

# BED, BATH AND *better* DESIGN



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**AFTER:** (above) Closing in the vanity gave the couple more usable storage. New lighting, hardware, more proportionally framed mirrors and accessories add function and pretty layers to the once stark room.

**BEFORE:** (left) The oversized vanity opening was wasting space, wall mirrors were the wrong scale and the room needed new lighting, hardware, towel hooks, a rug and accessories to add functionality and softness.

PAINT, CARPET AND OTHER TOUCHES UNIFY A COUPLE'S BEDROOM AND BATHROOM

BY JOETTA MOULDEN

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JANET LENZEN

Gail Nevarez found herself continually buying items for her master bath and bedroom and then taking them back to the store or giving them to friends. So she decided to take action.

"I was always looking for that elusive 'something' that would make our rooms complete, but I was unsure what that might be," Gail says.


She and her husband Jose needed new carpeting in the bedroom, and she was unsure about artwork, bedding and window treatments. Jose, who built most of the bedroom furniture, was quite worried about having a decorator come in and tell the couple they needed to get rid of everything (including the furniture he built) and that it would end up costing them an arm and a leg. Gail finally convinced him that she was wasting a lot of time and money trying to decorate alone and that hiring a professional would give her direction. She read him my mantra: "If it's already paid for, let's try to make it work." And he said yes.

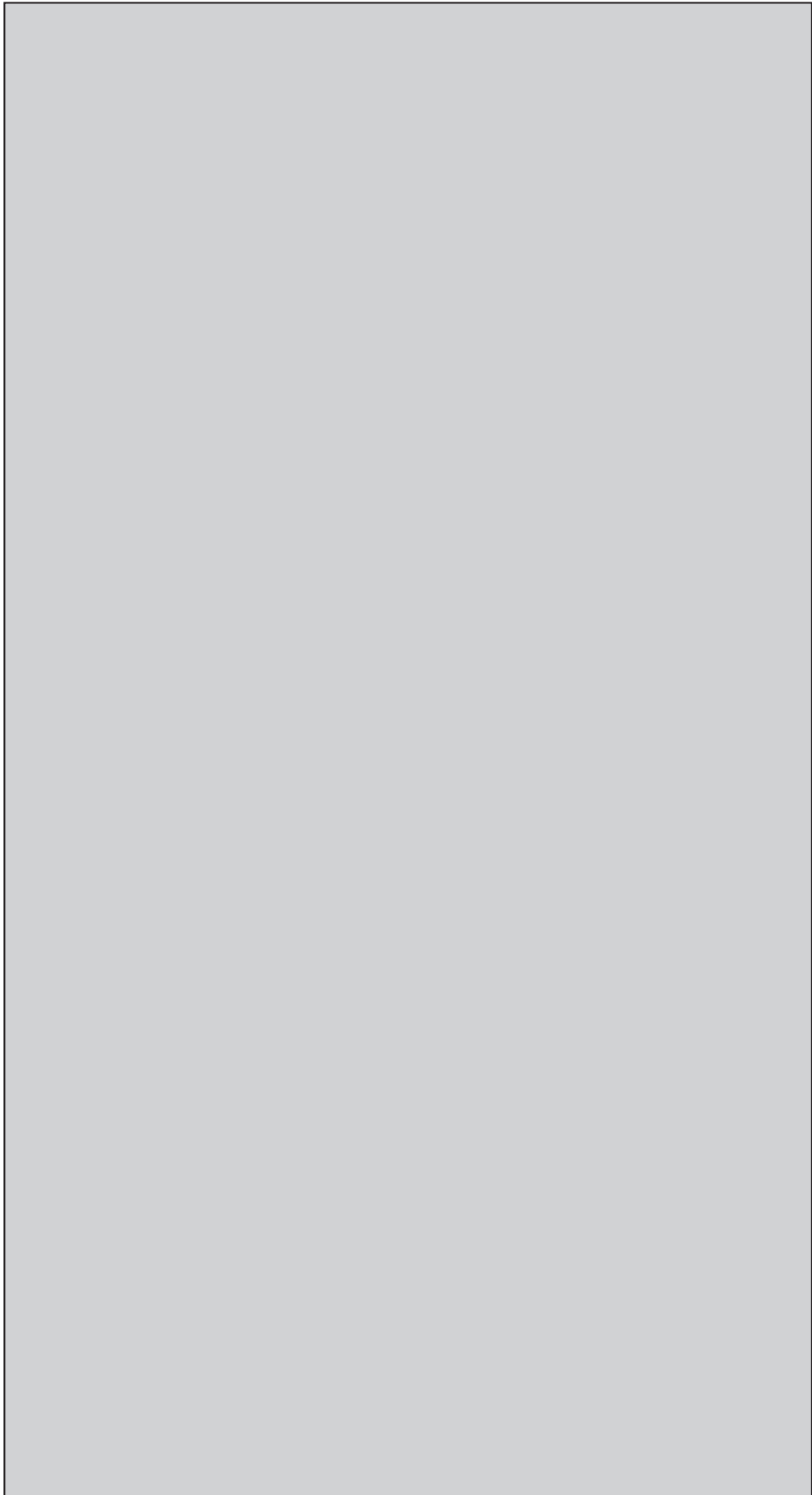
#### VANITY PROBLEMS

Like a lot of readers, Gail was stuck. She had a very long vanity opening in the master bath and didn't know what type of bench should go under it. She didn't own a makeup mirror that would be appropriate for a vanity and didn't know which one to buy. The ceiling was tall, and everything she placed on the long counter looked tiny.

The room seemed cold and stark. In an attempt to soften the space, Gail had painted the room four different colors. "By the time you came," Gail told me with a sigh, "I had given up and just painted the bath the same color as our living room."

TIP: Just because a builder gives you a large vanity opening doesn't mean you are stuck with it and must use it as such.

The first thing I did was ask Gail if she ever had time to sit down to put on her makeup. She laughed and said, "I wish!" She had just assumed that she would be forced to decorate around the unused vanity. I immediately suggested that Jose fill up the opening with cabinets and drawers for more storage. Nothing is sillier, I said, than spending money on a bench and makeup mirror that you never plan on using. We also discussed adding knobs on the doors and pulls on the drawers to match those they had installed on the doors and putting towel 



**DIY DECORATING**



hooks 22 inches above the counter beside each sink. Knobs and pulls not only add visual interest to a long vanity, but practicality as well.

**TIP:** To determine the correct height to hang a towel hook, drape a towel over the hook and move it up the wall until the towel does not drag on the counter, it looks right and is a convenient height.

“Jose and I were so surprised at your suggestion to add new cabinets,” says Gail. “It made so much sense we couldn’t believe that the idea had never crossed our minds. Now we have the extra storage we have both always wanted, and that empty feeling in the bathroom is completely gone. You even drew a diagram Jose could use to build the cabinets and drawers himself.”

**COLOR, CURTAINS & CARPET**

As for selecting a bathroom wall color, that too, was easy. I asked if they were happy with the bedroom wall color, and she said they loved it.

**TIP:** Paint the bedroom and bath the same color when there is an en suite room (in this case, Benjamin Moore’s “Dry Sage”). It creates a smooth flow

**AFTER:** (above) The terra cotta bathroom walls lacked continuity with the sage green bedroom, where blank walls and flat bedding cried out for a splash of color with more contrasting layers.

**BEFORE:** (below) New Ikea curtain panels, bedding and matching sage green paint in the bath soften and unify the two rooms, adding visual punch and style.



**BEFORE:** (above) The frameless mirror “floated” on the tub wall, an area that needed tall flowers, candles, towels and artwork to eliminate starkness.

**AFTER:** (right) Blooming dogwood branches repeat the framed dogwood photographs in the tub area. An architectural wood carving from Balinskas Imports is reflected in the mirror.



and continuity between rooms and positively affects resale values.

Since Jose really liked the green walls, he was delighted with repeating it in the bath. Gail, on the other hand, was worried that green would be drab and darken the bathroom. I explained that with the large wall of frosted windows, white woodwork and mirrors to bounce light around, the green would be no darker than the terra cotta wall color. She was willing to give it a try.

“That was the hardest suggestion for me to visualize,” Gail explains. “I was so surprised at how wonderful the sage looked. It made the terra cotta floor tiles look warmer, and the color was rich, not dark.”

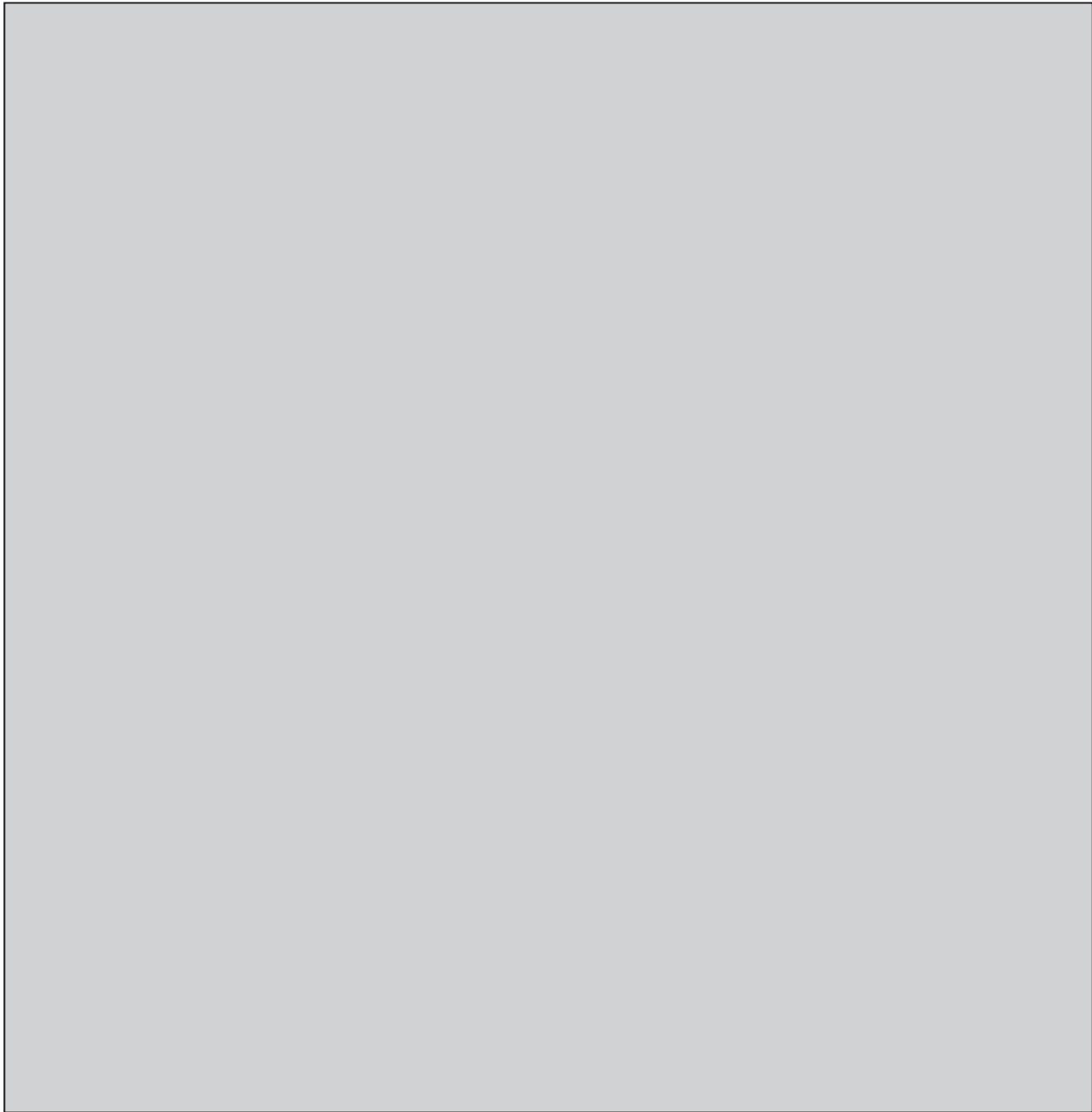
We purchased linen curtain panels from Ikea (two for \$29) to soften the nearby bedroom windows and installed white curtain rods from Lowe’s 9 inches above the top window to frame the transom windows. Since Gail had hung framed flower photographs over the bed, I suggested she add a tight grid of four 16-by-20-inch matted flower photographs (\$16 each) from Cost Plus World Market to hang on the blank wall leading into the bath. (She bought

the frames on sale at Aaron Brothers.)

TIP: Hang the art a frame-width apart, both vertically and horizontally, for the most pleasing spacing.

I also recommended having a mix of canvas paintings and artwork under glass in the bedroom to eliminate boring “sameness.” They shopped at Crate & Barrel for a 42-inch-wide inexpensive print transfer on canvas for the wall between the windows, and they found a watery boat painting they liked (not shown).

For carpeting, I suggested a warm, straw-colored flat carpet that would not show vacuum cleaner marks and that had the visual texture of seagrass (since some find seagrass a bit rough on bare feet). Gail found a wonderful carpet, Natural Beauty by Shaw, a Boucle™ in “Raffia” at Keystone Carpets & Interiors, which gives the look of seagrass but the comfort of plush carpeting. And to give Jose the color he wanted on the bed, they bought a “Tango” king-sized quilt (to fold at the foot of the bed), one sham from Crate &





*A grid of flower photographs repeats the frame style and theme of the existing photos over the bed.*

## TRADE | secrets

- Be consistent. Unify en suite rooms with the same wall and trim paint colors, artwork themes, frames, matting, hardware and accessory styles.
- Think outside the box. Just because the builder decided you needed a sit-down makeup vanity doesn't mean you are permanently stuck with one.
- Fewer large-scale accessories are more effective than a bunch of small ones.
- Use large trays on a long countertop to corral and organize toiletries.
- Sometimes the most effective strategy is to not buy more furniture and accessories, but to rethink the pieces that already are paid for.

Barrel and embroidered gold sheets (Steinmart) to layer over the ivory coverlet and shams (from Pottery Barn).

TIP: For a quilt to hang down luxuriously on each side of the bed, buy a king size to go on a queen-sized bed.

### BATH ADDITIONS & ACCESSORIES

In the bathroom, I suggested they continue their framed black-and-white flower photos, adding one above each towel bar by the tub and one in the water closet. I also suggested that Jose build a frame for the tub mirror. It is flanked with a pair of Hamlin vases and blooming dogwood branches from Pottery Barn that repeat the dogwoods in the artwork. Jose removed the tall wall mirrors over each sink and built framed mirrors, staining them instead of painting them white to look less matchy-matchy. New Mercer Quad bath lights from Pottery Barn complete the sink area.

TIP: When framing a mirror, paint the reverse side of the frame black so that bare wood is not "reflected" in the mirror.

To accessorize the long bathroom counter, Gail brought out a white Andover jewelry chest from Pottery Barn, which I placed in the center of the counter, and we added two matching Pottery Barn silver trays on each side of it to hold toiletries. The crowning touch is a hand-carved wood architectural fragment from Balinskas Imports, which hangs above the windows. It brings an exotic touch into the bath and ties the new stained wood mirror frames together. A wool "Estelle" runner from Pottery Barn softens the floor and has both the terra cotta floor color and wall color in it.

"The rooms seem cleaner and more pulled together than I would have imagined," Gail says. "You incorporated my ivory coverlet with the bold quilt he liked. By combining both our styles, we have a better look than we would have achieved separately. And at last, the room is finished."

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