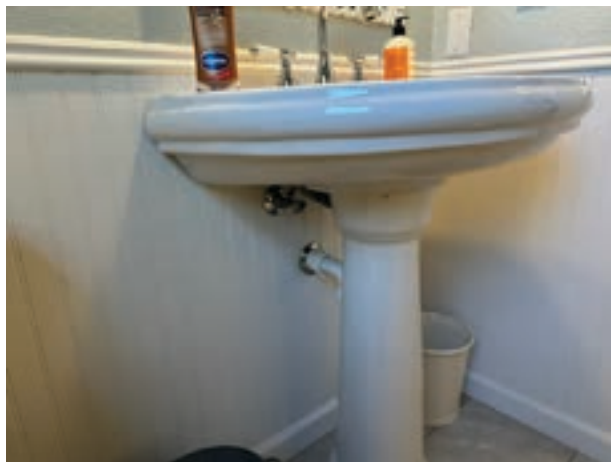


Half Bath Makeover

By Jim Hurley



Photos Jim Hurley

In 1966, The Mamas and The Papas released their first album, "If You Can Believe Your Ears". In addition to a couple hit songs, the album created a stir with its cover art, a picture of the four musicians together in a bathtub next to a toilet. In 1966, the toilet was considered in poor taste, and the cover art was modified in subsequent releases to conceal it.

Does your home have a half bath, possibly in poor taste? Maybe it just needs a little cosmetic update? Remodeling even a small half bath triggers a multitude of design considerations. I am frequently asked: "How much would it cost to re-do that bathroom?" The answer is: Do you have a budget or a design in mind? You may either budget to meet your design or design to meet your budget.

A client recently asked me to replace the cracked toilet in his half bath. Unfortunately, the sink cabinet included a countertop that extended in one continuous length across the back wall of the room and over the toilet tank. New toilets are taller and don't fit under that shelf. My client is now considering an update to the whole bathroom. He is in the essential design phase. A complete design helps prevent unnecessary costs like buying components that don't fit, or painting walls that you later tear down.

There is an expression for situations where work begins before the design phase is completed: "Ready, Fire, Aim". The following are suggested design decisions for your project. They will help you plan (aim) before

you start construction (fire).

My client's remodel started with needing a new commode. Here is a good example of an opportunity to spend a little or a lot. The price range varies for even a basic toilet. If you are coveting that heated Toto Washlet Bidet seat, it will double the price of the toilet (verses a regular seat) and you will need to add a GFCI outlet near the toilet. Does your half bath require the bidet? If it is a frequent stop for you and the family, maybe so. If it is for company only, maybe not.

If you want to replace a sink cabinet with a pedestal sink, you will probably want to rework the supply valves and even possibly the drain to position them directly behind the narrow pedestal column; add the labor expense to your budget accordingly. If you are simply replacing a cabinet and sink counter, there are many cabinets that come with the countertop and sink combined. One very desirable sink feature to look for is an overflow hole. This is a single hole or slot near the top of the sink which allows water to drain from a plugged sink before it runs over the top and floods the bathroom floor. It is important to verify this, since not all sinks come with this overflow feature.

If you are thinking of installing or removing a recessed medicine cabinet, there is framing, patching, and painting required. Backlighting mirrors are becoming more popular but will require electrical work to install (Ka-Ching!).

Are you changing the floors? You will want to pick out your new flooring to complement your cabinets and wall color. Hardwood flooring in a bathroom can be damaged by water; if you like the look of wood, the new laminates do an excellent job of imitating wood and are more water resistant. Also look at imitation wood-grained ceramic tiles - they are 100% waterproof.

Plan to buy new a faucet. You can try to re-use the existing faucet and drain from your old sink in your new countertop, but older fixtures don't always disconnect cleanly. Now this is very sad to write, but despite how popular they are, the color-coated fixtures of gold, black, bronze, antique brass, or white lose their luster in

about five years. Unless money is no object, you'll regret getting them when you pay to have them replaced. If you want a finish that lasts, get chrome or brushed nickel fixtures.

Peripheral expenses to anticipate are lights, mirrors, towel bars, toilet paper holders, a fan, and cabinet knobs. Prices can range dramatically depending on the quality and style. I recently installed a TP holder with a cell phone shelf attached on top - convenient for multitasking during your contemplative time.

The materials and labor for your bathroom update can be basic or expensive, depending on your tastes. Control of the budget requires planning, defining the scope of your project, and sticking to that scope.

Careful planning helps avoid the Ready, Fire, Aim syndrome: rework delays and budget overruns. After reading this article, you may be asking yourself if you have the DIY bug this badly. That's a good time to consult with a professional to help with the design.



Jim Hurley is an independent handyman with over 25 years of experience in residential repairs. Hopefully this free advice is helpful to someone attempting Do-It-Yourself home repairs. The information presented is intended for informational purposes and for use by persons having appropriate technical skill, at their own discretion and risk.

