

Answers @Home

Q: Thousands of Books in a Small Apartment?

A: Bookmobiles

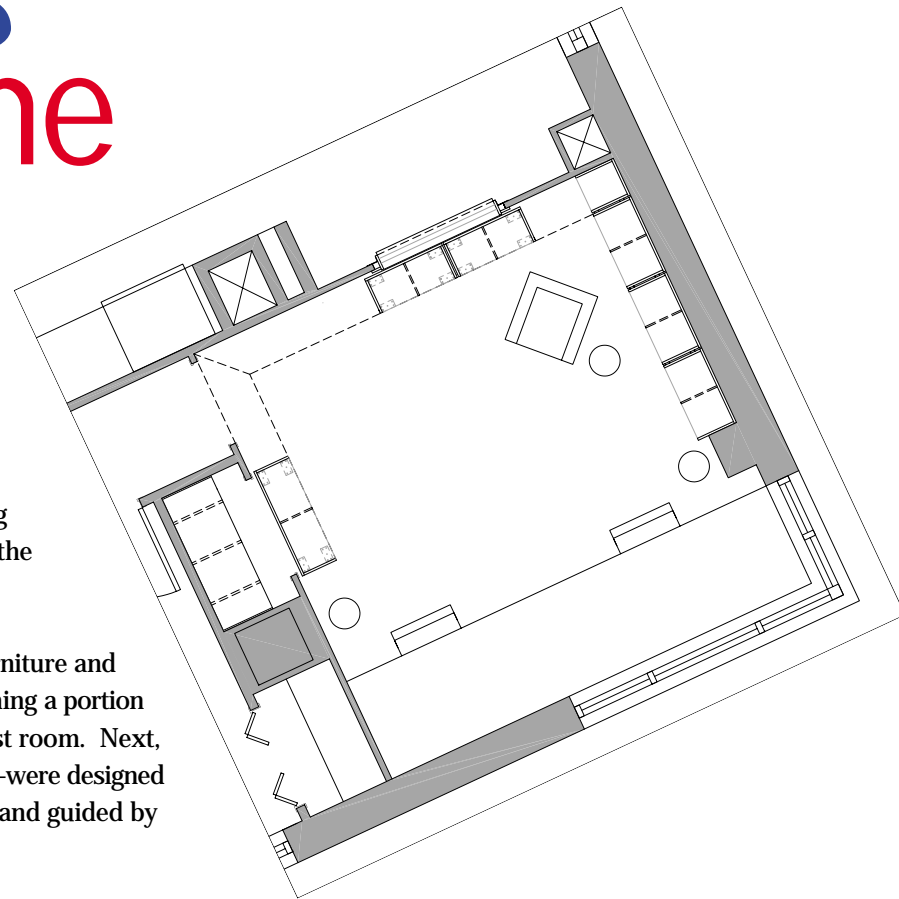
We simultaneously solved two particular problems in this small northwest DC apartment: the need to accommodate a growing book collection numbering in the thousands and the wish to make the most of the rooms by allowing them to do “double-duty.”

We created a library in which the architecture is furniture and the furniture is architecture. We began by demolishing a portion of a wall between the dining room and the study/guest room. Next, the primary elements of the design—library shelves—were designed to move. The bookshelves are mounted on wheels and guided by an overhead track.

This design provides multiple bookshelf configurations. Typically, the inside corner where two bookshelves meet is difficult to use, unless a space-consuming 45-degree corner shelf is installed. The rolling bookshelf solution allowed us to fully use the inside corner without consuming more space. One bookshelf rolls away from the other, revealing more books behind. A closet was fitted with shelves to turn it into a library alcove, accessible behind one of the rolling bookshelves.

The owners wanted to use their space in different ways—connected as a suite of rooms when guests came for dinner, separated into a cozy and secluded study at other times. Now the bookshelves act as sliding doors, varying levels of privacy or openness.

Amy E. Gardner, AIA
Gardner Mohr Architects LLC
Contractor: A.E. Boland, Cabinetmaker



Q: Illogical Bathroom?
A: Use Every Inch

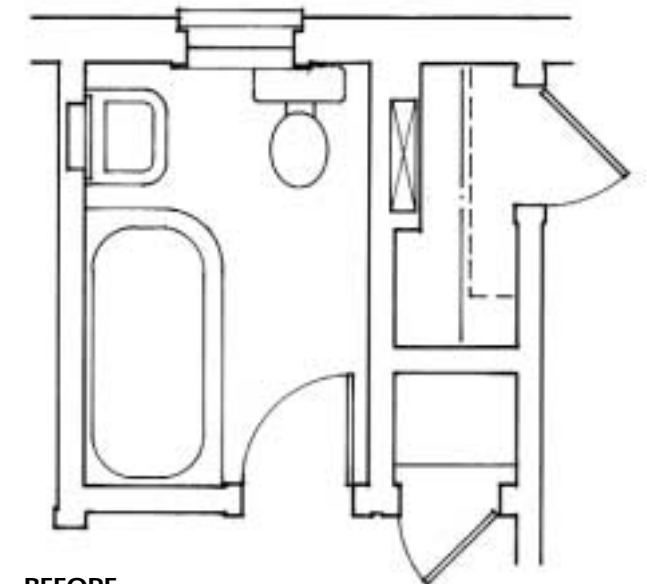
It is common in older homes to find bathroom layouts that defy logic. For reasons having to do with bygone construction techniques, the avoidance of windows over tubs, or simply thoughtless design, many older bathrooms are a chore to use. When layout problems are compounded by inadequate floor space, it is difficult to pass it all off as part of the home’s “character.”

For the owners of an otherwise very functional center-hall colonial in Northwest DC, getting to the sink in the hall bathroom involved an interesting sidestep between toilet and tub. The homeowners looked to me for some help in correcting the problems once and for all. But there was a twist: the renovation was to include a European stacking washer/dryer (to reduce trips to the basement) in the same amount of space.

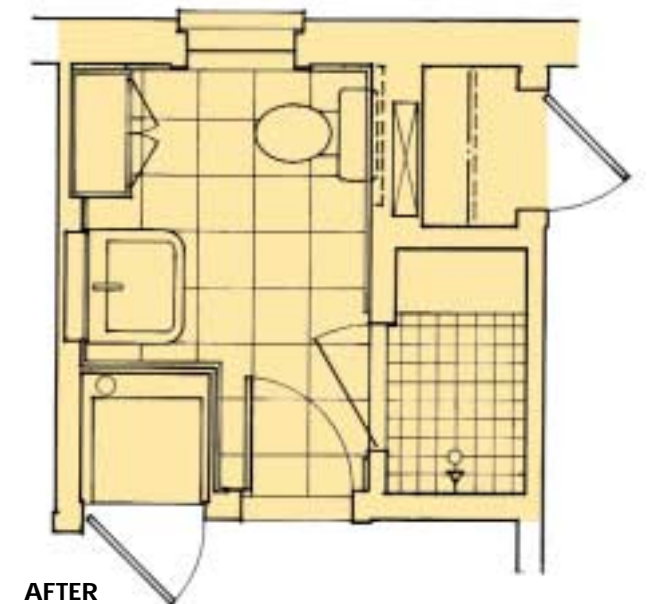
I was skeptical about fitting a laundry closet in the small bathroom and presented some ideas for incorporating it elsewhere on the floor. It was only agreed that borrowing some adjacent bedroom closet space was worth doing. This additional four square feet directly benefits the new shower, but also compensates for the laundry closet space-grab. To keep costs down, a major relocation of the toilet was ruled out and the bathroom door remains where it was. Within these constraints, the new plumbing fixture layout remains unconventional but improved. A generous pedestal sink is now the center of activity. The laundry closet faces the stair hall for direct access from the bedrooms, and the owners rave about this new feature.

Nothing was left to chance. To save space, I kept new walls thin and took advantage of existing wall space where possible. The wall around the washer/dryer was made of layers of plywood and drywall only two inches thick. A valuable inch of elbow room was saved in the shower by using 2x3s rather than 2x4s in some of the wall framing. The toilet, rotated 90 degrees, and the linen cabinet opposite it were both recessed in the wall. The owners chose a glass-front linen cabinet on legs to further minimize its intrusion into the space.

Mark Binsted, AIA
Mark Binsted Architect
Contractor: McCabe and McNeill Construction



BEFORE



AFTER

Q: A Dark Hall and Bad Dog?

A: Hallway Artspace

Our client, a Curator of Contemporary Textiles at the Textile Museum, collects textile crafts such as weaving, embroidery, and basketry. In designing the renovation of her first floor, we looked for ways to display her large collection—high enough so that her dachshund could not get to the artwork and chew it up—while still making a comfortable and livable space.

The home's entrance hallway was dark, tunnel-like, unwelcoming, and dated. We designed a strong and simple transformation. We raised the ceiling to incorporate an unused attic knee-wall space. We added skylights to bring diffused top light into the foyer, with splayed white openings that direct the light downwards. Raising the height of all interior doors to eight feet adds a sense of openness. A splash of warm, saturated red color faces you as you enter the house. Painting the cast iron baseboard radiators helps them blend into the display walls. Light maple flooring increases the illusion of spaciousness; the maple is contrasted with a dark mahogany shoe molding (which in small quantities is not expensive). Finally, we designed museum-quality lighting that is a graceful artwork in itself, creating a pattern of suspended points of light that illuminate the hallway.

Reena Racki, AIA
Reena Racki Associates
Contractor: Madden Corporation



Hoschander Davis Photography

AFTER



BEFORE



Q: Nightstand Obstacles?

A: Book & Coffee Niche

The bedside in this house was a fun design challenge. The owners are getting older (aren't we all?), and they didn't like how the bedside tables seemed to get in the way when they were getting in and out of bed. They had been thinking about getting rid of the stands altogether, but then they would have no place for their Sunday morning bedside cup of coffee or a place to keep the night-time reading.

You can see what we came up with. The books have a niche that they sit back in; the coffee has a ledge that can be pulled out when in use and hidden away when not required. The added depth of the headboard allows the clients to use adjustable table lamps over each side of the bed, so that reading light can be directed exactly where it needs to be. We also added switches to the bedside, so you don't have to get up to turn out the light. I actually measured the clients while they were sitting in bed so that I could be sure to get all of the heights and distances correct. They love the bed, and I think that now they spend more than just Sunday mornings drinking coffee there.

Griz Dwight, AIA
GrizForm Design LLC
Contractor: Estes & Gallup Construction

Q: Getting Dinner to the Porch?

A: Pass-Thru

Since my clients planned on using their screened porch continuously during the warm months, a pass-thru from kitchen to porch was needed to transport food and drink. In other portions of the house, walls, floors, and cabinetry extend from room to room to join those spaces visually while still allowing them to be experienced as separate. In this case, the stainless steel countertop is the continuous element, extending from the kitchen out into the porch as a cantilevered, floating plane. The continuity reinforces the spatial connection and allows food and drink to slide smoothly from one space to another. To protect the pass-thru during colder months, a custom door was designed to slide across the countertop in a narrow groove that minimizes the interruption of the countertop and, at the same time, creates a tight, dirt-free seal between inside and outside.

Norman Smith, AIA
Norman Smith Architecture
Contractor: Acadia Contractors



Timothy Bell