





NEW BATHROOMS FOR RENO LOVER

Mary Lee Keefe is a self-described renovation junkie. She has done many renovations in the past and just completed project number three at her current residence.

She started with a main-floor renovation that quickly evolved into project two – the backyard – because the indoor and outdoor spaces are connected. Her most recent project was the second floor. Three bathrooms, which hadn't been touched since the family moved in four years ago, were gutted and redesigned. "It was time to get them done," she says. Also, there was carpet upstairs, and that had to go. "The bathrooms were fine but not functional. We decided to do it all at once."

Plans were to "step up" the ensuite bathroom. "The previous owners had prettied it up" she says, "but the soaker tub was so big it would empty the hot water tank to fill it and in a few minutes the water would be cold."

That tub had also been installed incorrectly. Mary Lee says the shower was at one end and the faucets were at the other, and there was no place to hang a shower curtain. However the tub had a sunny location under a skylight, the perfect spot for a new washing area that includes a smaller tub behind a half wall to separate it from the vanity and an enclosure-free shower with a bench. "Because the bathroom was so large, we could do the shower without a glass enclosure," says Amedeo Barbini of Barbini Design Build. "An enclosure keeps water inside a small space. For an open shower, you need an area at least six by eight feet."

"More people are doing wash areas," Mary Lee says. "I had seen a lot of pictures. We decided to try it out. The floors slope to a long drain in front of the bench."







Mary Lee says her husband, Guy Manuel, “couldn’t get his head around” a shower without an enclosure but “he has since come around.”

There’s a long vanity with vertical storage separating twin sinks along one wall. The toilet was moved to a new location just inside the bathroom door. A medicine cabinet above the toilet provides handy storage for essentials.

A closet was redesigned as a walk-through closet that connects the bedroom and bathroom. “It was custom designed and tailored to the way the couple uses the closet – the amount of hanging space versus shelving and the amount of shoe storage,” says Barbini interior designer Vanja Stepanek. “Cabinetry was designed to complement the bathroom vanity to ensure a flow of finishes and tonalities.”

“It has one glass pocket door and one that’s mirrored in case someone wants to use the closet as a dressing room,” Amedeo says.

The prime motivation for their son’s bathroom was to create a comfortable and functional space for 6’5” Lucas. (“Amedeo had to dig down to accommodate the steam shower in the basement of our last house to fit Lucas and the rain shower head,” Mary Lee says.)

His bathroom was large, but Mary Lee says “it had a tiny little sink and a tiny shower.” Post renovation, it includes a big shower with a glass enclosure. The like-new vanity from the master bathroom was used in this bathroom and topped with a new mirror.

In their last house, the family had a steam shower. It was on the top of father and son’s list for the new main bathroom.

A steam shower must be fully enclosed but have breathing room for when the steam is not in use. There must be easy access to equipment. A bench is an added touch in case the user wants to spend a longer time relaxing there, Amedeo says.

Mary Lee says Guy and Lucas love the new steam shower. “They each use it three or four times a week.”

One interesting decision, says Mary Lee, was the type of tiles. “We had done marble before but the upkeep of marble can be a bit much. You have to be careful with cleaning materials. We thought we’d try porcelain. Porcelain products are amazing. We’re happy. It looks spotless and can be cleaned with anything. Our son’s bathroom has a Carrara look to it.”

“Mary Lee wanted the look of stone without the maintenance. High-end porcelain is maintenance free





and looks great,” Amedeo says.

The bathrooms all have heated floors, a must as far as Mary Lee, a real estate agent, is concerned. “Whenever I show people houses, it never fails. When we go into a bathroom with heated floors, they all go ‘ahhhh’.”

The old carpet was removed and replaced with hardwood floors in a colour that would provide consistent flow between the main and second levels. Mary Lee said she appreciates the new floors because the squeaks have been eliminated.

A fresh coat of grey-based paint and new brushed chrome hardware create flow between main and second floors.

This renovation also included an upgrade to the front door. The new solid double doors are mahogany, stained a rich espresso colour. The windows have matching espresso mahogany frames.

The only post-project regret Mary Lee says she had is that they didn’t redo the cabana. “It’s not a big deal but might be the next project.” That project (after they finish renovating their Florida home) may also include new windows.

As a real estate agent, Mary Lee is often inspired by the houses she sees. “I see great ideas, but it’s dangerous,” she says, because she wants to do more renovations on her own home.

“Amedeo and I work well together. I make decisions fast but am open to suggestions. We have a good working relationship,” she says, adding that Amedeo is good at coming up with creative solutions to problem spaces. “He loves those problems. He sees them as challenges.”

“Mary Lee is a fabulous client. She has the ability to make quick decisions,” Amedeo says.

To help make the choice easier, Vanja presents full custom-designed packages to clients based on their needs and wants. Packages include everything from floor and wall tiles to paint colours to cabinetry and other finishes so the client can see how the components come together. “All Mary Lee did was point to what she wanted,” Vanja says.

“The big thing with Amedeo is that I know it’s going to get done. He’s great at communicating costs and staying on budget. If we buy something more expensive we can stay on budget by saving money elsewhere. He’s also got a good reporting system. It’s very detailed. I have a four-inch-thick folder with details.”

She also says her husband doesn’t like to be put out. “Amedeo gets it done. The job is clean and not very intrusive.”



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