

A powder room invites creativity: "It's a great spot to have fun with a theme," said designer/builder Jeffery Roberts, who fashioned this half bath. "This hand-painted mural makes you feel as though you're inside your own hot air balloon."

GRAND RAPIDS | HOME

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL BUCK



# Reinventing The Bathroom

Whether remodeling, building new or seeking to simply update their bathrooms, homeowners are discovering artful new options await.

**THOUGH THE BATHROOM** may be a home's smallest room, this space can virtually become a canvas of creativity.

"Bathrooms have to function as bathrooms, but they are also evolving into refreshing living spaces that express individuality," observed Jeffery Roberts, artist/designer/builder and owner of Jeffrey Roberts Homes Inc. in Grand Rapids and Chicago. "More often, I see clients wanting to incorporate personal collections beyond the usual toiletries — memorabilia that means something to them, and artwork."

## On The Walls

In the past, Roberts noted, moisture issues prevented inclusion of certain elements. "But now we have much better ventilation — better HVAC systems — and protective sealants for wallcoverings," he said.

Wallcoverings, Roberts added, encompass much more than wallpaper. "There are faux and built-up paint finishes, along with a wide variety of materials that can be fashioned onto walls," he said. "I've used stationery stock and sheets of veneer that have been basket-weaved. The Egyptians used abacus paper for their writings, which homeowners can use today; faux finishes can also be covered with translucent rice



Taking bathrooms beyond functional, designers including Jeffery Roberts (who crafted this bathroom's character) to the team at Dreammakers Kitchen & Bath in Grand Rapids are infusing furniture pieces, earth-hued fixtures and collections to create inviting living spaces.



Artistic expression in the bathroom needn't be limited to framed prints of Parisian tubs. "It's refreshing to take this space beyond what's expected," said Jeffery Roberts.

paper, then varnished for protection against moisture."

This technique will amber naturally over time, Roberts said. "One home I did had sycamore trees outside the bathroom window," he noted. "At Paper Source in Chicago, I found stationery that had sycamore leaves in the paper, literally. So we created a traditional grid wallcovering out of it in this bathroom, varnished it for an aged look, and gave this small space a classic new feel, with a twist."

Murals can also lend inventive character. "In one client's powder room, I had a vin-

tage hot air balloon scene hand-painted all around, chair-rail height to ceiling, so that you feel like you're standing in your own balloon," Roberts illustrated. "Small bathrooms are great places to get wrapped inside a theme."

### In The Details

Bill and Jayne Wolf, who own Dreammaker Kitchen and Bath in Comstock Park, noted that clients are reveling in their updated master bath, transformed into a fresh, relaxing space with "beach-like" appeal.

"To create the look, we installed 18-by-8-inch sand-toned tiles in the floor with a

unique border of jeweled pebbles," Jayne said. "Iridescent glass tiles in the shower reflect the shimmering movement of water, and a frosted glass divider was added between the stool and vanity."

While pale blue walls and maple create airy ambience, light also shines up through a translucent blue Avonite countertop in Antique Glass. "A realistic Lake Michigan mural lends a great artistic finish," she said.

Roberts loves adding the authenticity of salvaged goods. To suit the tastes of both husband and wife in a 1930s home, Roberts designed a Ralph Lauren-hued master bath that includes hand-brushed woodwork for nostalgic texture and a marble mosaic floor inspired by Burberry plaid.

"But what really takes this bathroom up to the next level," he said, "is solid cast brass hardware stamped with New York City's Plaza Hotel emblem. That hotel near Central Park has always been special to this couple, and it happened to be going through a major renovation while they were remodeling their home. We purchased these great door and cabinetry knobs that look incredible against the space's white woodwork."

"Because I have a second office in Chicago, I often go to Salvage One, Architectural Artifacts and Revival there for reclaimed fixtures and other finds," he said. "But there are also great resale shops in Grand Rapids, including Phil's Stuff Antiques on Wealthy Street, Pitsch's on Richmond and Antiques at Victoria's Warehouse on Century Avenue."

Homeowners looking to upgrade their bathrooms can do so reasonably by replacing items like faucets, hardware, countertops and vanities, Bill Wolf said. "Switching to a new faucetry finish like brushed bronze or copper or adding any number of wonderful new wood species can make a big difference in this small space."

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