

Max out the minimal



The expectation that every master bedroom must have an ensuite has helped push real estate values to a new level, states Nadia Sakey.

COLUMN by Nadia Sakey

Savvy vendors will often try to add an ensuite on a tight budget with limited space. The later addition may look good enough, but without efficient planning, performance is often compromised. A well-designed, compact bathroom can provide you with all the space you need to perform your daily rituals and still pack a punch in the design stakes. Here's how to maximise the tiny space you've inherited.

Take stock

Assess your needs versus your wants; it's important to redesign your bathroom according to how and when it will be used. If you have a well-equipped main bathroom, you don't need a bathtub in the ensuite. Instead opt for a larger shower area, perhaps with a double-head to accommodate both you and your partner for busy mornings.

Next look at your current layout and make note of openings, such as windows, doors and existing plumbing locations. If the layout generally works, don't change it. Moving plumbing positions can add to the cost of a remodel.

Plan carefully

Like most things, it starts with careful planning; and when size is an issue, making the most out of the space is critical. Small rooms can easily lead to unwanted clutter. Utilise your wall cavities for storage and shelving, such as incorporating easy niche shelving boxes within the shower cubicle and recessed shelving or cabinets above the vanity. Consider every possible layout for your basic suite first; and remember there are certain standards for minimum clearance space needed between each unit in the bathroom, so it is highly recommended that you engage a qualified renovation specialist to assist you. Creating a safe, efficient and functional bathroom within the correct code of practice is challenging and a certified renovation specialist is strongly advised to assist with the plans. They will ensure the correct clearance measures and often introduce you to new products and ways of thinking to solve specific issues.

The palette

You can create the illusion of space by choosing the right colour and finishes – it literally adds visual square inches to your space.

Keep everything in the same tone. Neutral tones work better in creating the calmer spa-like environment and darker shades tend to add a luxe feeling when used with effective lighting.

Avoid contrast like combining dark walls with light tiles – it tends to cut up the space visually and can make it feel smaller.

It's important to blur the line between materials as much as possible. Paint the ceiling the colour of the walls and unify colours where you can to make odd angles and sloping low areas visually disappear.

The materials

If you are tiling the floor, select a tile that you can also use on the walls. Even better, tile the entire room in the same tile. Fewer transitions mean less fuss and a more expansive feel. I often encourage to waterproof and tile the entire space, especially in small bathrooms, as it can also eliminate the need for a bulky shower cubicle.

The lighting

Never underestimate the power of well-placed lighting. Wherever possible, maximise natural light and translucent window treatments. If you don't have a window, consider retrofitting a solar tube or skylight.

Strategically-placed mirrors can help reflect and bounce light into the room. Try using a sheet mirror above the vanity that goes right up to the ceiling to visually expand the space.

Use a good lighting plan as a series of layers – placing good levels of light where it is needed for showering, shaving, or putting on makeup. Aside from good task lighting in a tight space, overhead/ambient lighting needs to be planned and placed to ensure there is an even wash of light for an optical illusion of space.

Storage

Whether you are remodelling or just need a little additional storage in your existing rabbit hutch of a bathroom, there's always a solution with good planning and a little creativity. Items that you use every day need to be immediately accessible, which is best placed within the vanity. Vanity sliders, wall-hung vanities, mirrored wall cabinets with recessed wall cavity and soft-close drawers with hidden smaller inner drawers – these are all examples of clever storage solutions.

You can never have enough storage, but it is true that you will always fill what you have. Be mindful of what you really need and focus on building clever and functional storage into the hidden or dead space first. Going over the top on creative storage ideas can actually be counterproductive in small spaces. While a little more investment might be needed to create a functional bathroom packed with hidden storage, it is money well spent.

A minimal spa-like look to a compact bathroom will ensure you enjoy a stress-free environment. ■

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