

How To Remodel Your Bathroom

By Jack Thomas

It may have taken a little longer than originally planned, but Kevin Martin says remodeling his home's bathroom himself was definitely the way to go.

"I guess with any kind of project like that, you figure out about what it's going to cost, how long it is going to take and then weigh that against if it is something you want to do or not," he said. "For me, I enjoy that kind of work, so doing it myself made sense."

Martin and his wife, Michelle, live in a Detroit-area neighborhood that was built after World War II to accommodate the veterans coming home.

"It's a great little house, but some of the décor was getting pretty tired," Michelle Martin said. So she put Kevin to work.

The house only has one bathroom, but the couple decided they could live with the mess for a while in exchange for having a great-looking bathroom when they were finished.

The roughly 5-foot by 7-foot bathroom was tiled on the floor and about halfway up the walls. They decided to gut the old tile and replace it with new, in basically the same fashion -- tiled floor, tile about four feet up the walls, and almost to the ceiling in the shower area.

The first and hardest step, Kevin says, was in removing the old tile. "I started in there with just a small hammer, tentatively tapping away at the tile," he said. "It wasn't long before I was out at the hardware store, buying a two-handed sledgehammer and really going at it. The hardest part about it was working in the cramped quarters," he said.

Also, once he got started, he realized he needed a way to dispose of the old tile. It was too heavy to just throw in a garbage can. He ended up renting a special waste container from a local company.

"The hardest part about the bathroom work is that sometimes you would really get a good head of steam going on doing some tile work, but then you would hit a point where you needed to let things set over night," Kevin said. "If you want to do things right, you have to do that sometimes."

While installing the tile, Martin said he quickly learned that working with a pair of nippers and a handsaw to cut the tiles just wasn't going to be sufficient. "In the bathroom, you are dealing with a small room, so you always have to cut tile. It seems like every other piece of tile you put down, you are having to make a cut around the toilet plumbing or going up against the wall," he said.

Not counting the \$100 or so spent on a wet power saw to cut the tile, the total cost of remodeling the Martin bathroom came to about \$800. This sum included tile, a toilet, sink, mirror, paint and fixtures.

As for the original tub, well, after the new tile was installed and the walls were painted, the Martins decided the old tub looked dingy in comparison.

There was no way they were going to start over to get that old tub out, so they looked for other ways to brighten it up. Martin spoke to a salesman at a local hardware store and was introduced to a two-part epoxy paint. It only came in white or almond, but Martin said it made a dramatic difference in his old tub.

"There wasn't anything wrong with the tub; it just looked kind of worn next to all that new stuff. The [epoxy] was under \$20 and just brightened up the tub," he said. According to the product label, it carried a five-year warranty for household use.

"I figure even if I have to do it again in five years, the stuff is inexpensive enough that it's not a big deal," Martin said.

After finishing the bathroom, Martin used a couple of tricks he said he learned from his dad to finish the job. "I caulked the tub and anything else that needed it on a Friday afternoon before Michelle and I left for the weekend, so everything would have several days to dry and settle before we used the bathroom," he said.

He also filled the tub with water prior to caulking, so the tub was at its heaviest load, and gravity was pulling it down away from the tile on the walls. "If you caulk it then, you get the best seal," he said. "At least that's what my dad always told me."