Decor Score: Every square inch is needed in new guest bath

by Rose_Bennett_Gilbert

Q: Our guest bathroom is really small. There's a hall closet we could integrate into the bath, but that won't give us but 4 extra feet of floor space. What's your take on this? Is it worth it to go through a messy renovation?

A: When bath space is limited, every square inch is precious. You are right, renovations can be a test of endurance and humor, but even 4 feet of new space can make an enormous difference in the way a bath serves your home and your guests.

A NECESSARY MAKEOVER - To stretch a small bath, closet space becomes a separate space for the water closet. CNS Photo courtesy of Brad Daniels. My advice, therefore, is to grit your teeth and do it. Perhaps the photo we show here will spur your pedal to the metal, as they say. It's borrowed from a smart new book, "Easy Home Makeovers" (Filipacchi, $19.99) by talented writer/editor Mervyn Kaufman. Scoping out dozens of successfully redone rooms, Kaufman leads you through both the why and how behind each makeover.

For this bath, he explains, a small closet in a master bedroom was gutted and annexed to the existing bathroom to serve as a water closet, literally. By isolating the toilet itself, the rest of the bath could assume a more luxurious spa-like personality. For example, the homeowners added a double vanity and fixed transoms in the WC door so it relates to other working transoms in this vintage home. They also found room at the other end of the bath for a new walk-in closet to replace - and enlarge dramatically - the original small closet they had stolen.

Was it worth the bother? Well, not only is home life more comfortable after the renovation, home itself is value-enhanced. Remodeling magazine (www.remodeling.com) compiles a "Cost vs. Value" study every year. Last year, it reported that when you decide to sell your home, most bathroom upgrades will pay you back what the bath improvements cost, almost in full (84.9 percent in 2006).

Q: We really like Arts and Crafts style furniture. In fact, my husband is convinced that the horsehair-seated rocker his grandfather passed on is a Stickley original. It went through a flood once and if

there was identification, it must have been lost. But here's my real question: will it be OK to mix a few other pieces in with the Stickley things? We are doing over the great room and would like some comfortable seating pieces, maybe even wicker.

A: I have it on good authority - Gustav Stickley himself - that his signature heavy oak furniture could coexist attractively with other styles of furniture, most especially willow wear. Stickley actually sold willow through his catalog and integrated a number of willow pieces into his home at Craftsman Farms in New Jersey. According to the Stickley experts who now lead tours through his farmhouse, he considered the lighter, airy pieces a nice complement to the dark, weighty oak furniture he manufactured himself.

You can see the willow in situ by taking a real or virtual tour of Craftsman Farms at www.stickleymuseum.org. The Web site shows the Stickley home as it was when he lived there with his family at the height of his influence in the early 1900s, and as it is now being carefully restored.

You will also see the two corner cabinets the museum was able to buy back at a Christie's auction for upward of $65,000 each. There's also an enormous sideboard that weighs some 800 pounds and was original to the house. It's bigger but less famous, perhaps, than the sideboard Barbra Streisand so famously bought back when few people cared about Stickley and his Arts and Crafts interpretations. Streisand often gets credit for setting off the revival of interest in Stickley furniture, but other bright lights like Andy Warhohl and Steven Spielberg were also early rediscoverers.

In fact, we once went to interview Luke Skywalker, aka Mark Hamill, in his New York apartment overlooking Central Park and found his study filled with - you guessed it - Arts and Crafts furniture that seemed to fit just fine a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

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