



# Spa treatment

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After waiting out the recession, a couple can finally create a master bath using every inch of their Lake Nokomis home's unfinished attic space.

**T**hink it's impossible to create private space in a 1½ story home that houses two adults and two children? Think again. And again.

That's what Leah Drury and David Dobish had been doing since buying their 1936 Tudor in 2000.

"The selling point of the house was the height of the upstairs, which had never been finished," says Drury, a real estate agent.

The family's home on the east side of Lake Nokomis has three bedrooms and a full bath on the first floor, plus a three-quarter bath in the basement. They finished the basement and upgraded its bathroom to give their children a place to spend time with friends, then worked on other living areas. Then the recession intervened.

Finally, the couple decided they no longer needed to sleep on the same level as son Aidan, 11, and daughter Hadley, 6. Instead, they committed to making their long-held dream a reality, creating a master suite on the unfinished second floor.

They started discussing options for the space with friend Ted Barnhill, a principal at Design Forty Five in Minneapolis. The upstairs ceiling follows the roofline to peak at 8 feet, 9 inches, making the master suite a tight fit. The couple opted to honor the structural integrity of the house by working within the existing space and hiding three new skylights from the street.





"They really decided, in my mind, to do it right," Barnhill says. "They hired a structural engineer and added a lot of beams" to add stability to the floor, ceiling and walls.

Drury and Dobish had some flexibility with the interior. Starting with an unfinished space allowed them to choose the height of the knee walls that would create backdrops for a tub and a vanity.

"We played with how big a tub and how far it should go back" beneath the sloping roofline, Barnhill says. "It's kind of nice to tuck a bed or a chair or a tub under a knee wall."

The couple chose a Kohler Mariposa whirlpool tub for the space. Drury liked the idea of having a whirlpool but didn't want the appearance of early whirlpools with large jets that she'd heard are difficult to clean. "They call (the Mariposa whirlpool) more of a champagne bubble experience, which is fun," she says.

Drury wanted a modern look for the master suite, but not too modern for the home's vintage. She had met interior designer Lisa Albers of Albers Design in Minnetonka at a women's business networking group and thought she would be a good match to work on the house.

Albers designed built-in cabinetry as well as a large, his-and-hers walk-in closet with sliding barn doors and a niche for a stackable washer and dryer for the master bedroom.





Frosted-glass pocket doors separate the bedroom from the bathroom. Albers took her cue for the bathroom's greenish-gray hues from Drury's choice of bluish-gray wall color for the master bedroom. Albers designed what she called timeless wood wainscoting for the bathroom. It covers the knee wall behind the vanity, surrounds a pair of windows at one end of the room and conceals the adjoining knee wall behind the tub. To unify the area, she added a tub surround to match the wainscoting.

Horizontal tiles of marble and glass provide the backdrop for the vanity. The couple chose a pivoting wall-mounted mirror. Leftover space between the vanity and a wall became a perfect spot for a small built-in seat.

The sloping roofline prohibited a tub-shower combo, so the couple and Barnhill had to think creatively. An L-shaped area that they first considered for closet space instead became an open, walk-in shower. It features a cubby for robes, a rain showerhead at the corner and a standard showerhead further back. A narrow window allows light into the space while maintaining just enough privacy.

To protect it from water damage, they covered half of the exposed brick chimney at the entry to the shower area with narrow, horizontal gray and white marble tiles that extend to cover the shower's walls and ceiling. Half-inch-by-half-inch tiles of glass and stone create a mosaic on the shower floor. Gray-veined white porcelain tiles in 12-inch-by-24-inch squares cover the rest of the bathroom floor.





All those shades of gray could have made for a dreary bathroom, which Drury definitely did not want. Albers obliged by finding a quartz countertop shot through with glistening flecks for the vanity.

"One of the things that she really wanted was for it to sparkle," Albers says. "It really does sparkle."

Dobish, a software engineer, was nervous about the sparkle factor, but it's just right by Drury.

"That just makes me smile, to have something extra special in the bathroom," she says. A skylight above the tub, a pair of tall, narrow sconces flanking the vanity mirror and small pendants that hang from the ceiling unobtrusively contribute light to the 124-square-foot space.

Drury couldn't be happier with the project, finished earlier this year.

"The amazing part about this house is we didn't have to put a dormer in or alter the roof line in any way, and it was really fun for (Barnhill), too," she says.

"I'm really happy that they're finally up there and enjoying the space," Barnhill says. "It was a fun process. It's interesting for me to get to work with such close friends."

This was the couple's first experience working with an interior designer.

"It's just invaluable to have all those extra ideas and experience for the project," Drury says. "Just the colors and textures that Lisa chose — it just has a really good feeling. I feel relaxed. It's been up there six months now and it feels like it's been up there forever." ■

*Nancy Crotti writes for several Twin Cities-area publications and is a frequent contributor to Spaces.*