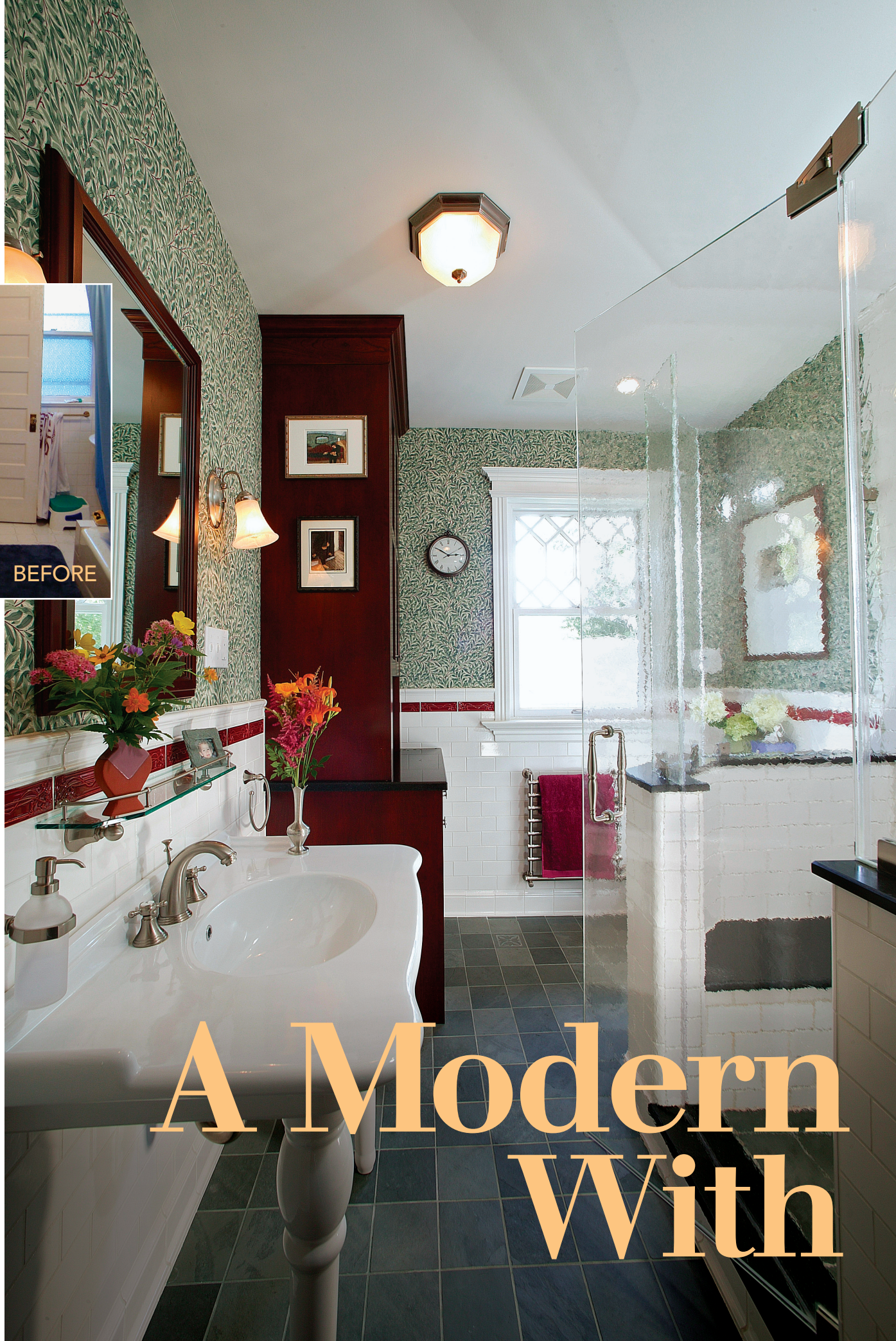




**From clunky to classy.** Sleek white subway tiles and a curvy two-legged washstand are the backdrop for the bathroom's pale-green slate floor, Arts and Crafts wallpaper, and claret-red accent tiles. Photo taken at A on floor plan.



# A Modern With

# Reversing a backward floor plan brings style and function to an American foursquare bathroom

BY TIMOTHY GILL

**W**hen we bought our house in Maplewood, N.J., my wife and I wanted to renovate the main bathroom prior to moving in. To put it plainly, the previously remodeled bathroom had a poor layout and was generally ugly. But our son was only a year old, and we did not have the time or the funds to get the project off the ground. In some ways, I think this was a blessing.

Living with the shoddy bathroom for a few years allowed us to think a lot about the specific problems it had and what features and functions we wanted from a renovation. It also gave us time to learn about our house and to get ideas for the design.

## The old plan was backward

The problems in the bathroom were numerous. With the toilet just inside the door and the sink hidden in a back corner, the flow of the small 7-ft. by 9-ft. room was in the wrong direction (inset photo, facing page). Instead of a cabinet, there was a bulky closet that hid a steam pipe and a stairwell ceiling protruding from the kitchen below; the storage space was wasted. The tub enclosure had an unfriendly pointed corner, and the built-in medicine cabinet was inoperable. The sole window was heavily patterned, allowing no view of the outside and very little natural light. A steam radiator wedged between

the toilet and the closet made the space very cramped, and the wood, tile, paint, grout, and fixtures were all in poor condition. So we gutted the bath, keeping only the steam pipe and the original door.

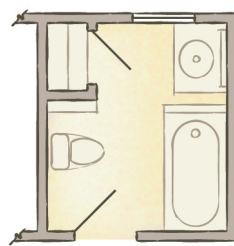
## A look in harmony with the house

Once we addressed the problems with the old layout, we wanted to ensure that our design yielded an attractive and inviting bathroom that was appropriate to the age and style of the house.

A 1910 American foursquare, the house has wonderful period features such as parquet floors and a grand front porch, but not the distinctive look of some of the pure Arts and Crafts or Victorian homes in our area. Our



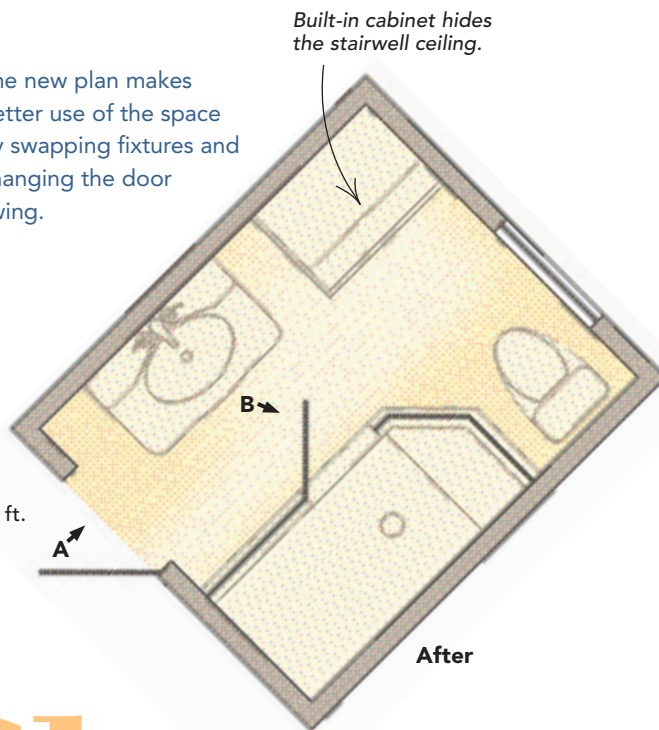
**The style of the house defines the style of the bathroom.** This 1910 American foursquare inspired the owners to update the bathroom but keep some of the period style intact.



**Before**

The new plan makes better use of the space by swapping fixtures and changing the door swing.

Photos taken at lettered positions.

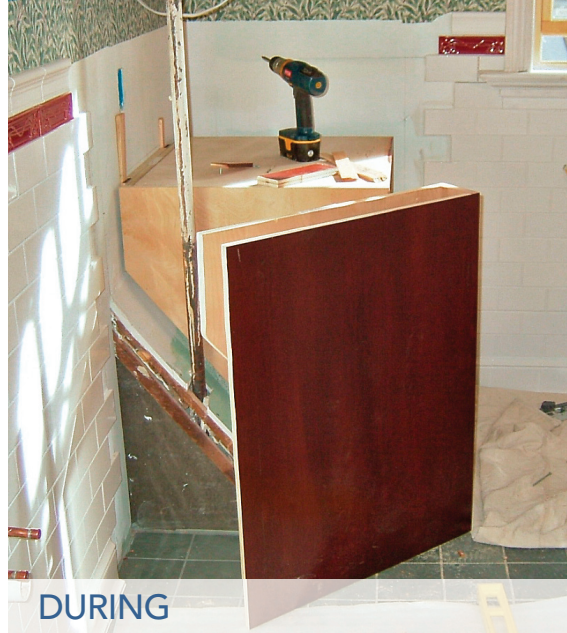


**After**

# Bath Period Charm



BEFORE



DURING



AFTER

## A CLEVER CABINET HIDES SOME PROBLEM AREAS

Removing the closet would expose both the steam pipe and the sloped ceiling above the stairwell, which took up space in the corner of the bathroom (photo above). We designed a cabinet with a chase to hide the steam pipe, with a balancing chase on the opposite side for visual symmetry. The stairwell is hidden behind the base of the cabinet, which

houses three stepped-back shelves behind standard cabinet doors. We chose a simple Arts and Crafts cabinet style and reused excess cabinet moldings for the mirror frame over the sink. We used the same matte-black granite for the cabinet's counter that we chose for the shower bench and the tops of the kneewalls.

challenge was to design a bathroom with modern features and a style that was harmonious with the look of our house.

Our approach combined classic white subway tiles, chair rail, and cove-molding pieces. Using white tile as the backdrop, we added color with wallpaper, accent tiles, and slate flooring. We hung a William Morris willow-bough-design wallpaper from Bradbury & Bradbury (707-746-1900; [www.bradbury.com](http://www.bradbury.com)) above the chair rail and used a Roycroft-pattern accent tile (330-484-1656; [www.meredithtile.com](http://www.meredithtile.com)) in a claret red below the chair rail. We chose pale-green slate tiles for the floor to complement the light-green background of the wallpaper, and a few randomly placed floor tiles engraved with a pattern added a tiny tactile and visual smile under our feet.

To replace the window, we copied a design element found in other windows in the house. Then we asked Pella ([www.pella.com](http://www.pella.com)) to fabricate a window that has hexagonal mullions.

Because we were eliminating the medicine cabinet, we wanted a large pedestal sink (800-359-3261; [www.porcher-us.com](http://www.porcher-us.com)) with ample surface area. Not liking the bold look of brass, we chose satin-nickel fixtures for a

softer look ([www.jado.com](http://www.jado.com)). We thought that a shower enclosure using textured frameless glass on tiled kneewalls was a reasonable approach to integrating a modern feature into the design, and the large amount of glass added a feeling of roominess to the shower, as did a built-in bench. A floor-kick heater hidden under the bench replaced the radiator; we also took advantage of our access to the subfloor by installing radiant heat.

We wanted to keep the original bathroom door and decided to strip its many coats of white paint and refinish it to bring out the original beauty of the wood. But probably the most satisfying part of this remodel was working with a local designer to transform the sloped-floor closet into a built-in cabinet with elements that hide the steam pipe and the sloped stairwell (photos above).

### Looking back on our experience

At the time of this writing, we've lived with, and loved, our new bathroom for six months. Throughout all the work that contributed to its success, we found it really helpful to document the project with a digital camera; we used it for shopping, for emailing photos to the other spouse at work when a quick decision for the contractor had to be made, and

even for communicating between the contractor and vendors.

Writing down a detailed list of the problems with the old bathroom and our needs for the new was also a helpful tool for communicating with our builder. But next time, we definitely will prepare detailed floor plans and elevations to reduce the frequent day-to-day decisions we had to make with the contractor.

On the other hand, if we initially had paid better attention to pricing for the three most expensive parts of the bathroom (tile, shower glass, cabinet), we could have come closer to meeting our budget instead of going over by about 20%.

Looking back, we think the biggest surprise—other than the incredible number of aesthetic and functional decisions we needed to make—was that we enjoyed the whole construction process as much as we did. We learned a lot, and it was not as painful as we had feared. □

Timothy Gill lives with his wife and son in Maplewood, N.J. Thanks to contractor Mitch Broder for his patience and good humor. Photos by Justin Fink, except where noted.



**A tub becomes a stall.**  
A roomy glass-enclosed shower complete with a granite bench replaces a cramped bathtub with an awkward, sharp corner. Photo taken at B on floor plan.