would give them a 12- by 12-foot room, but as it was, the steeply angled roof would have made much of that space unusable. Raising the roof, then, was an obvious first step in creating a luxurious master bath.

But the budget-conscious couple, who'd already logged many hours remodeling their 1895 fixer-upper, didn't quite have the patience or the checkbook for a another major project. There was also the integrity of the house to consider. Gina loves all things modern, but the attic's sloped ceiling and tiny windows peeking over the evergreens in the backyard told her that this was a place to nestle a vintage tub, not an acrylic whirlpool (see "My Inspiration," p. 90). And then there was the challenge—which Gina, an interior designer, and Tim, a carpenter, couldn't resist. "If we



*TUCKED IN
AMONG THE
TREETOPS,
the bathtub
is perfectly
situated for
a revitalizing
soak. Birds
serenade from
nearby ever-
greens by day;
stars twinkle
through the
skylights
at night.*

A NEW BATH, INCH BY INCH

Designing a small, oddly shaped space can easily put you in a tight spot. Here's how Gina and Tim worked their way through the design process:

> Choose a focal point

The prominent placement of the tub created a focus amid the room's competing angles and spaces. It also dictated the positioning of other features. "Once I decided the tub had to be here, I thought of everything else in terms of function and relationship," Gina says.

> Place features whose size limits their options

Gina positioned the shower second because its height restricted it to the dormered area. "Like any space plan, it's a puzzle," she says. "Certain things have to go in certain places, and then you have to see what you have

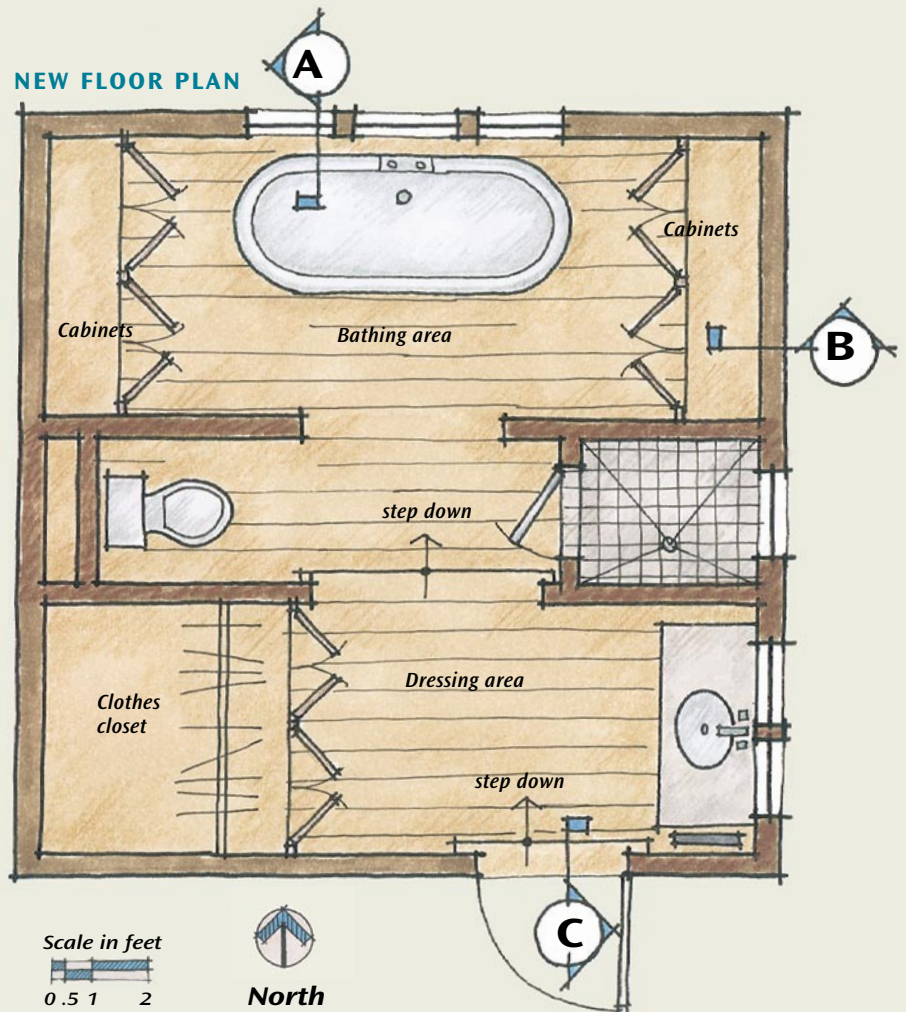
left and how you can make it work."

> Think 3-D

Gina and Tim quickly discovered that floor plans alone didn't communicate the room's varied heights and angles. So they also drew sections, or vertical slices, of the space, as well as elevations, which are drawings of individual walls. Gina also had the advantage of a professional computer-aided design program.

> Test your ideas

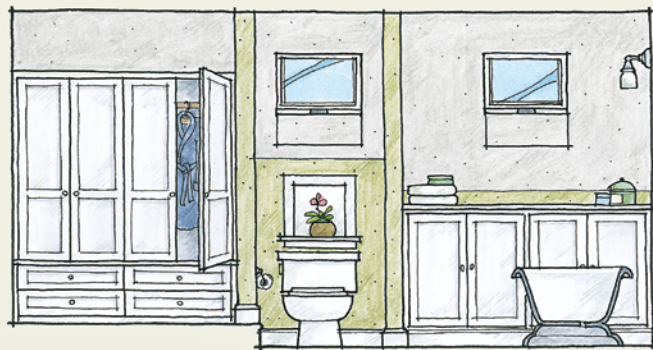
After planning out large features, like the shower and cabinets, on paper, Gina and Tim tested their ideas with cardboard mockups in the actual space. "The challenge with designing a small space on paper is that it's hard to imagine yourself inside, and you get this false sense of space," says Tim. "So using mockups is a good idea."





THREE VIEWS OF THE BATHROOM

Section drawings (below), referenced by letter on the floor plan opposite (arrows indicate orientation), helped Gina and Tim better envision the room's slanted ceilings and varied floor elevations.



A LOOKING WEST



B LOOKING NORTH



C LOOKING EAST

had raised the roof, the sky would have been the limit as far as design went," says Tim. "But there was something about the attic space that I found interesting and challenging." Gina concurs: "We thought, Wait a minute—we're both designers. We should be able to make this work."

The first challenges were structural. Reinforcement was needed in both the floor and the roof to support the tub and to make it possible to open up the space. But even as the shell was sufficiently strengthened, there awaited an equally daunting challenge: space. "Everything in here was a matter of inches," says Gina. Spatial issues would affect every design decision Tim and Gina made in their bath, from the location of the skylights to the paint on the walls.

Openness combines with anticipation

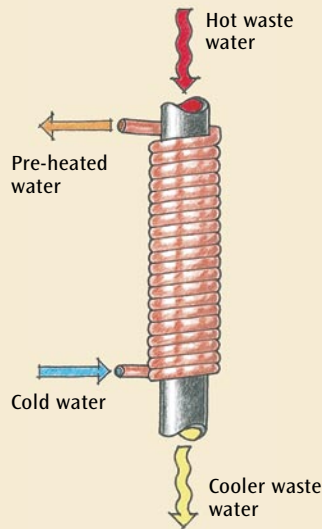
A first glance through the doorway of the remodeled bathroom reveals a sumptuous, vintage-style white tub partially hidden in an alcove across the room. Gina wanted a clear view of it from the door, so she positioned the partition walls not for symmetry or balance but to preserve the line of sight. The resulting view—in which the tub is visible but just out of reach—suggests there's more in this small space than can be taken in with a single glance.

Pulling back the walls meant Gina had to find another way to spatially separate areas for bathing, dressing, showering, and using the toilet. "I wanted to define the different functions but at the same time keep it an open space," she says. Her solution—splitting the bathroom into two distinct levels, one for the sink and dressing area under the existing dormer and the other for the tub, shower, and toilet—not only delineates activity areas but also boosts headroom, especially in the tub alcove where the ceilings are sharply sloped. It also masks a puzzling quirk: For unknown reasons, the subfloor of the attic area was built about a foot lower than the upstairs hallway floor. Making room for two steps down at the bathroom entrance would have wasted valuable space.

Light lifts a low ceiling

Gina and Tim knew the quality of light would have a big impact in such a tight space. They surrounded the tub—their focal point—with light from a trio of windows behind it and a pair of skylights above, which visually lift the sloped ceiling. The bathroom's third skylight, located above the toilet, provides extra headroom as well as light.

ENERGY SAVER



One of the most soothing features of Tim and Gina's bath renovation is the comfort that comes with each electric bill. The device responsible is a gravity film exchanger (GFX), which extracts heat from shower wastewater to preheat cold water on its way to the water heater.

How it works: Cold water is routed through a coil wrapped around the shower wastewater pipe. Heat from the hot wastewater, which naturally clings to the insides of the pipe (what is called "gravity film") raises the temperature of the cold water several degrees before it reaches the heater. In one test, Tim says he found that the temperature of the water went from 55°F to 82°F after passing through the exchanger.

Savings: Tim and Gina save about \$15 on their bimonthly electric bill and estimate the device, which cost about \$200, will pay for itself in a little over two years. See Resources, p. 82, for buying information.



WINDOW TO THE WORLD A window in the 32- by 35-inch shower stall prevents claustrophobia. As one of her few splurges, Gina dressed the stall in hand-shaped subway tile and tumbled marble.

Dimmable sconces beside the tub and in the dressing area along with recessed fixtures in the flat ceiling over the sink and shower provide multiple levels of light. The couple uses halogen capsule bulbs in the ceiling fixtures for their crisp sparkle and incandescents in the wall sconces for a warmer light.

Simplicity adds spaciousness

Gina was careful not to clutter the small bath visually or texturally with a lot of fancy surfaces. But it wasn't easy to turn her back on materials she found beautiful and fascinating. "Glass tile—that was tough to resist," she says. Instead, she put her money into hand-carved subway tile for the shower and tumbled marble squares for its floor—"a bit of a twist" that she felt wouldn't detract from the overall simplicity. Other materials she rejected included wainscoting for the walls and ceramic tiles for the floor. "Part of it was cost, but part of it was that I didn't want to add another finish to this



PROBLEMS INTO PLUSES Solutions to the bath's spatial challenges became design elements in themselves. The peaked gable facing the backyard was a natural place for the tub, with cabinets for towels and soaps filling in under the eaves (left). Changes in level (below left) were used in place of walls to delineate different areas. An arch brings a doorway to its proper height (below right) while lack of headroom above the toilet is cured with a skylight (bottom right).




room that already had so much going on," she says. They chose a floor of wide red-pine planks that is visually quieter than tile and matches the floors in the rest of the house. And for the walls, Gina settled on a soft green.

Quirks turned into assets

With the entire house a little shy of 1,600 square feet, "storage is a big issue," says Gina. So Tim designed built-in cabinets to put the angled spaces under the eaves to work. Not only do the built-ins provide storage, but by filling in the room's deep corners, they also make the ceilings appear higher. The largest of the built-ins, a combination of drawers and closet space in the dressing area, extends far enough into the room that Tim, who is nearly 6 feet 3, can stand comfortably in front of it. "It opens up the room because you don't see the ceiling coming down," he explains.

For Gina, wrestling with an unconventional space meant casting aside a few of the con-

ventions she learned as a designer. Instead of aligning the top of the window over the sink with the top of the shower wall—and cutting off her tall husband's view outside—she let both find their own height (photo, p. 38). Other make-dos forced by the room's configuration created new design elements. The arched doorway into the bathing area, for example, was necessitated by the steeply sloped ceiling on either side. Only by arching the center could Tim keep the doorway height up to code. The fact that the arch enhances the gracious view of the tub is just a bonus. "As a designer, in addition to bringing your own ideas, you've got to let the project inform you as well," Gina says. "We knew from the start that the tub, with those windows behind it, was going to make this room—and everything else we'd just have to try to figure out." 

Debra Judge Silber is an associate editor.

For more information, see Resources, page 82.

