

A Modern Bath Built in an Old Tradition: It helps when the owners and the remodeler see eye-to-eye

Don and Jean Washburn's new bath is a marriage of old and new—it melds urban sophistication with earthy charm—and it evolved out of a daily collaboration between them and Marcos Gonzales of Lorca Corporation. Trust, flexibility, and creativity were the recurring words in discussions about the remodeling of the Washburn's home. They had been thinking about doing the renovation for some time, but they were busy and couldn't find just the "right" person. One day a pipe burst and in the cleanup process they met Marcos Gonzales. Immediately, they hit it off—and started their renovation.

"I had the basic parameters, knew the look they wanted, but it kept developing... I left tracing paper... and every night Don doodled," said Marcos. "I knew it was the only way it was going to work—it was really hard, but I felt I could trust them and it would work in the end and we could do something special. We ended up integrating everything—views, surrounding landscape, materials, architectural details. It was a real process."

Jean agreed—in many ways, they didn't know what they wanted. But they were able to "get into" Marcos' process. "He's artistic," said Jean. "He didn't just see the job... he has a very good sense of proportion. Had a really good eye. He didn't let me make bad decisions. We collaborated a whole bunch."

Marcos was able to "ball park" the costs of the project—and didn't charge for every single change. Consequently, the Washburn's felt comfortable as well. "He didn't nickel and dime me," said Jean.

So, what, exactly, did they want? For the bath? They wanted a Jacuzzi tub in a place where Don could look out a window; they wanted a two-person shower—and Jean was committed to glass block; they wanted a vanity with plenty of space.

In Marcos' opinion there just wasn't enough room to have a two person shower made of glass block—it would have overwhelmed the space. They looked at pre-fabricated showers but they weren't quite right and they were expensive—so they built a glass shower from scratch, using techniques and details that minimized its visual presence in the room. Marcos tried to make it seamless, used beveled edges where appropriate, and powder-coated the top metal trim to match the ceiling—"I didn't want to break up the room visually."

This bath is eclectic—it mixes materials and techniques—it is the result of a builder with a wide range of skills, an artistic sensibility, and a willingness to participate in a dynamic collaboration—with his clients and his crew.

The vanity runs along a curved wall—and uses cabinets similar to those in the kitchen, maple with red cherry stain and white wash—another mix of elements that really works. Wood cabinets, verdigris light fixtures—resonant with older things—in a truly modern bath. The shower itself is a mixture—granite, which evokes an urban sensibility, elegance; glass which speaks to modern, clean lines, and the floor of Rosa Perlina marble (sometimes called tumble stone and looks all banged up.) The tumble stone was used for part of the vanity too.

"I would have picked something... more frou-frou... purples and mauves... that would have been dated

in five years," said Jean. "He [Marcos] wouldn't let me."

"I like spaces you can really live in," said Marcos. "I love to build in the old tradition and live in the 21st Century." He used hand cut marble from Italy, installed radiant heat in the floor (hidden yet functioning,) and put in skylights to make the room more comfortable and economical. He loves the art and architecture of Asia, and appreciates the qualities of Feng Shui—yet has worked on commercial projects that utilized laser technology.

"I just love stone," said Marcos. "It's timeless... I use a lot of imported material—I don't use much native stone—it's not hard enough for what we want to do. I use mostly Italian... some Mexican. The Rosa Verona is hand-cut Italian marble. With the shower, we mixed stone—used black granite trim... sophisticated, modern... Rosa Verona on the floor... and we used skylights—to allow for natural light off the stonework. It shows the natural spectrum of colors, it's more comfortable. And it minimized the use of energy."

"We had fun," said Marcos. "We had the tub fitted to Don—We tried it out at the spa company. The jets were set up to work his lower back, upper back, and feet. And all he has to do is just reach up to adjust controls. No tension on his body at all.

"They had a good sense of humor—and this job was not a breeze. The logistics were difficult... they were busy people and were living there. I like to think the relationship just doesn't end when the project is over... that the relationship will go on."

Marcos said one of his strengths is helping people articulate their vision, and being able to generate creative ideas. "I don't take the job if I don't get something creative out of it. I've been lucky—fortunate. I won't start unless I like them and they like me—and we can feed ideas back and forth. The plans will change. It's inevitable. You need flexibility to work through the changes."

And for this bath, and actually the whole renovation, this daily collaboration, the intuitive process, worked very well.

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