

Decor Score: Space is an illusion

by Rose Bennett Gilbert

Q: There's a small space off the downstairs hall in our old Victorian that we'd like to turn into a half-bath - the house was built circa 1899, with only one bath upstairs. The trouble is this little room is taller (at nearly 12 feet) than it is wide (just under 8 feet). What should we do so it doesn't feel like you're "in the bottom of a well?"

A: Two quick tips: 1. Do tricks that lower the apparent height of the room. 2. Take full advantage of that height.

The small guest bath in our photo is a great case of show-and-tell. Tricks that lower the height start with the tongue-and-groove wainscoting that has been applied to the lower part of the wall all around the little room. With its horizontal moulding and dark wood-tone, the wainscot effectively breaks the visual flow up the high wall and brings it down to a comfortable, human-sized scale.

HIGH LIFE - The wainscot effectively breaks the visual flow up the high wall in this bathroom and brings it down to earth. The upper cabinets also make the most of the tall space, offering attractive storage for decorative and seldom-used items. CNS Photo courtesy of Wood-Mode.

Aiding and abetting that illusion, the upper cabinets also make the most of the tall space, offering attractive storage for decorative and seldom-used items - you wouldn't want to climb up for your make-up every morning, but who wouldn't be glad of extra space for stashing supplies? By combining glass-fronted cabinets with solid-paneled doors (all by Wood-Mode, www.wood-mode.com), the designers lightened the looks of the arrangement without losing valuable storage space. The deep crown mouldings and wide mirror under the cabinets are still more professional designer tricks that help lower the ceiling and expand the overall space.

Q: We are planning to replace our 35-year-old formica countertops. Since there are so many products available, we would like to know what you would choose for your own home in a moderate price range. Also, the walls are covered with brick veneer. Would you remove that or paint over it?

A: Have a little respect! As the granddaddy of laminates, "Formica" deserves a capital F, even if its popularity has reduced it from a brand name to a generic term, like so many of the once-distinctive, now

taken-for-granted products we live with: Frigidaire, Kleenex, and La-Z-Boy pop to mind (perhaps most impressive of all, the English have made Hoover into a verb, as in, "I have to Hoover the rug before everyone arrives").

End of digression. I could live happily with a number of the distinctive laminates still available from Formica (www.formica.com). Also have a look at Wilsonart's offerings (www.wilsonart.com). Be prepared for how things have changed for the better in the 30 years since your laminate was installed. You'll find solid-surface materials that don't wear through, and eye-fooling metal and stone look-alikes realistic enough to bluff a lapidarian.

About peeling or painting your brick veneer: I vote for painting. It will brighten things up without losing the brick texture that will make your walls more visually interesting than plain, flat paint.

WHO'S MAKING THE BEDS IN "HEARTBREAK HOTEL?"

Priscilla Presley has now debuted her collection of bed linens in the U.S.

First introduced to Australian bedrooms last year, the bedding ensemble comes in what the designer calls "clean and crisp" porcelain color with blue embroidery, which makes it work for both men and women, Presley says. There's a spa robe to match. Check it out at the manufacturer's Web site at www.cuddledown.com.

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