





A Gallery of Favorite Bath Details

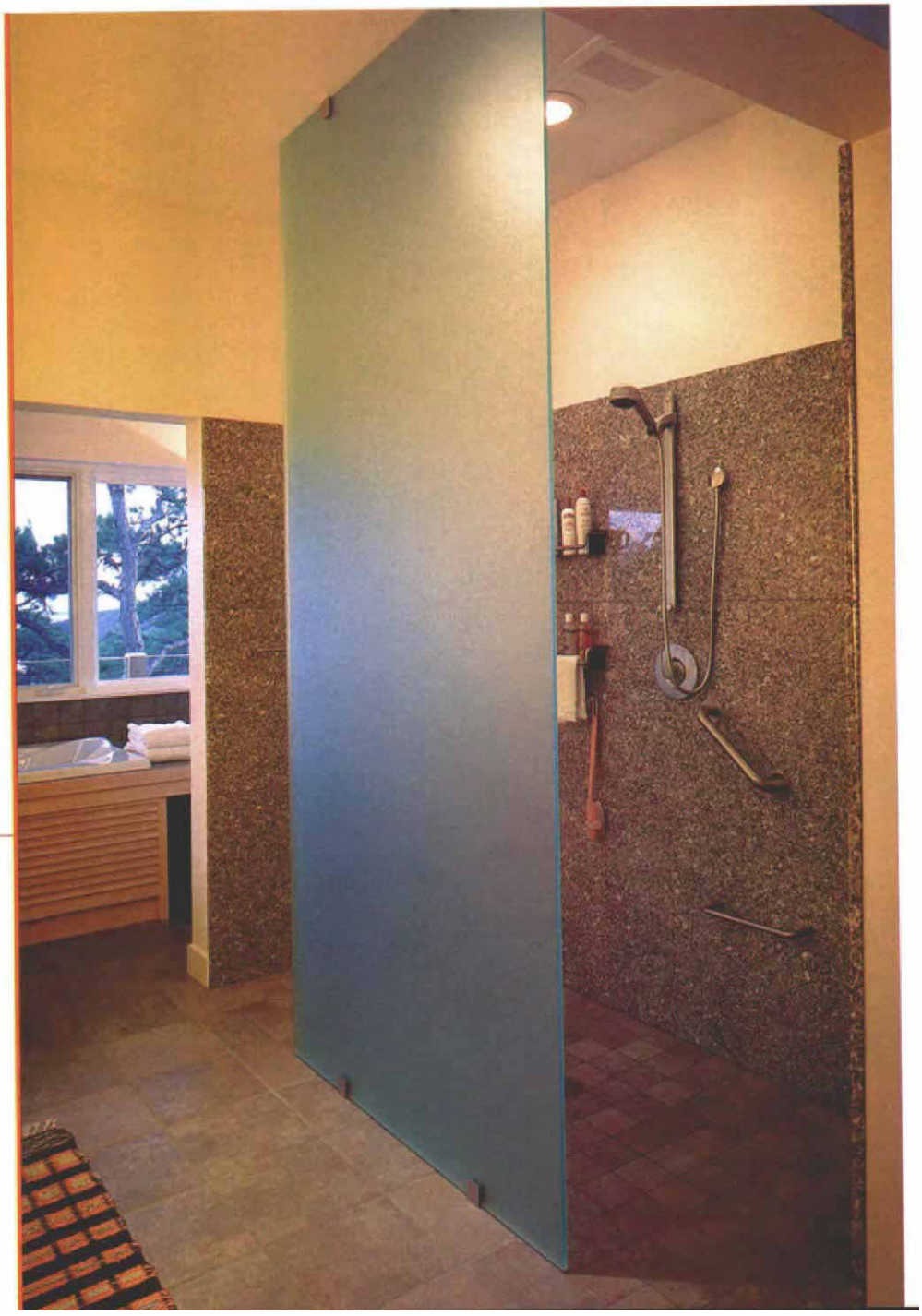
It's the little things that make a good bathroom great

BY CHARLES BICKFORD

Bathrooms are busy little places. Unless you live on the space shuttle, you won't find a similar density of fixtures, wiring and plumbing anywhere else in your house. Bathrooms must also reconcile contradictory design elements: They should be as waterproof as a locker room, yet be as comfortable as a living room. These basic requirements can make a tall order for any designer.

Fortunately, bathroom design can be exceptional. Bathrooms can cost a lot, but with a bit of thought and less money, you still should be able to get a good bathroom. To find some ideas, I took an unscientific survey among architects, designers and builders. The results are mixed regarding cost, but I hope all these projects give you food for thought for your next bathroom project. □

Charles Bickford is an associate editor at *Fine Homebuilding*. Photos by the author, except where noted.



SHOWERS WITHOUT BOUNDARIES

Bruce Norelius of Elliott & Elliott Architecture, Blue Hill, ME

When clients requested a shower without a curb or door, Elliott & Elliott had to work out details that would confine water. A well-drained floor with a substantial pitch is the cornerstone of the design (photo right). A fixed 9-ft. by 4-ft. screen of acid-etched tempered glass blocks the spray. The shower's interior walls are covered with 1¼-in. thick granite. Without a full enclosure, the shower throws small amounts of water on the floor, but usually no more than a normal shower. Photo by Brian Vanden Brink.

CONTINUOUS BACKSPLASH

Sarah Susanka, architect, Raleigh, NC

Without careful detailing, small bathrooms can seem cramped. One way to make a small room seem larger is to make the eye move around the room. To give a half-bath some visual interest, Sarah Susanka came up with an idea that extends the lines of the countertop backsplash around the room, much like a chair rail (photo right). Although made of tile in this example, the backsplash can be made of wood. This continuous line around the room is an effective means of breaking up a space; the room is divided visually into upper and lower halves, an arrangement that lends itself to contrasting paint or material schemes.

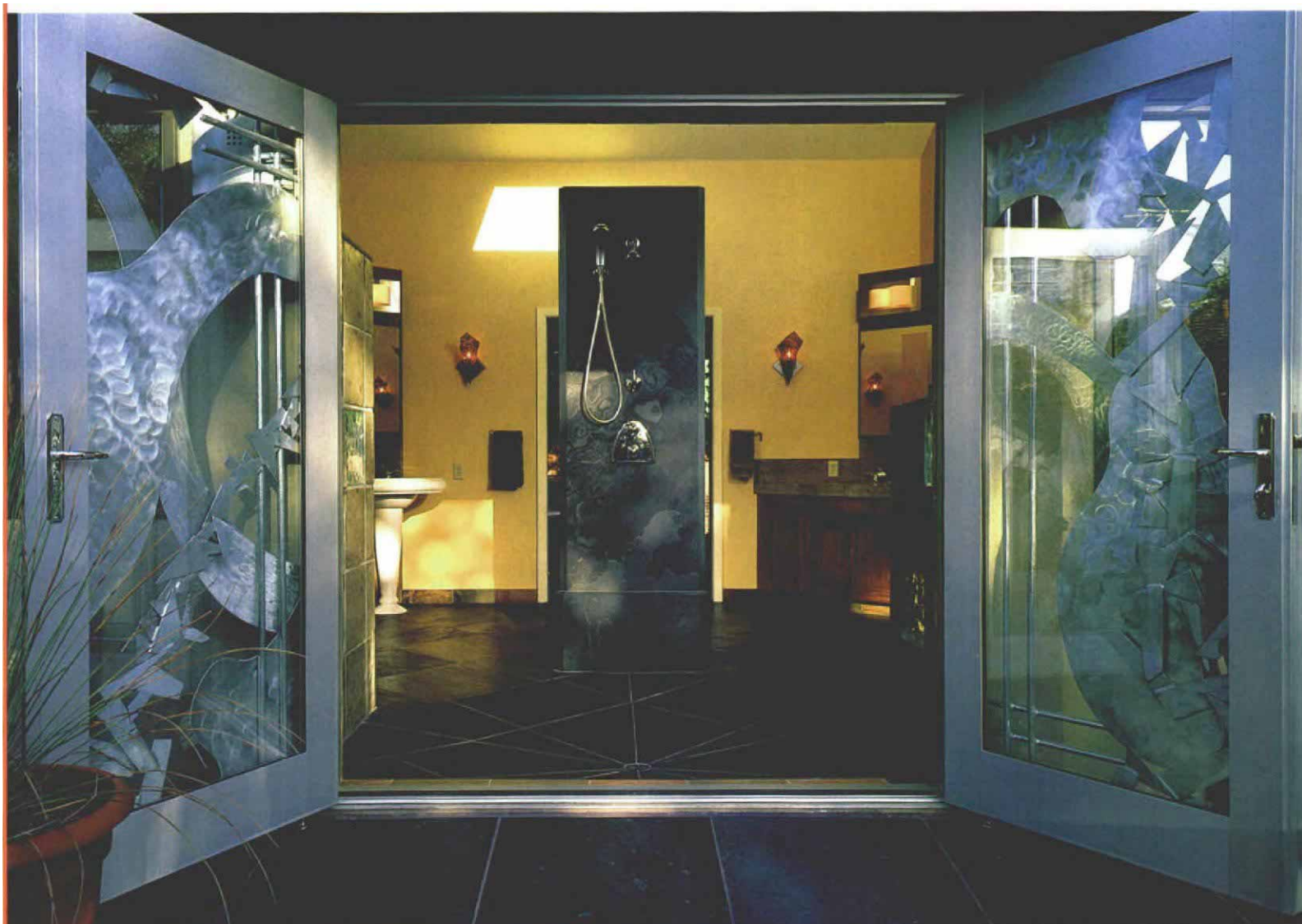


A SLATE TOWER OF SHOWER

Under Jones, Harrell Remodeling, Mountainview, CA

When the great wide open calls, you have to go there. Or factor it into the design. The owners of this house spent a good deal of time in outdoor showers on Hawaiian vacations and liked that feeling of openness. When it came time to remodel their master bath, they asked Linder Jones to incorporate this feel.

The shower monolith (photo below) is covered with 1½-in. thick slate over a plywood box bolted to the floor. Kneewalls of concrete and glass block on each side of the shower keep the splash factor to a minimum. Custom doors by BZ Design of Mountainview, California, open onto a private backyard. Photo by Ken Gutmaker.





CUSTOM MEDICINE CABINETS

David Edrington, architect, Eugene, OR

Medicine cabinets that match the trim details of a bathroom are often overlooked in custom houses. David Edrington rights that wrong in a variety of ways. In this house, for example, he used the chair rail atop the wainscot as the bottom of the medicine cabinet (photo left), giving it sort of a window-stool-like appearance. The frame-and-panel door has a mirror for a panel, which is protected from behind by a piece of white plastic laminate. The doorknob matches those on the other bathroom cabinets, and the 1x4 trim around the cabinet is the same as that bordering the door to the room. Note the nickel-plated butterfly hinges. Small butt hinges would have worked just as well here, but European-style hinges would be out of place. Photo by Ken Peterson.



SHOWER-STALL WINDOW

Keith Moskow, architect, Boston, MA

Showers can be as dark and dismal as a cave. In-shower light fixtures are okay, but there's nothing like natural light, at least according to architect Keith Moskow. His solution to the problem: Install a window in the shower wall. Although he typically places the window in the exterior wall for the view, he used a small window in the interior wall of his own bathroom (photo left) for the same effect.

But what about water damage to the window? Moskow's shower window is a fixed lite that's reversed; the side meant to be exposed to the exterior is facing the inside of the shower. Moskow has also had good luck using casement windows with sills reconfigured to a 1-in-12 pitch. It's also advisable to use exterior-grade paint and/or clear varnish to protect the wood.

A TOWEL RACK AT THE EDGE OF A WINDOWSILL

John Abrams, builder, Martha's Vineyard, MA

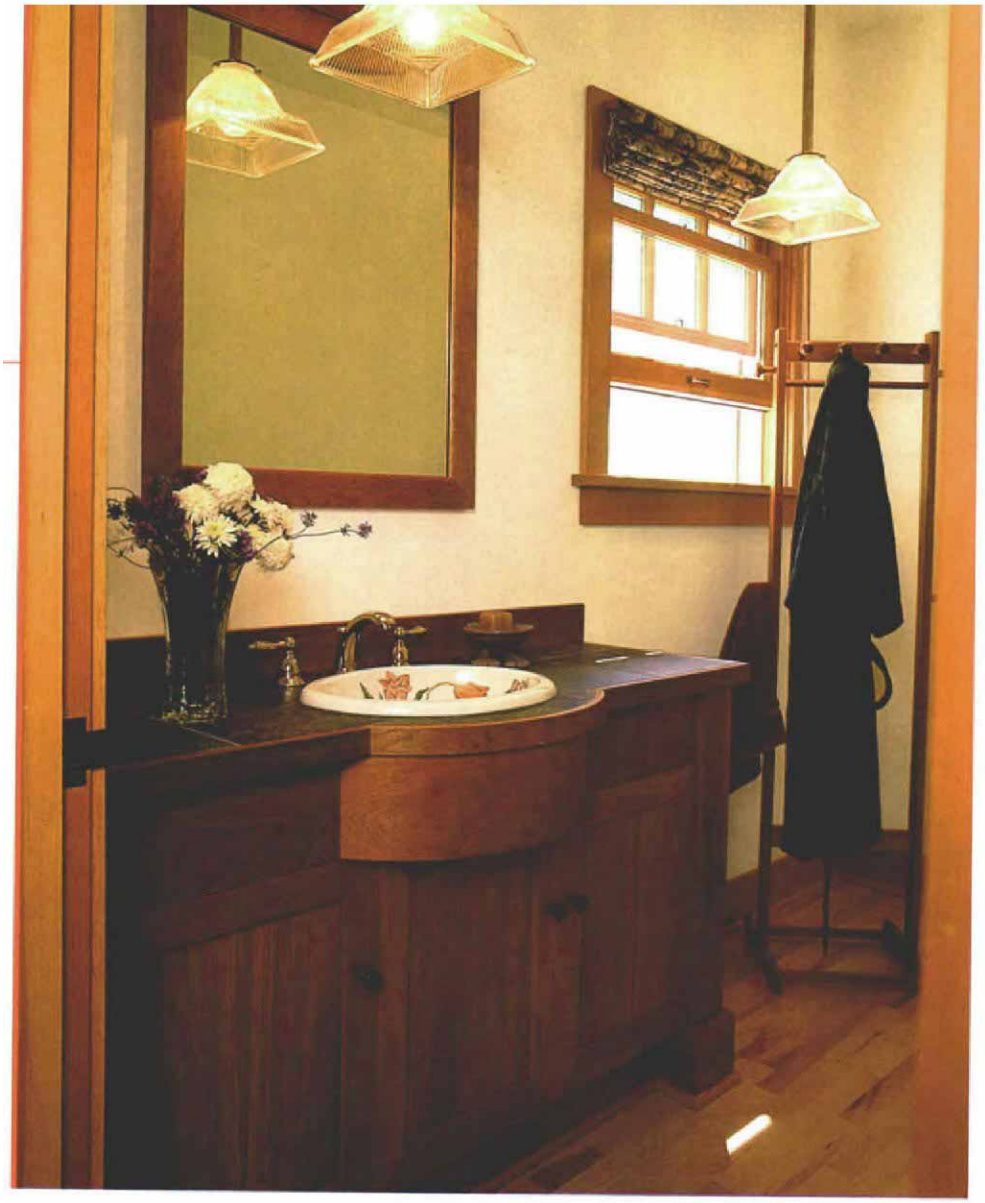
In the midst of building a house, John Abrams and a business partner were designing fixtures and realized there wasn't much room for towel bars in the bathroom. One likely place was below the window, but the placement was too low. As they were looking into the room, job foreman Billy Dillon passed by and said, "We can just make the sill wider and cut a slot in it for the towels." As it turns out, the solution was nearly as easy as he made it sound. They widened the sill to extend 3½ in. beyond the casing and cut a 2-in. wide slot in it (photo right). Screws concealed by plugs at each end of the sill keep the ends from cracking at the weak points. Photo by Randi Baird.



A VANITY THAT FITS THE SPACE

Stephen Babbitt, architect, Seattle, WA

Because this powder room is narrow, Stephen Bobbitt originally chose a pedestal sink. But that meant less storage. Also, the clients were keen on using a custom-painted sink bowl. Instead, Bobbitt designed a cabinet with a shallow 18-in. depth and a curved front that takes up less room than a standard vanity (photo right). The pilaster motif and the slate-tile top are details drawn from cabinets in the nearby kitchen. Photo by Kevin Ireton.





A HIDDEN SOURCE OF AMBIENT LIGHT

Nancy McCoy, lighting designer, San Francisco, CA

One of the hardest things to do is light a bathroom. Sometimes you need a lot of light, but sometimes you want only enough to navigate a path to the toilet. You certainly don't want to get into a staring contest with a light fixture at 3 a.m. While house-hunting, Nancy saw a detail (photo left) that solved a handful of problems all at once.

In a small bathroom with a cathedral ceiling, partition walls separate the toilet, shower and sink vanity. A 4-ft. long fluorescent fixture mounted atop each wall is high enough to be hidden from view but bright enough to cast good ambient light over the room. Equipped with a daylight-balanced fluorescent lamp, the fixture is economical to operate and casts a warm-colored light. Design by Berle Pilsk. Photo by Peter Judge.