



How to *Make the Most* of Your Master Suite

Master Bedroom, Bathroom and Closet Remodels are Growing in Popularity and Require Careful Consideration of Space By Bruce Wentworth, AIA

Each year, I meet with approximately 150 homeowners to discuss their home remodeling projects. Among the remodeling projects sought by homeowners in the Washington,

D.C. Metro area is a master bedroom and bath remodel, which essentially creates a private domain with a comfortable bedroom, bathroom, and closet. My design experience with master or owner suite remodeling comes from our clients who live in the urban areas of Washington, D.C., and own older homes of modest size. Older homes have less space to work with than the new larger suburban homes but, in general, the components of a master suite are similar.

At Wentworth, Inc., our design/build architects develop designs that reconfigure interior spaces to create master suites where only bedrooms once existed. For our clients who do not want to build an addition, live in the city, and own smaller homes, we sometimes will combine two bedrooms to create sufficient space for a new master suite. Within this newly designated area, our designs carve out space for a master bedroom, bath and walk-in closet. Usually 300-350 square feet will be a sufficient space for a modest master suite. These projects involve reconfiguring existing space, building a new master bath or remodeling an old bath, and carving out space for closets, while also considering the user's circulation paths within the new suite.

The Master Bedroom -----

Master bedrooms do not have to be large. We have designed master suites with bedrooms as small as 11' x 14', although it helps if the owners have a queen-size bed instead of a king-size bed, which requires more room. Space for a bed and two nightstands establishes the bedroom's minimal width.

Investing in built-in dressers and wardrobes is more efficient, eliminates the need for freestanding furniture, and makes a smaller bedroom practical. Plus, built-in units look better than having a dresser

in the corner. Even an 11' x 14' bedroom accommodates an easy chair and a wall of built-in dressers and bookcase with window seat.

In terms of flooring, most of our clients want hardwood flooring in their master bedrooms, although carpeting can be practical for bare feet, is cost-effective, and makes a bedroom quieter.

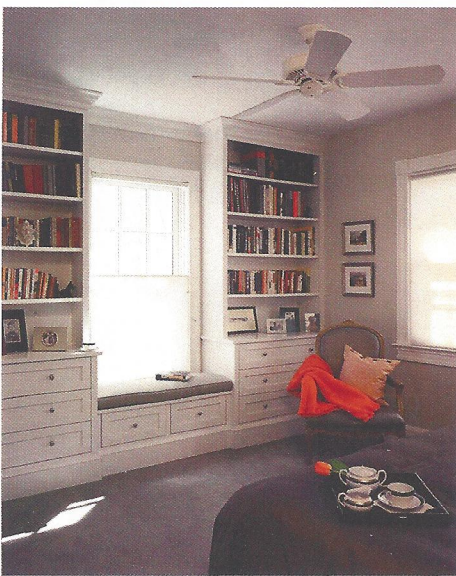
It is important to consider a variety of lighting, such as lamps for the bedside tables or swing-arm lamps for those who read in bed. Recessed lighting or central ceiling mounted light fixtures provide general illumination if the homeowner prefers.

The Master Bathroom -----

Our urban clients with older homes often opt for a large shower stall instead of having a bathtub in their master baths. If there is a soaking tub elsewhere in the house, often in a hall bath, it is acceptable to not have a tub in the master bathroom. A separate soaking tub, seldom a whirlpool, and separate shower stall can be designed if space is available, which is often not the case with older urban homes. Our suburban clients typically have more space for a separate soaking tub and large shower stall, and presently freestanding sculptural tubs are more popular than deck or platform tubs.

The typical master bath will have two sinks with a vanity cabinet for storage. We recommend at least 66" of length for a double sink vanity and preferably more. Careful design maximizes the storage in a bathroom with recessed wall cabinets, cabinetry that hangs off the wall, and other discrete storage. Marble, limestone, granite and man-made stones continue to be the preferred countertop material.

Shower stalls are larger and more elaborate now, creating a bit of luxury in the master bath. The importance of a nice walk-in shower for a master bath cannot be underestimated. A modestly sized shower stall is 36" x 36" square. Ideally, the shower would be larger, such as 42" x 60", and for those homeowners with ample space, a walk-in shower without a shower door is an option. Most of our custom shower stalls have a built-in bench and a recessed niche or ledge to accommodate shampoo and soap. Women tend to like a ledge or bench at 18" above the shower floor for shaving legs and a bench provides a place to sit if a person has a leg or foot



injury. Some of our male clients shave in the shower with a fog-free mirror as long as there is good lighting. Occasionally, a shower stall will be fitted with body sprays, hand-held sprayer, which are also good for washing the shower, double shower heads, and even steam shower

set-ups, which can get rather complicated and costly.

Aging-in-place is a growing phenomenon, and our baby boomer clients ask for grab bars in their shower stalls featuring new attractive grab bar designs that are not institutional looking. If a client's budget and the home's structure allows, we will design curbless shower stalls that eliminate the tripping hazard from a raised shower curb.

Certainly, the refinement of frameless glass shower enclosures has changed the look and function of our shower stalls. Minimalistic frameless glass shower enclosures (usually $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick tempered glass) provide more useable space, create a sense of more room in the entire bathroom, bring more light into the shower, and establish a focal point with wall tile. The only downside is that the shower users should be prepared to squeegee the glass after showering.

The Master Closets and Dressing Rooms -----

A good closet contributes toward an organized home and minimal clutter in a master suite. Most of our couple clients share a walk-in master suite closet. Seasonal clothing is often moved to a closet outside the master suite, such as a cedar closet in the attic or basement. Occasionally, homeowner couples with sufficient space will each have their own walk-in closet. But as is the case with smaller older homes, options are more limited and the existing space will be reconfigured to maximize space.

Closet design professionals recommend that a walk-in closet be 6' wide to allow hanging clothes on both sides with clearance to walk between. When possible, our master suite designs include a 6' x 10' walk-in closet, which we feel is an adequate size. Frequently, additional 2' deep traditional-style closets elsewhere in the suite supplement a walk-in closet.

When budget permits, we design built-in dressers and wardrobes to maximize available space and enhance the space aesthetically. When possible and space allows, we design walk-in closets that also act as dressing rooms. A dressing room can be designed with a center island composed of storage and a stone countertop for laying out the cloths of the day. Dressing rooms are always custom designed, tend to be the size of a large bedroom, and are fitted-out with hanging space, shelving, drawers, cubbies, good lighting, and all the luxury features available in modern closets.

Bruce Wentworth, AIA, is a licensed architect and contractor. He is president of Wentworth, Inc. a residential remodeling design/build firm located in Chevy Chase, Maryland. To learn more about the firm's design and home remodeling services, visit www.wentworthstudio.com or call 240-395-0705 x 100.