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Presented with an inefficient and outmoded master bath, Paul Linnebach of Mantis Design + Build, Minneapolis, improvises on existing features to demonstrate remodeling at its best. (Photo: Paul Linnebach)



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Recognizing the nation's best remodeling and design work in 15 general categories of residential and commercial projects.

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**MASTER DESIGN
AWARDS 2017
GOLD
BATHROOM
\$50,000 TO
\$75,000**

REMODELER INFORMATION

Mantis Design • Build
Minneapolis, Minn.
mantisdesignbuild.com

PROJECT INFORMATION

Project name: The Resplendent Bathroom
Project location: Minneapolis
Square footage before: 125
Square footage after: 125
Project cost: \$69,000

PRODUCT INFORMATION

Shower concrete tiles: Atlas Concorde | Etec-Ulivo

Bathroom floor tiles: Fioranese | Concrete Beige Matte

Bathroom floor tiles: Provenza | Re-Use Concrete Fango Sand

Wall tile behind vanity: Atlas Concorde | 3D Wave in Gloss White

Lighting: Lite Source | Benedetta

Lighting: Bocci | 14.14

Toilet: Kohler | Santa Rosa

Rain Shower: Hansgrohe | Raindance wall bar and C-Therm Trim

Sink: Decolav | 1446-CWH

Sink faucet: Hansgrohe | Metris 260

Paint: Benjamin Moore



Photos: Paul Linnebach



Tropical Shower

Paul Linnebach of Mantis Design + Build, Minneapolis, improvises on an inefficient and outmoded master bathroom to demonstrate remodeling at its best.

By Patrick L. O'Toole

The difference between new construction and remodeling is well known. One is a blank canvass, the other begins with a discarded space that must be re-imagined and transformed. Remodeler Paul Linnebach won a gold Master Design Award in 2017 for showing that creativity and imagination often offer radically new ideas, even when applied to a client's most problematic spaces.

In this case, an old master bathroom was quite a sore spot for a very busy woman. In one portion of the bathroom, a large unused corner tub sat under a skylight and housed a potted plant. At the same time, an adjacent shower enclosure was partially obstructed by the toilet. The client wanted a bigger shower, more storage and a vibe that reflected her unique taste.

"She is a busy, busy woman, who really did not like the layout of the room. She really did not know what to do with it," Linnebach says. "It was really inefficient, which was a shame for what is a nice master bedroom."

Linnebach's first task was to assess her style as evidenced by other spaces in the home. It features a lot of museum-style art on the walls. And many spaces showed an Asian influence. "It was modern, urban and chic," Linnebach notes. But the question of how to integrate those themes into the existing space was tricky. The skylight was thought to be part of the problem, but very soon it became part of the solution.

Linnebach suggested a tropical Balinese theme complete with a large rain shower recessed into the skylight.



➤ An ethereal effect is created as natural light emanates from the same direction as the shower flow. The new shower enclosure replaces an oversized tub that was under-utilized.

“She would be bathed by light and cleansed by water,” Linnebach explains.

The client asked to see pictures of similar recessed showers but, to the best of his knowledge, none existed. And yet they proceeded down this path together, and the results are remarkable.

WALNUT CABINETS, TILE AND MORE TILE

With the big idea set, the plan fell into place and put the project in motion. Custom-designed walnut cabinets complete with pullouts for laundry and linens were designed to occupy the spot where the shower enclosure once stood. A 7-foot-long floating vanity constructed of matching walnut was designed for the main wall near the

shower. Meanwhile, Linnebach, who does 6 to 12 projects per year, was focused on creating a detailed tile plan. Tile would be utilized throughout the space.

The Balinese theme would largely be accomplished by the use of large-format, wood-grained tile from a number of manufacturers. These were complemented by 2-foot by 4-foot concrete tiles in the shower and a different type of concrete tile for the floor.

“Everything was carefully planned out. We worked so hard on getting that tile plan right, because we wanted to make sure it was really done well,” Linnebach explains. “We wanted four different wood looks. We wanted four different patterns of wood. And we would take those tiles, and we would stagger them and flip them around [so] each piece looks like a separate piece of wood. We did that throughout. We wanted to make sure you could not see a repeat pattern and, therefore, give it an illusion of real wood.”

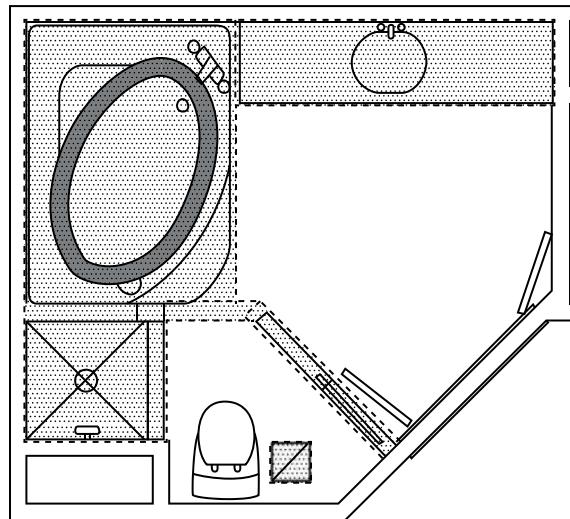
On one end of the shower, built-in shelves were designed for soaps, shampoo and other toiletries. From that end of the shower stall, down to the floor and up the opposite wall, a series of horizontal wood-pattern tiles were set in place to mimic the way real wood planks would be set. The floor tiles were a variant of these tiles that were cut into thin strips by the manufacturers. It creates a Japanese tatami-mat look for the spot directly under the skylight and, thus, directly under the rain shower.

“The wood tile is by Atlas Concorde. They have what is called a tatami mat. What they have done is cut their 3-foot tiles into long strips,” Linnebach notes. “And it is just so beautiful. It looks like a tatami mat, but it is tile.”

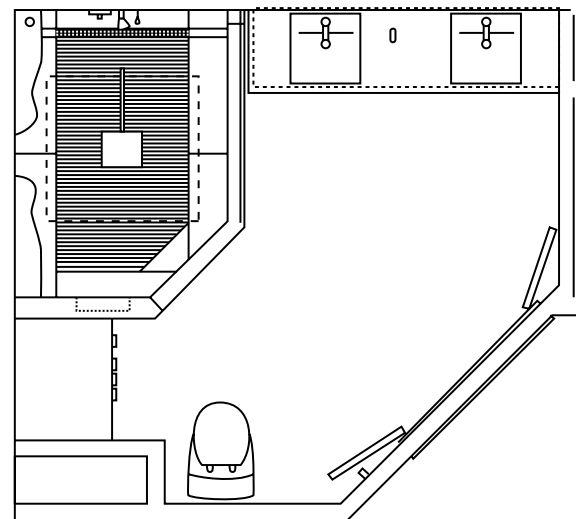
The wood patterns continue up into the shaft below the skylight. Linnebach concluded that simply setting a series of wood-plank tiles up in that space would not look realistic. Instead, vertical tiles were set in the corners to

➤ Before-and-after floor plans show a small shower and large tub that were replaced by a custom closet and larger shower. A new floating vanity with two lavatories instead of one was added.

BEFORE



AFTER



look like wooden support posts. Three-foot planks were then set to look as though they are fastened to the posts.

The Balinese scene was completed with the inclusion of custom-made, ceramic planters made by artist Julie Asbury of Portland, Oregon. The planters were attached using stainless steel screws with attractive, brushed stainless caps inside the planters to hold them in place. A diamond-bit carved out the tile to allow for the screws, which were inserted and set in silicone.

If at some point in the future someone would like to remove the planters, the brushed stainless caps could be left in place to be used as a place to hang sponges, washcloths or towels.

“The planters kind of popped up in my head. I was trying to have fun with the design. It is a fairly large wall,” Linnebach says. “And I think if you saw the scale of it with someone standing in there, it would give you better perspective on the size of that space. I really wanted to create some interest on that wall. So I put together a preliminary design concept for these planters and I had an artist, Julie Asbury, make the pots.”

Linnebach’s team set all of the tiles, complete with hand-cut mitered edges. The goal, again, was to make the whole space appear to be real wood. Without the miter cuts, metal strips would have detracted substantially from the intended effect. Another challenge was the room’s third-floor location. The large-tile cuts were all done outside at ground level, so each of the heavy large-format tiles had to be carried one-by-one up the stairs. This added considerable time and labor to the job.



▣ Carefully selected tiles were married with a zen-like artistic vision to dramatically alter the bathroom. The waterfall effect of the new shower enclosure is complemented by custom-designed wall planters.

VENTILATION AND CURBS

As a practical matter, ventilation became a huge concern in the planning process. The question was not whether more condensation would travel upward and create conditions for mold and stains inside the skylight shaft—it would—but how to design a mechanism for removing all of that humidity.

Linnebach created an open lip near the skylight. That open lip is connected to ductwork backed by a whole-house ventilation unit that was installed in the attic space directly above the bathroom. Two-inch by 2-inch furring screeds were utilized to create the open lip on one of the four sides. The other three sides of the square were closed lipped.

“We’ve got the air collecting from one side so we can pull air across,” he explains. “We kind of wanted it to pull in one direction so we get circulation. So that was a great solution, and I continually check with the client to

see if there is any moisture buildup in there. She tells me nothing is collecting up there and that it is comfortable.”

Linnebach concedes that the shower room would have been better without a curb. But the location of the floor joists below prevented creating the proper angle for a curbless drainage system. The only way to achieve that desired look would have been to build up the entire floor of the bathroom, but the client declined that option based on higher costs.

“The client has told me that the new showering experience has transformed the way she frames the beginning and end of each day,” Linnebach says.

As a remodeler, you really can’t ask for more than that. | QR