

Home + Design Three Bathrooms, One Designer

Interior Designer Holly Freres of JHL Design in Portland takes us through three creative bathroom designs

written by Melissa Dalton

WHEN IT COMES TO designing bathrooms, Holly Freres likes to sweat the small stuff. “I love doing bathrooms,” said Freres, interior designer and principal at the Portland-based JHL Design. “There’s a lot of details that go into their design, whether it’s the lumens of the vanity sconces, the size of the drawers or the clearances.” She walks us through three notable projects, including her own home. >>

A 1902 bathroom in Willamette Heights gets a handsome makeover that improves space utility.

Photos: JHL Design



To create more space, a slightly thinner vanity with wall-mounted faucets was used.

WILLAMETTE HEIGHTS Modern Classic

Old house owners often love the historic details in their homes, but not the outdated function. Such was the case for this primary bathroom in this 1902 home in Portland's Willamette Heights neighborhood. “Like a lot of old homes, all of the bathrooms were quite small,” said Freres. The biggest challenge was to maintain the original footprint, while maximizing sought-after modern amenities.

Freres started by fine-tuning the layout, designing a vanity to be a touch more narrow in its depth for better floor clearance between it and the walk-in shower across. The stone counter has a single, linear integrated trough sink, with

two wall-mounted faucets, rather than two separate basins. “That’s a great space saver,” said Freres. “Because two people can easily use the same sink area, and still have a nice amount of countertop.”

With the layout so dialed, Freres even managed to fit in a separate water closet and linen storage, repeating the curved door trim found elsewhere in the home. Such traditional details are contrasted with modern touches, like the white oak millwork with fluted fronts and the shower's stacked tile, to make for the ultimate refresh on a classic. The last piece is the natural brass hardware throughout. Although one of the owners wondered if the metal was too bright upon install, it has since acquired the perfect patina, fitting in just so with the rest of the old home. >>

DUNTHORPE Open and Organic

When it came time to design her own primary bathroom in the Dunthorpe home that she shares with her husband, JHL Design principal David Horning, and their four children, Freres knew exactly what to plan for. "If you have kids, you know the hurry before going out the door for school," said Freres. "The teeth brushing, the hair brushing and someone spilling something. I knew that my bathroom was going to be filled with a lot of bodies at certain parts of the day, so we wanted as much openness as we could get."

The couple created a private patio just outside their en-suite and then installed floor-to-ceiling sliding glass doors to access it. Inside the doors, Freres placed a smaller, sculptural tub, which creates a focal point at the end of the room, but can be easily circumnavigated. Next, an airy open shower with double showerheads is behind a demising wall, itself with a bench seat for propping a leg while shaving, or sitting and chatting while someone brushes their teeth.

The material palette emphasizes natural textures, combining durable porcelain tile with a wood and concrete effect, with a wood vanity, woven textiles and polished dark brown quartz at the counter. This puts the eye to the garden just outside, so when not in use by the family, the room becomes a serene sanctuary. "I'm a big outdoor shower person, so this really checked a lot of boxes for me," said Freres. "I can open the doors most of the year and let in fresh air. It's a nice way to begin my day."



The bathroom seamlessly leads to a patio with a private feel for a retreat.

Holly Freres wanted an openness toward the outdoors for her own primary bathroom in Dunthorpe.

Photos: Kara Mercer/JHL Design

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT In this Alameda bathroom, a slipper bathtub is elegant and timeless. A pedestal sink would have been widely used in the 1930s. The storage cove blends nicely with wainscoting. A rose-colored shower tile brings light and warmth to the space.

ALAMEDA Tranquil Tudor

This project was all about infusing warmth and character into the hall bathroom of a 1930s Tudor home, via just right cosmetic fixes. Freres started with a traditional pedestal sink, “something that would have been original to the house,” she said, and then added abundant storage with a custom cabinet fit into an existing arched alcove. Deep indigo wainscot around the rest of the room makes the cabinetry appear seamless.

A slipper tub makes for a pretty vignette in one corner, while the shower received a complete tile wrap from floor to coved ceiling. “We needed to lighten up the shower quite a bit because there was no natural light coming in there and it has a lower ceiling,” said Freres. “So, we used a lighter blush handmade tile that was cheerful and welcoming, so you didn’t feel like you were walking into too dark of a space.”

Traditional touches, like the slipper tub, penny floor tile and marble counter, finish the look, as does artisanal wallpaper above the wainscot. “That’s a really beautiful floral, small patterned paper that I thought lent itself to the era and history of the home,” said Freres. “We really wanted to create something moody that was also cozy. A place where it felt like you could just go in and have a long soak.” ■

