



Balanced Budget

Bathroom is Right on the Money

Designer left nothing to chance in this modern, Asian-inspired space

LAST YEAR, JOHN CONROY, managing principal and founder of Princeton Design Collaborative in Lawrenceville, N.J., was hired to renovate a master bathroom. Located in a builder-grade home, the space was transformed into a modern, Asian-inspired bathroom for an overall cost of just under \$70,000.

The original bathroom was cold and drafty, as it sat over the garage and was poorly insulated. The homeowners were seeking a more modern look for their master, as well as additional storage space.

CHOOSING A BUDGET UP FRONT

“Clients often have a wish list and a budget in mind; their wish list exceeds their budget by at least twice,” said Conroy. Thus, the budget often needs to increase, or the scope of the work needs to be cut. Having a pretty firm grasp on the budget at the outset takes the surprise out of the project.

After conversations with the homeowners about their vision, Conroy, using SketchUp, presented them with three options for a design, all at various price points labeled as “high,” “medium” and “low.” The package of drawings was detailed and inclusive, and the homeowners ultimately decided to go with the middle-of-the-road plan, which Conroy said was commendable on their part.

“That is the first step for them controlling the budget; by not getting all excited about doing the

ABOVE & BELOW Asian influences in this modern bathroom are evident in the rice paper quartz countertops and the onyx tile accents.

absolute ‘wow’ but zoning in on something balanced between their budget and their desire to make this a more pleasant space,” he said.

Once the clients decided on the design scheme, the designer made the process even easier for them by showing them pre-selected finishes. “We like to bring finishes to the client because they may gravitate toward something very expensive [on their own],” he said. Again, the clients chose the medium price point.

One challenge was that all exterior design decisions had to go through the community’s association. Originally, Conroy wanted to install a new bathroom window in the rear of the house that would have been placed over the soaking tub in an otherwise windowless space, but the association did not approve the plan. It all worked out regardless, as eliminating the window ended up being a cost savings, and lighting was achieved from the existing skylight. Additional space was added from the adjacent attic to accommodate the shower bench and linen armoire.

BY HILARY DANINHIRSCH



The final result was an 88-sq.-ft. space, complete with a sleek soaking tub, a curbless shower, a vanity illuminated with LED lighting and a shower bench, along with a water closet and plentiful storage.

"I would call their aesthetic Craftsman modern," said Conroy, adding that it had a warm feel, leaning toward the modern side.

Although the clients did not set out to create a modern, Asian-inspired bathroom, the design naturally evolved in that direction, such as the folded planes origami approach to the quartz and millwork. The quartz countertops also have the look and feel of rice paper, another Asian element, along with LED fixtures over the vanity.

SPLURGES AND SAVINGS

To keep within the budget, Conroy made economical choices that still had the look and feel of something more expensive but spent a little more on smaller, specific elements.

To give the space a larger feel, he made a composition of larger and smaller tiles. The 1-ft. by 2-ft. porcelain tile has a light creamy stone effect and came in at what Conroy says was extraordinarily priced under \$3 a square foot, particularly because it has the look of a much more expensive tile. However, they did splurge on the onyx mosaic accent tile, which furthered the Asian theme, but even that tile was just under \$30 a square foot.

"We have bathrooms that can go as high as \$75 a square foot for tile, so that is still within a reasonable price point," said the designer.

Because he had a longstanding working relationship with an area cabinet dealer, they were able to customize standard cabinetry without the full-blown custom pricing: cherry cabinets with a rosewood stain, which picks up on the Asian theme and provides ample storage space. Although the cabinets were reasonably priced, they splurged a bit on the detailing.

"We made sure we had all the returns in the shelving and the wraparounds fabricated as 45-degree miter joints so it looks like one piece of solid wood," said Conroy.

As the master bath is directly over the garage, one expense on which they did not compromise was the insulation package; they needed to create an environment that would be warm in winter and cool in the summer. The team installed closed-cell foam insulation, which provides a high thermal barrier.

Conroy often uses Grohe fixtures and faucets, which he said are reasonably priced for the quality. He used standard chrome, which is less expensive than many other finishes. Keeping all the fixtures



SOURCES

DESIGNER: John Conroy, Princeton Design Collaborative;
CONTRACTOR: Kaiser Building and Remodeling;
PHOTOGRAPHER: Jeffrey E. Tryon, Art Director at Princeton Design Collaborative

COUNTERTOPS & BENCH: DuPont; **HARDWARE:** Häfele;
LIGHTING: Sonneman;
MEDICINE CABINETS: Robern; **MILLWORK:** Tucker Distinctive Kitchens;
PAINT: Sherwin-Williams;
PLUMBING FIXTURES: Grohe & Kohler; **SHOWER WALL & FLOOR SYSTEM:** Schluter Systems; **TILE:** Daltile; **VENTILATION FAN:** Panasonic

in the same general location saved on plumbing, as did reusing a recently purchased water closet.

Sustainable elements include non-VOC paints; low-flow water fixtures; LED lights; and certified wood, quartz and large-format tile. While more expensive up front, these sustainable efforts are not only in line with the clients' lifestyle but will result in cost savings over time.

COLLABORATION

Conroy feels that the key to keeping a project from going over budget is establishing initial expectations, working out any price differentials at the outset and making sure the entire project is a collaborative effort among all parties involved.

"In the end, I would say we achieved the greatest bang for our buck by pushing more common materials for a not-so-common space," he said. "With the help of the client picking from our schemes and staying in the medium range, we were able to stay right on target, with no surprises; they weren't shocked as to what they spent. They were very happy with the job—so happy that they have hired us again to do more work in their home." ●

ABOVE Chrome fixtures and a well-priced, large-format tile helped keep the costs down without sacrificing style.

The rosewood linen cabinet on the continuous bench provides generous storage space.

