

THE FIX
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A Perfect Niche for a Bold Statement

It isn't just a half bathroom, it's also a place where you can show off your personality.

THE POWDER ROOM is the hummingbird of the home: a room so small you may wonder whether it's a room at all. (There's a reason real estate agents call it a half bathroom.)

No matter how diminutive, though, it's a space that can be used to create an outside design statement.

A powder room is a perfect opportunity to get a bit crazy," said Paris Forino, an interior designer in New York. "We look at the powder room as a little jewel box, a little wow factor, and somewhere you can impress your guests. You can be bold, because it's not a space where you have to worry about getting sick of something."

Dark, saturated colors and large-scale patterns that might seem overwhelming in a living room or bedroom are often ideal for a powder room. And you can use high-end materials that might be too expensive to install in larger spaces, said the interior designer Katie Ridder, because "there isn't a lot of floor and there isn't a lot of wall."

For advice on how to create a showstopper of a powder room, we talked to Ms. Forino, Ms. Ridder and other designers.

Focus Your Efforts

While eye-catching and even provocative design elements are fair game in a powder room, it's important to determine your overall vision at the outset, so you don't end up with a mishmash of clashing styles.

It's best to start with a concept, as many designers do. For instance, Brian Paquette, an interior designer in Seattle, wanted to reflect a client's passion for travel in a powder room he designed for her home on Mercer Island, Wash.

Because the room "was inspired by the client's love of Mexico," he said, he chose wallpaper with a jungle-vine motif from L'Aviva Home and a vintage mirror with a hand-carved wooden frame. "She didn't want that look all over the entire house, but it can be in this one place."

Or you could choose one dominant element—a beautiful wallcovering, unique ceramic tile or marble with intricate veining—and build the rest of the room around it, with subtle details in a coordinating color palette.

"Everything has to balance out," Ms. Forino said. "If you have a very graphic wall, you might want to have a calmer floor."

Dress the Walls

One popular way to bring life to a powder room is with wallpaper in a bold pattern.

"People think a small space shouldn't be dark or have pattern all over, but those rules are completely subjective," said Jennie Bishop, a partner at the Chicago- and Los Angeles-based interior design firm Studio Gild.

So feel free to break them, the way Studio Gild did in a powder room in Highland Park, Ill., where the walls are covered in Serengeti paper from Hygge & West, a striking pattern featuring gold cheetahs on a black background. For another powder room in the same house, the designers chose an even more intense wallpaper called Gilded Age, from Phillip Jeffries, with an undulating metallic stripe that makes the walls glitter.

Distinctive ceramic tile, or even an unexpected grout color, can have a similarly theatrical effect.

For a powder room in a house in Los Angeles, Mr. Paquette installed a seemingly random mix of black-and-white Sisto tiles from Exquisite Surfaces. The tiles, in various geometric patterns with occasional brass inlays, cover the top of the wall behind the sink, making a big statement with a minimal amount of material.

"We used it kind of like wallpaper," he said, "just on one accent wall."

Or, Focus on the Floor

If you have a quieter wall finish in mind—paneling, paint, subway tile—consider making a statement with the floor.

"I like to use wallpaper in a bathroom when there isn't a lot of other detail," Ms. Ridder said. But when the bathroom is more than just a simple white box, she often embellishes other surfaces.

For a recent project on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, where John B. Murray, an architect, had designed handsome wall paneling and molding, she installed a floor of graphic black-and-white cement tile from Mosaic House to create a high-contrast surprise for anyone who steps inside.

Ms. Forino took a similar approach in the powder rooms at the Galerie condominium in Long Island City, N.Y., where she designed simple walnut paneling for the walls and contrasted it with an attention-grabbing herringbone pattern of green, pink, black and white stone on the floor.

Choose Your Sink or Vanity

The sink is the centerpiece of the powder room, and there are countless styles to choose from. For extremely space-constrained situations, or in rooms where you don't want the sink to be the center of attention, a simple porcelain wall-mounted or pedestal sink may work best. For slightly larger rooms, many manufacturers offer complete vanity units, with a base, top and sink.

But if you want a unique, dazzling place to wash your hands, it's hard to do better than a custom vanity top made from exotic stone.

In the powder room of a Chicago home, Studio Gild built a vanity and backsplash out of Bianco Giada marble, a white stone with swirls of gray and black, covering the walls with cost-effective grasscloth. "The



Above, Cortney Bishop, an interior designer in Charleston, S.C., sometimes uses oversized pendants in small bathrooms. Below, a Studio Gild room in Chicago. Below right, another design by Paris Forino.

big moment is that beautiful stone, and then the other elements of the room are the supporting actors," said Kristen Ekeland, a partner at the firm.

A custom vanity top can be paired with a sink mounted underneath for a streamlined, integrated look, or with a vessel sink that sits on top, for a more sculptural appearance.

For support, the vanity top can be mounted directly to the wall, so that it almost appears to float. "When you float a vanity in a small space, it makes the room feel a little larger, compared to something that goes to the floor," Ms. Ekeland said. Alternatively, it could be supported by a washstand, with legs but no cabinet, for a similar feeling of airiness. Or, if more storage is needed, it could be placed on a small cabinet with a door or drawers.

Consider Stone Remnants

Natural stone is usually sold in large, expensive slabs, but because so little is needed for a bathroom vanity, it's possible to use remnants from stone suppliers, or reclaimed pieces from architectural salvage operations—like Mr. Paquette did for the Nero Marquina vanity in his project on Mercer Island.

"You don't have to buy a whole slab for one tiny powder-room sink," he said, noting

that it would be wasteful and expensive.

While you might not always be able to find exactly the stone you were hoping for—and you'll have to do a little legwork—the savings could be substantial. A stone fabricator can then transform your remnant into the vanity top of your dreams.

Add a Warm Glow

The powder room is where guests will check their hair and makeup, and you can enhance their experience by adding fixtures that provide flattering light. Avoid using bright fluorescent or bluish-white LED lights. Instead, aim for low levels of warm light with a color temperature of about 2,700 Kelvin.

Scones or pendants hung near eye level on either side of the mirror will provide light where it's needed, while an overhead fixture can deliver general illumination for the rest of the room.

And beyond functionality, think of light fixtures as an opportunity to add sculptural appeal to your bathroom.

"Don't disregard the opportunity for a really cool light fixture," said Cortney Bishop, an interior designer in Charleston, S.C., who has used a range of fixtures in powder rooms—from a vintage chandelier to an overscale brass-and-glass pendant from Apparatus. During parties, "people are



Left, in a powder room in Highland Park, Ill., Studio Gild covered the walls in Serengeti paper from Hygge & West. Above, Paris Forino designed this room in Long Island City, N.Y., using simple walnut paneling for the walls. Below, to reflect a client's "love of Mexico," Brian Paquette, a designer in Seattle, papered the walls in a pattern from L'Aviva Home.



spending a little moment in there, looking around," she said.

Choose Accessories With Personality

Because powder rooms have so few objects in them, every accessory is an opportunity to introduce a little personal style.

The mirror, for instance, can be more than a standard reflective rectangle. Instead, you might hunt for a vintage mirror with an ornate frame or a contemporary mirror in an interesting shape.

If you're tired of standard chrome faucets and towel bars, choose a less common finish, like copper, unlacquered brass or matte black.

And to hold soap and toiletries, you can find handmade vessels with a story behind them. "It's a great place to add something you collected while traveling," Cortney Bishop said.

Because in the end, a powder room isn't just a bathroom, she said: It's "a tiny, little sanctuary where you can really show your personality."

