

YOUR HOME: KITCHENS AND BATHS

The smartest bathroom window

An unusual pane of glass in this Swampscott home plays hide-and-seek with the ocean view.

By Jaci Conry | SEPTEMBER 23, 2012



Distinctive Duravit sinks sit atop exotic zebrawood vanities. (Photo Credits: Michael J. Lee Photography)

LOCATED ACROSS THE STREET FROM THE OCEAN in Swampscott, this contemporary-style house has a master bathroom with killer views — some of the best in the house, in fact. That was not the case, though, before a recent renovation by Jerusha Hall, an architect with [Walter Jacob Architects](#) in Marblehead: “There was just one very small window with a tub in front of it,” she says of the old bathroom. The homeowners hired Hall’s firm to transform the compact, outdated space into an oasis of calm that feels more expansive and capitalizes on the coastal vista.

Because bathrooms need to ensure privacy, Hall replaced the room’s tiny window with a much larger one made of Smart Glass. The new 8-by-10-foot window, composed of liquid crystal sandwiched between two panes of glass, transforms from clear to opaque at the flip of a switch. Fabricated by Pittsfield-based [LTI Group](#), the roughly 700-pound window is an inch-and-a-quarter thick and had to be hoisted up to the second-story bathroom by crane. “It was pretty impressive to watch,” says Hall, noting that the expanse of glass was the largest LTI had ever made.



Just behind the vanities is a giant window that transforms from opaque to transparent at the flip of a switch, revealing ocean views. (Photo Credits: Michael J. Lee Photography)

With its excellent vista, the window makes the room feel larger, as does the mostly white color scheme. The floor and walls are sheathed in white unglazed porcelain tile. To enliven the monochromatic palette, and as a departure from the dark blues prominent throughout the rest of the house, the homeowners selected glass tiles in aqua tones — which have a Miami flair, says Hall — as an accent.

Custom vanities of exotic zebrawood give the room that wow factor. “We wanted the vanities to pop,” says Hall, noting that because the sculptural oval Duravit sinks are funky and unusual, it was important that the pedestals on which they were to sit be equally distinct. Mirrors above the sink are mounted on cabinets made of unsteamed beech, paler than the more commonly used kind.

In another move to create a feeling of space, Hall eliminated the tub in favor of a walk-in shower outfitted with a built-in bench. From that perch, it’s possible to peer out of the bathroom window; the shower’s partial aqua-tiled wall prevents anyone outside from seeing in.

“We worked to put in elements that would help the homeowners feel protected, not exposed,” says Hall. “So they are able to relax and enjoy the view.”

HOW TO LIGHT A BATHROOM

Illuminating “working” bathrooms — versus powder rooms — is tricky, says Nancy Goldstein, principal of Marblehead-based [Light Positive](#) who developed the bathroom’s lighting plan. There should be lots of light, says Goldstein, but faces must be lighted in a flattering way. She advises the following:

> **Use downlights sparingly and combine them with lighting from another angle.** Here, task lighting is provided by small, square, recessed ceiling fixtures over the sinks, along with sleek inset lights flush with the mirrors.

> **Choose light fixtures that are unobtrusive.** Goldstein selected recessed lights that are flush with the ceiling. “You don’t want the eye to be drawn to the ceiling,” she says. “You want to be looking at the unusual sinks, the tile, the exotic-wood vanities.”

> **Provide a layer of general light that is soft and shadowless.** In the center of the room, a round surface-mount light fixture with a white-glass diffuser ensures that the room is properly illuminated at night.