

# Making Small Bathrooms Work

by Patrick J. Galvin

Few people are around now who remember it, but there was a building boom in this country in the 1920s that established a standard with which we are still saddled.

That was when a federal law first prescribed that there be at least one bathroom in every urban dwelling unit. Everyone needed it but nobody

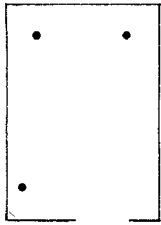


Figure 1. Standard location of drains

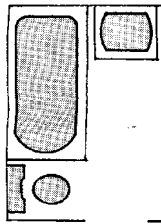


Figure 2. Typical 5x7-foot bath

liked to talk about it, so architects and builders established the still-standing habit of tucking it away. The result? Our standard 5x7-foot bath. We often add a few inches, even a foot, in either or both dimensions, but the size is so minimal it is difficult to take away a few inches.

Many builders do a lot better now—providing more space and adding room for needed counters and storage, especially in the master bath. But most still stick with the minimum size. Remodelers, of course, must often cope with tiny bathrooms and the fact that modern folks don't want to put up with them.

## Don't Move the Toilet

The easiest answer in remodeling is to borrow space from an adjacent closet. Sometimes, however, there isn't one. Also, in new, low-cost housing, the builder must work with the small bathroom space. As the accompanying drawings show, however, there are ways to make tiny bathrooms better.

At the framing stage, a builder can make many adjustments. But in remodeling, the cardinal rule is to keep the toilet in the same space, because moving the toilet drain is

expensive. A bathtub, on the other hand, can change direction without costly plumbing changes, and a lav can be moved easily.

The prime consideration in a bathroom is to have room for the three basic fixtures and space to maneuver in while using them. The next most important factor is counter and storage space.

In the accompanying drawings, Figure 1 shows the locations of drains, with the toilet at lower left. Figure 2 shows a typical installation.



**A 1920 federal law prescribed that there be at least one bathroom in every urban dwelling. The result was our standard 5x7-foot bath.**



Figure 3 would be typical if a 5-foot tub were at the far end. But this drawing shows two alterations. One is the use of a 4 1/2-foot tub and a full wall of cabinets and shelving, which can be 9 inches deep if you extend the shelves 3 inches over the foot of the tub. Alternatively, you could use a 5-foot tub and start the shelving just to the right of, or below, the tub.

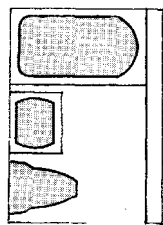


Figure 3. A wall of shelves is added by overhanging the tub or going to a 4 1/2-foot tub.

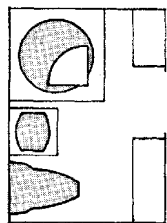


Figure 4. Japanese soaking tub—new here, but old in Japan—allows a full 12-inch-deep wall system.

The open shelving offers counter space as well as storage space, and doesn't hinder movement in the room.

## A Touch of Glamour

Figure 4 uses a new kind of tub (new here, old in Japan) called a soaking tub. It is 40 inches square with a molded seat, represented by the arc. With the door moved to the side, this allows space for a full 12-inch-deep wall system combining open shelving and cabinets.

Part of the wall system across from the lav can be converted into a vanity-like counter area by adding a mirror and a slide-out shelf. The shelf can be slid out on standard drawer slides to serve as makeshift counter space.

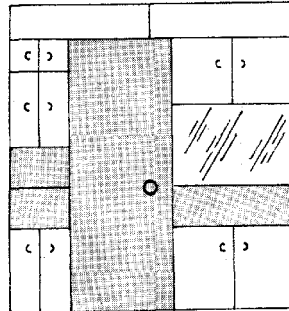


Figure 5. A 9- or 12-inch wall system can combine open shelves with cabinets. A slide-out shelf below a mirror creates a makeshift vanity.

Figure 5 shows how this wall system might look using both open shelves and cabinets. Twelve-inch-deep wall systems are available from most stock- and all custom-cabinet manufacturers. The 9-inch-deep system is available from several.

In modern housing, a small bath is one that has up to 75 square feet. A master bath usually has from 75 to 120 square feet. Above that, we get into "super" baths, which might include exercise equipment or laundries, or allow for other activities.

The fact is, however, there are still many bathrooms under 50 square feet in which these suggestions can help. ■

Patrick J. Galvin is the author of Kitchen Planning Guide for Builders, Designers and Architects and the former editor and publisher of Kitchen & Bath Business.