

Decor Score: An old-fashioned bath with a new-fashion hardwood floor

by *Rose_Bennett_Gilbert*

Q: We have a very small bath on the top floor of our old house, which was probably the former servants' quarters. My wife and I both work and our children are grown. We are thinking of taking in a college student as a tenant/caretaker, and need to do some upgrading. There's a claw-foot tub NEW-FASHIONED FLOOR - Faux stone resilient floor makes a small bath big on charm. (original to the house) and a vanity we'll replace with a pedestal sink. The floor is tile, little porcelain hexagons, many of which are broken. We're wondering if we can just lay a new floor on top of the tiles, do we have to take the tiles up, what would be smart (and relatively inexpensive) for the new floor?

A: First, the bad news: any new floor covering is only as successful as the floor beneath it, which should be completely level and smooth as possible. Otherwise, every imperfection will telegraph to the surface and stay there, forever reprimanding you for your slapdash ways.

Therefore, almost any new flooring material will require a new subfloor, usually made of plywood, so you might as well go on and bite the budget bullet: have those old broken tiles removed.

Now the good news: your world of options has opened up dramatically. You can go for more ceramic tiles, for hardwood (yes, even in a bath, thanks to new water-resistant finishes), or for a resilient flooring, in either tiles or sheet goods. Most flooring experts suggest the latter in a bath for the simply logical reason that there are no seams for spills and splashes to seep through. As most sheet resilients come in 6- or 12-foot widths, they can go down seamlessly in small rooms.

The old-fashioned bath we show here has a newfangled sheet vinyl floor that looks like natural stone but is warmer to the touch and kinder to dropped perfume bottles ("Windsor Stone" by Domco at www.domco.com). It was installed wall-to-wall - no seams for seeping - and the natural colors and outsize paver pattern actually make the small space look larger.

Q: I love my black-and-white living room - walls matte black with white trim - but with the coming of autumn and darker days, I need more lights in there.

I just don't know where to put them. I already have lamps on every table (three), plus sconces on both sides of the mantel, and a floor lamp behind the sofa. I hate overhead lights. Please, some suggestions.

A: You should find these bright ideas, well, illuminating. The experts at Shades of Light, the catalog people (www.shadesoflight.com), suggest a number of ways to rev up a room's wattage, starting with individual picture lights. They're almost a signature for top New York designer Jeffrey Bilhuber, who says he uses picture lights over mantels and every available piece of art to add soft, overall lighting (and romance) to his rooms.

Small lights in bookshelves and inside cabinets will create the same kind of internal glow. You may even consider replacing solid shelves with glass in cabinets so the light can filter from top to bottom. Special-focus fixtures can also highlight plants and sculpture, or shine up to illuminate an entire wall, an effect that works especially well if the wall has an interesting texture, such as brick or stone.

Other architectural features also take brilliantly to special lighting effects. For example, an illuminated ceiling will shed its glow over the entire room below. Or you may have a built-in niche you want to dramatize - which, in turn, will help light the rest of the room.

More ideas to consider: install fluorescent bulbs inside window cornices so they wash the curtains with light; mount lights under the edge of a cocktail table to make it "float" on its own illumination; add landscape lighting outdoors to extend your indoor living space visually.

Finally - my personal fave - use lots and lots of candles. Gather flickering votives, stately candelabra, clusters of fat pillar candles in different heights. When it comes to dispelling the forces of darkness, nothing holds a candle to candlepower in my book.

Rose Bennett Gilbert is the co-author of "Hampton Style" and associate editor of Country Decorating Ideas. Please send your questions to her at Copley News Service, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190, or by email.

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