

Easy Access

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX KAYDEN

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DESIGNER:
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Instead of traditional rice paper, these shop-style screens are made of translucent fiberglass, which holds up better in a damp environment.

In this master bath, Far East aesthetics meet elements of universal design

"WHEN I WAS IN THE NAVY IN 1954," SAYS THE owner of this Seattle-area home, "my wife and I set up housekeeping in Kamakura, Japan, for four months and fell in love with Japanese style, its cedar ceilings and the beauty of its woodwork." A few years after returning stateside, the couple built a house that reflected those Japanese elements they so admired.

Fast-forward four decades. Having reached their early 70s, the homeowners were still, as they say, "fit and flexible," but they were also aware that physical limitations could loom in the future. The couple was faced with a clearly defined project: Add a master bath that would be fully accessible throughout their senior years while maintaining the pleasing Japanese aesthetic of the home. They weighed two choices: Either sell their beloved house and "move to someplace simpler," or do the remodeling that would let them stay put indefinitely. The decision wasn't hard to make, since, as the former Navy man says, "I can't get my wife out of her garden."

With help from certified kitchen designer Beverly Staal, the couple extended the house by a little less than 8 feet to create a space for the new bath off the master bedroom. The entry doorway and the opening leading to the shower are an overall 43 and 42 inches wide, respectively, giving access even to wheelchair users. There is no shower door to break up the space and pose a potential obstacle. Only a curtain and a panel of patterned glass define the open shower area. It is partitioned from the toilet, but even this divider can be removed in the future if greater accessibility is needed.

Materials are in keeping with the Asian ambience of the home. The floor and walls are covered with satin-finish ceramic tile in a neutral shade. Lengths of cedar were for the ceiling were stained to match ceilings elsewhere in the house. Constructed of vertical-grain fir, the vanity and the storage cabinet opposite it echo the simple lines of Japanese woodwork. Sunk halfway into the granite top of the vanity is a glass bowl sink, which the owners consider "a lovely sculptural piece that makes something beautiful out of a tool for daily living." (The shape of the sink repeats the oval of the mirror above it, which

Wide passageways, the lack of doorsills and ample central open space combine to make this master bathroom suite both comfortable and accommodating.



the homeowners requested to soften the angular lines of the room.) A sliding shoji-style screen serves as the bath door, its translucent-fiberglass panels much more durable than rice paper. Near the foot of the tub is another shoji screen, which closes off the bath from the bedroom; the homeowners can open it to watch the bedroom TV. There are more sliding panels in the center of the full-height cabinet, where three translucent-glass panes conceal a medicine chest.

The room owes much of its sense of spaciousness to large windows—"the site is completely private, like living in a tree house," says the husband—and to the skylight that, in spring, frames a view of blossoming plum and dogwood trees.

Combining beauty with accessibility, this is a bath that reveals wise planning and a timeless aesthetic. As long as the homeowners reside here, its design serves them well. ■

Floor Plan



Using sliding shoji-style screens as partitions in the room eliminates space-wasting door-swing areas.

FLOOR PLAN: STEVEN STANKIEWICZ

RIGHT: The tub, by Maax, features a sloped back support, which enhances comfort and reduces the amount of water needed to fill the tub.



BELOW: Small accent tiles of earthy tumbled stone interspersed with mirrored squares add visual interest to the walls.



Good Ideas

LOOK AHEAD: The homeowners admit it didn't occur to them to plan for accessibility when they designed their home in the 1960s. Some 40 years later, they are fit and healthy but even so, are delighted to have such easy, flowing access in their new bath, unimpeded by narrow doorways or raised sills.

TILE STYLE: On walls and most of the floor, 12-inch satin-finish ceramic tile in a neutral color creates a tranquil backdrop. A 6-inch version of the same tile lines the windowsills, and the shower floor is covered with 3-inch tiles for maximum traction. The homeowners are enthusiastic about their NuHeat radiant-heating system, which cycles on and off to warm the floor tiles to a constant 71°F.

JET SET: The jetted bathtub was chosen with particular care. "We weren't into tubbing for forty years," says the husband, but the couple finds their new massage tub "more useful and comfortable than we'd thought."