

Home

N.J. MAKEOVER

Lasting impression

Couple with a lifetime of memories in their home revamp with style to create a new living space

Kimberly L. Jackson
For The Star-Ledger

The Freehold house was among more than 200 built in a Levitt and Sons subdivision known as Contempra at Monmouth Heights.

While early problems led about half of the development’s original residents to file complaints with the New Jersey Division of Consumer Affairs about issues ranging from flooding to leaking windows to sagging upper floors, Sharon Berenson says their three-bedroom, two-bathroom Arizona-style ranch had no such problems.

But back in 1973, “easy-to-care-for vinyl asbestos” flooring was among selling points listed in a brochure about these built-to-order homes with prices ranging from \$39,500 to \$44,500.

The asbestos flooring, now known to be a health-threatening household material, was carefully removed about 15 years ago in a renovation that updated a kitchen “designed for the lifestyle of the ’70s.”

In the 44 years they’ve lived in their single-story home, Jim and Sharon Berenson have taken care of its routine maintenance and also made a variety of lifestyle-supporting adjustments.

It’s the house from which they watched their son and daughter grow up, go off to college, then start their own households and visit their childhood home with their children.

After all these years, Sharon Berensen still loves her home’s features — the cathedral ceilings, the large windows, the spacious backyard.

“When I retired in 2007, I gutted each room,” said Berenson who taught first grade for 30 years at Freehold Learning Center while her husband worked in sales. “I didn’t want to move to a retirement community,” she said. “I love my house, I love the yard. So I decided that I would do one room at a time.”

Working in phases, the couple has repurposed the 1,950-square-foot space that now makes a home for two. Sharon Berenson’s ally in the process has been interior designer Dulce Feito-Daly of Red Bank.

Feito-Daly guided a second renovation of the home’s kitchen, a bathroom and other areas. She made it possible for Berenson to hold onto pieces that mattered. She worked a beloved metal headboard into the new design for their master bedroom while others had advised getting rid of it.

In the most recent project, Feito-Daly helped select materials and addressed small-space challenges in what had been their son’s bedroom.

“I wanted it to be my girl’s cave,” Berenson said of the room that had become a holding place for the couple’s queen-size bed when they upgraded to king-size.

“I had all this heavy furniture,” Berenson said. She donated most of it, but her husband wanted to keep his old dresser. It went into their son’s former bedroom along with the over-sized sleeper for grandchildren and other guests. Berenson also kept their daughter’s former student desk, which she had been using as a vanity table.

“It was just a mishmosh of things,” she said. Berenson wanted to turn the room into a more welcoming personal space where she could put on her makeup, watch TV, read and relax. She envisioned built-in furnishings, and discussed her ideas with Feito-Daly.

“It’s a very small spot, and I didn’t think that I could do it. She said it could be done.”

To give Sharon Berenson a place to put on her makeup, and Jim Berenson a place for his off-season clothes, Feito-Daly designed a slim-profile built-in with a vanity table and drawers as one side and a chest of drawers and shelving as the other.

It has two ports to charge mobile phones, and above the drawers, a shelving area with space to tuck in a wall-hung television and LED lighting.

“It offers a nice little display area,” Feito-Daly said. A figurine of a woman in a 1920’s bathing suit perched atop a beach ball reminds Berenson of her mother. It is tucked into one of the shelves along with faux flowers.



An updated bedroom, above, in Sharon and Jim Berenson’s Freehold home is now a “girl’s cave” where Sharon can watch TV, read and apply her makeup. She shares a bit of the space with Jim, who has six drawers for clothes storage in the room. The space also serves as their guest bedroom, thanks to a pull-out sofa bed, top. Photo courtesy of homeowners.

The details

What they renovated: They converted their son’s former bedroom to the “girl’s cave.”

Who did the work: Dulce Feito-Daly Interior Design of Red Bank.

How long it took: Four months

How much it cost: About \$20,000

Where they splurged: On the designer-outfitted sleeper sofa

How they saved: By using a melamine faux wood for the built-in unit. “Custom wood would have cost at least twice as much,” Feito-Daly said.

What they like most: Sharon Berenson says she likes the total look of the new room. The Uttermost brand vanity chair with its animal print upholstery is a focal point, she says.

DESIGN

Avoid common bathroom decorating mistakes

Gabrielle Savoie Tribune News Service

A spacious, well-organized bathroom is truly life-changing. A great bathroom should be visually pleasing, but most importantly, it should serve its purpose well: adequate storage for everything from bath products to towels, lighting that serves the tasks performed in a bathroom, and finishes that are resistant to humid environments.

We talked with designers to find out about the biggest decorating mistakes they see in bathrooms and the clever solutions they use.

Storage: Every designer agreed on one major mistake: not having enough storage. “You absolutely need as much storage as possible to ensure that your bathroom stays the most functional and uncluttered space,” says interior designer Tali Roth. “Medicine cabinets, although often harder to find attractive ones, are so, so useful for storing all those small items for everyday use. If you’re building from scratch, explore recessed wall cabinets and recessed shower shelves.”

Lighting: “There’s nothing worse than a poorly lit bathroom,” says Roth. “People often



Although you need to be mindful of humidity in a bathroom, wallpaper is one way to inject some personality. Randy L. Rasmussen

forget that they need multiple light sources and end up with a single dull sconce — which basically ensures you’ll leave the house with scary clown makeup. Try to incorporate both

decorative and task lighting.”

Designer Ohara Davies-Gaetano agrees: “So often the importance of lighting is overlooked when designing a bathroom,” she says. “It’s always preferred to make sure that a bathroom has a good source of natural light as well as strategically placed overhead and vanity light.”

Finishes: Roth pointed out how messy designs can become when going crazy with finishes and patterns. “In most circumstances, more than two finishes in a bathroom can look odd. Try to flow the materials in a digestible way — keep all the floor materials the same and change up the walls. If you want a statement pattern or color, use it on the floors or tile the inside of a recessed shelf instead of putting it everywhere.”

Electrical: For designer Jane Abercrombie, the single biggest mistake when designing a bathroom is to plan the electrical components too late. “Electrical planning needs to be done very early in the process,” she says. “For example, a hardwired makeup mirror is great mounted on the wall, but you need to remember this in the early phase.”

Tile: “A common mistake is using cool, decorative tile on their bathroom floors that aren’t made for getting wet, which can make it really easy to slip on,” say the designers at Studio Life.Style. “This can be fixed by either making the flooring slip-resistant which can be done with treatments, or making sure that the tile you choose is suitable for bathrooms.”

Personality: “People forget that bathrooms can have personality just like any other room in your house,” the designers at Massucco Warner Miller told us. “Add a fun and unexpected light fixture, chic art or even wallpaper. Bathrooms are typically smaller spaces, so it doesn’t take much to really spice them up and make them cohesive with the decor of the rest of the house.”

Humidity: The designers at Studio Life.Style say to apply caution with the use of wallpaper: “We love using wallpaper in all the bathrooms we design, but the biggest thing we always keep in mind is that the wallpaper needs to either be made for bathrooms (like a vinyl, for example), or the backsplash needs to be high enough so that the wallpaper won’t get damaged.”