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Personalized spaces from
tubs to tiles

bathroom renos **X6**

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small wonders

Two condo-size bathrooms make bold statements with high-end elements and smart, space-saving style

BY ANDREW FINDLAY PHOTOS TERRY GUSCOTT

A successful renovation is a careful balance of form and function, and it often also involves a couple that gets along under pressure. When interior designer Rita Bellano turned her attention to the bathrooms in the thousand-square-foot Kitsilano condo she shares with husband Giovanni Maameur, she approached the task with the meticulousness of a mathematician and the creativity of an artist.

The condo complex, constructed in 1976, has been home for Bellano and Maameur since 1990, and had already undergone bathroom renos prior to the couple's arrival. However, Bellano says it was high time for a refreshing retrofit. As she summoned the contractors to strip the rooms down to concrete and wall studs, Maameur admits he was quickly relegated to the role of helpful, supportive critic.

Drawing on years of experience in the family tile business, Bellano designed a layout and chose tiles that would both please the eye and create the perception of space within the limited five-by-7½-foot floor plan in each room.

"There's not an inch of wasted space. It looks easy, but technically it's hard," says Bellano.

Though the end result in each bathroom exhibits a restrained simplicity, the execution was anything but easy. Bellano is a taskmaster: if at first the tile setter said it couldn't be done, she made him find a solution.

First up was "her" bathroom. The eye is immediately drawn to the creamy wall tiles, which are broken by an accent band of green glass tiles wrapping around the bathroom and culminating in a diamond-shaped mosaic above the jetted bathtub. Large marble tiles are floated atop

a custom alder vanity, and faucets are plumbed directly into the wall to maintain the crisp design lines, while optimizing use of space. In-floor heating keeps tiles warm underfoot, and low-profile light fixtures allow for warm and surprisingly focused illumination for such a confined space.

"Basically, I wanted to achieve a feeling of colour and brightness," Bellano says.

Then it was time to turn her attention to Maameur's bathroom, another meditation in mathematical tile-setting artistry. To buy an extra 10 cm of space off the wall in her layout, Bellano chose a compact toilet. Rather than a bathtub, she designed a dramatic shower featuring almond glazed-porcelain tiles that wrap around the wall and ceiling.

The shower stall's tempered glass is fixed to the wall and the tiled curb using only silicon instead of the conventional and often distracting metal channel that is screwed into the tiles. A heated towel rack completes the shower layout—an added touch of luxury in this small space.

On the remaining wall, four floor-to-ceiling "racing stripes" composed of asymmetrical metallic bronze-and-copper glazed tiles provide a slick contrasting accent. Similar to Bellano's bathroom, two marble tiles cap the alder vanity.

Though Maameur's bathroom has a slightly more robust esthetic, with darker accent tiles and a shower rather than a jetted tub, it's far from overtly masculine.

In the end, from the moment the contractors arrived to when they packed up their tools, the project took eight weeks. But from concept to completion, the project took about 18 months.

"Every product and design was thoroughly



"her" bathroom

PRECISION PLUS The diamond tile motifs in Bellano's bathroom showcases the precision needed to cut and set tiles just so. A jetted tub with handheld spray shower lends a hint of spa sensibility to the small space. **MODERN WARMTH** Bellano wanted to create "a feeling of colour and brightness," which is easily accomplished with the fresh green tonal variations in the Bisazza Maria mosaic tiles. The wall-mounted fixtures and streamlined over-counter basin are sleek space savers.

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Small space, big budget

Was this times-two bathroom reno project a condo-size bargain?

At between \$20,000 and \$30,000 per bathroom (roughly \$800 per sq ft on the upper end) the answer is, well, not exactly.

However, both Bellano and her husband believe the home is not the place to skimp on quality. By opting for lowball craftsmanship or materials, such as tiles and cabinetry on the front-end, you may find yourself summoning the contractor for repairs in a few short years.

Bellano suggests doing some extra homework to source quality materials. Or, she suggests, hire a qualified designer, and you'll enjoy a stylish result for many years. Bellano travels to Italy annually for business, where she gets plenty of design inspiration and first-hand insight into the quality and scope of products available. □



"his" bathroom

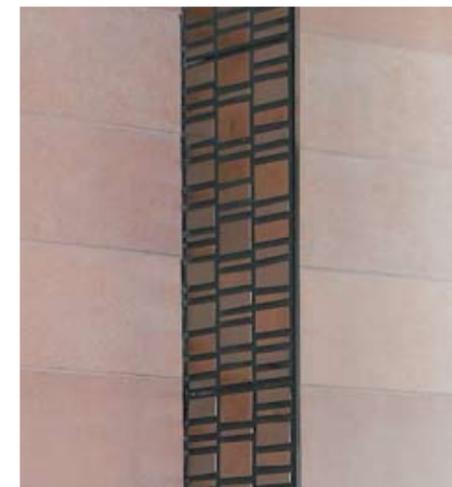
MIX IT UP While serene tones abound in Maameur's bathroom, irregular-size metallic tiles inject drama. **FLOOR-TO-CEILING** racing stripes draw the eye upward, and act as a bold frame around the mirror. **HIDDEN COMFORTS** A towel warmer cleverly placed in the shower does double duty: no wet floors! No cold feet, either, thanks to the essential in-floor heating.

researched to find the very best fit in both function and look," Bellano says, adding that many of the tiles had to be special-ordered from Italy.

"This is it. This time I went all out. We may never want to do something like this again," she says. "People bathe every day. They spend a lot of time in the bathroom. In a condo like ours, to make the most out of the space, you have to specify everything down to the millimetre."

The renovations are done, the relationship remains intact, and together the "his" and "hers" bathrooms project an efficient modern style that outpaces the aged 1970s chic of this Kits Beach condo building. ■

STYLIST Heather Cameron
See SOURCES on page 60



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