

# Suite Dreams

## *From Posh to Practical*

**O**F ALL THE ROOMS IN THE HOUSE, the master bedroom suite is the most private and personal. It's not only a place for sleeping and bathing, but also a refuge for working, watching television and winding down. The bedroom portion of the suite often doubles as a living space or home office, while the bathroom can provide a spa and a sanctuary from everyday stresses.

And as the function of the suite has grown, so, too, have its size and stature. "Even in the average 2,200-square-foot house, the master bedroom is bigger than it used to be," says Gopal Ahluwalia, vice president of research at the National Association of Home Builders. "People are spending more money

remodeling master bedroom suites so they can have more closets, whirlpool tubs and dressing areas."

No longer just bedroom-bathroom combos, "today's master suites increasingly resemble posh hotels," says builder Patrick Latessa, owner of the Galileo Group in McLean. Designed for personal pampering, these suites can incorporate amenities such as fireplaces, chandeliers, kitchenettes, media centers, lounge areas, personal gyms, saunas and elaborate showers.

Designer June Shea of Shea Studio Interiors in Springfield, says that if she were advising a good friend on how to go about the somewhat large task of creating a master suite that works it would be, "Treat yourself like a professional would; do your

BY DEBORAH K. DIETSCH



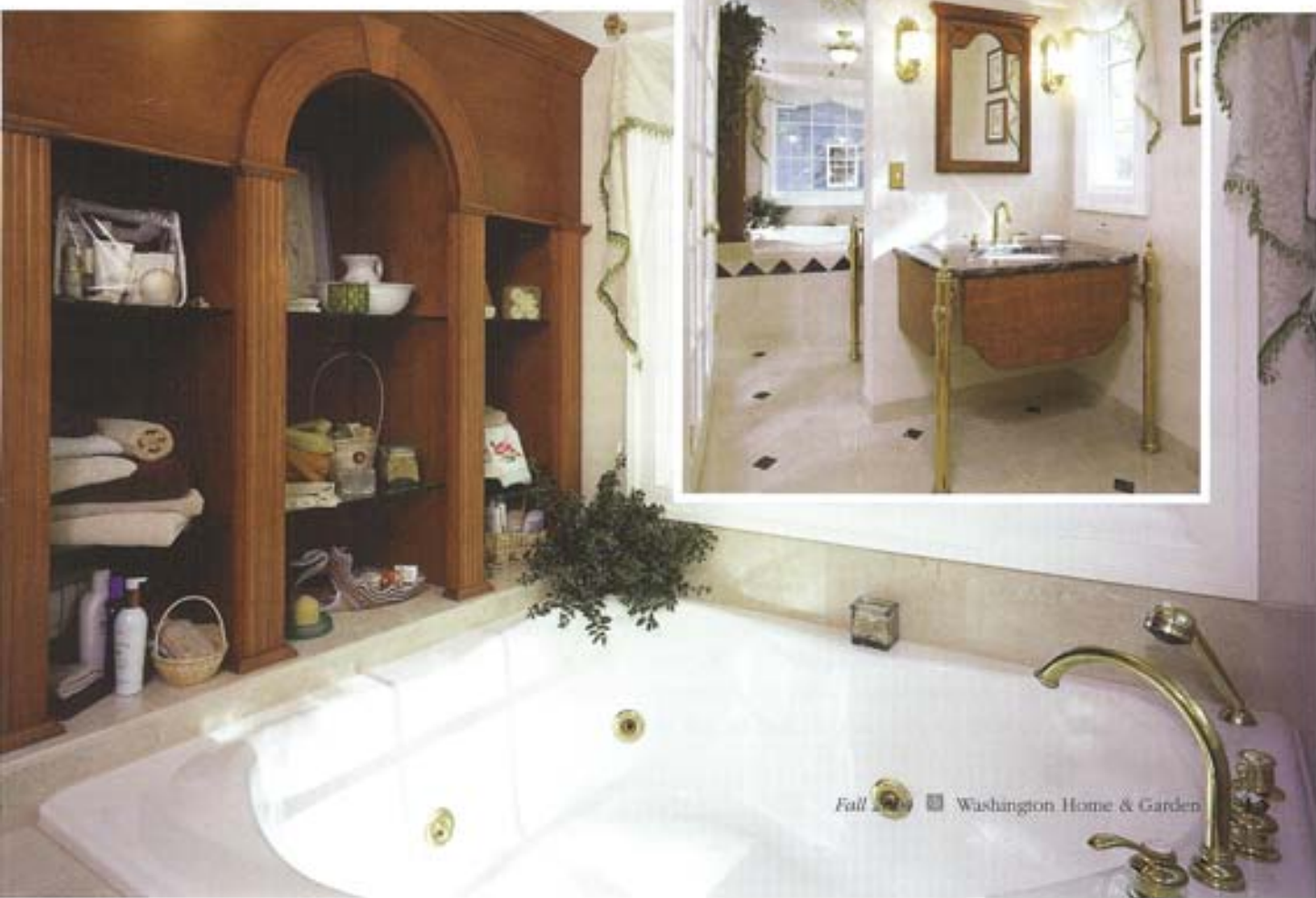
homework; assess your priorities, likes, dislikes, must haves, and can't stands; and set a *realistic* budget." Shea says you should establish a plan up front, but "be open to opportunities for modifications that would make a good plan exceptional, and surround yourself with quality talent, be it designers, contractors, artisans, etc."

Many features are now routinely built into new homes, such as that recently constructed by Bell Builders in Potomac for Scott and Carol Della Penna and their three teenage children. The couple shares a spacious, sage green bedroom with a mahogany four-poster bed, matching side tables, two chests of drawers and an oriental rug. On the ceiling is a fan with mahogany blades to match the furniture.

Adjacent to the bedroom are his and hers walk-in closets and a large linen closet in a hallway leading to the master bath, which centers on a whirlpool tub in front of a huge window. On either side of the tub are shower and toilet compartments, each with its own door. A pair of cherry vanities with sinks set into limestone countertops lines the opposite wall. And limestone tiles cover the raised tub, shower stall and floors.

**Le Chat's Meow.** FACING PAGE: Dick Leggin says this master suite was designed to capture the feel of an elegant French apartment. Part of an addition to the original house, the bedroom features a simple vaulted ceiling and painted box beams. "It's a comfortable space," taller than the rest of the house but "not jarringly different," says Leggin. The balcony extends the view and the apparent size of the room and overlooks a "fantastic" garden. Leggin also credits the remodeling expertise of Macon Construction Inc. (Photo by Kenneth Wyner, courtesy of Richard Leggin Architects)

**At Home Elegance.** BELOW: June Shea says her client's goal was to consolidate two bedrooms into a spacious master suite (see bedroom, page 46). "She wanted the spa experience—we added a large bath, two picture windows and a place to put soaps, oils etc.," says Shea. "We were able to divvy the room up into a his side with vanity/shower and a hers with vanity/tub by creating a wall in the middle of the space. Vertical windows at the vanity ensure natural light, which is wonderful for applying makeup." (Photos by Greg Hadley, courtesy of Shea Studio Interiors)







**His and Hers Jr., and Fido's.** ABOVE LEFT: Sharon Rainey, vice president at Home Equity Builders, says this bathroom was designed for the teenaged boy and girl of the house, including matching sinks and vanities. NOT SHOWN: Behind the glass block reflected in the mirror are a separate toilet area with door and a large shower with an extra shower head placed for easy shampooing of the multiple household pooches. The glass block curves around and connects to the hallway, so that the kids can enter and leave in privacy, says Rainey. (Photo by Omar Salinas, Hi-Tech Photo Inc., courtesy of Home Equity Builders)

**Bed Trends.** ABOVE RIGHT: Russ Dailey, president of Scan Furniture, says the upholstered look in beds reflects a trend toward softer, more elegant suites. One of the store's most popular beds features a headboard covered in faux suede. "It feels like velvet" but is easy to care for, says Dailey. (Photo courtesy of Scan Furniture)

Though large and luxurious, this master suite is also designed to be practical. "In our previous home, our bedroom had a sitting area and a fireplace that were never used," Carol explains. "So in this house, we eliminated them and spent more money on the bathroom and the flooring."

Her remarks reflect a common attitude toward personalizing the master suite among homeowners interviewed for this article. If a sitting room fits into a client's lifestyle then one is provided. If not, the square footage is used for something else, such as a larger closet, a bigger bathroom or a home office off the master bedroom.

### All the Comforts

Above all, the suite should incorporate comforts and conveniences to satisfy individual needs. "If you watch CNN each morning, then install a flat screen on the bathroom wall so you can see and hear it as

you prepare for your day," says Latessa. "Or if you sing in the shower, install waterproof speakers so you can sing along with your favorite tunes."

Designing an efficient yet elegant master suite requires everything from figuring out where to place the bed to choosing the bathroom fixtures. In many respects, the suite's related spaces call for as much planning as the kitchen. The bedroom and bathroom should be arranged to promote easy flow between them and to accommodate sitting areas, entertainment cabinets and closets for clothes and linens. Arranging the bathroom to accommodate the tub, shower, sinks and toilet, while taking into account windows and other architectural features, can be particularly difficult within the confines of an existing space.

A master suite's proportions vary according to the overall size of the home and the number of specialty areas that are incorporated into it. "The typical master suite in the homes we build averages around 2,300 square feet," says Latessa. "That includes bedroom, sitting room, office, dressing room, two walk-in closets and bathroom. The bathroom alone averages close to 500 square feet."

In remodeled homes, the master suite "is large but not gigantic," says Bill Millholland of Case Design Remodeling in Bethesda. "People are being more realistic about how they use the space and how they can get the bedroom and the bathroom linked," he says, so that either half of a couple can get out in the morning without disturbing the one who's still sleeping.

Though the couple of a house spend about a third of their lives in their bedroom, they may put off decorating and remodeling these private spaces until the more public living areas on the main floor are complete. The Della Pennas are making headway but still not finished decorating. "Eventually, I want

to put an armoire for the TV here," Carole says, pointing to a blank wall in front of her bed.

"Everybody wants a TV in the bedroom and an armoire to put it in," says Beth Boggs, director of interior design for Mastercraft Interiors, a chain of area furniture stores. Along with the armoire, she says, homeowners typically purchase a queen bed, nightstands and a chest of drawers with matching mirror—a suite of furniture that typically runs about \$20,000 for higher quality, solid wood designs. "Our number one selling bed is a Regency-style sleigh bed," she says.

### Sleeping Elegance

At Scan Furniture, the best-selling beds are king-size, in dark wood finishes such as wenge, according to company president Russ Dailey. One of the most popular has a headboard covered in faux suede fabric. "It feels like velvet but is much more durable and stain-resistant," notes Dailey, who says the upholstered look in beds is part of the trend toward a softer, more elegant look in master suites.

Bedding has become more of a statement. "There's a lot more interest in custom bedspreads,

pillow shams and dust ruffles," says Boggs, noting that when people can't find bedding to fit larger size beds, they often have it custom made.

"People are getting beautiful duvet covers and accenting them with a cashmere throw," says McLean interior designer Barbara Hawthorn. "We're seeing less formal bed covers and more pillows—an inexpensive way of introducing elegant and unusual fabrics."

Some homeowners prefer to put all their energy into decorating the living room because it's public, and they see the master suite as a quieter, more neutral space. Others capitalize on the privacy of the suite to create a romantic retreat that's uniquely designed for them.

McLean homeowners Lee and Howard Forman, who recently renovated an expanded 1800s farmhouse, belong to the latter camp. Their second-floor

**Private and Posh.** In their expanded 1800s farmhouse, Lee and Howard Forman enjoy a romantic getaway.

**LEFT:** A window seat in the hallway connects two walk-in closets. **RIGHT:** A custom-designed mahogany bed and cascading curtains carry out the theme. (Photos by Geoffrey Hodgdon, courtesy of Barbara Hawthorn Interiors)







**All Things Are Possible.** ABOVE: Susan Alefantis designed this cozy setting around the fireplace, another lovely option to warm up the master suite. The fireplace is cast stone made locally to look like limestone, in keeping with the McLean house's English/French style. (Photo by Omar Salinas, Hi-Tech Photo Inc., courtesy of Alefantis and Associates) BELOW: June Shea's client inherited Victorian antiques and art, which she made lovely use of in her bed and bath suite (see bathroom, page 43). "Everything on the walls and in the room has special significance," says Shea. The bedding is custom-made and coordinated with antique lace and buttons. NOT SHOWN: Space for an enlarged closet and stacked washer and dryer was gained by eliminating an unused hallway. While the client and her husband love going to bed and breakfasts, now there's just no place like home. (Photo by Greg Hadley, courtesy of Shea Studio Interiors)



master bedroom incorporates a fireplace, a crystal chandelier and French doors opening to a balcony. Dominating the center of the room is a mahogany bed with a curved headboard and gilded finials that was custom-designed by Hawthorn. At the corners of the bed, creamy yellow curtains cascade down from a molding in the ceiling to create the effect of an old-fashioned four-poster. The same fabric, trimmed in a colorful fringe, is repeated in window drapes. In the hallway, two walk-in closets flank a window seat. "They're hers and hers," jokes Howard Forman.

Next to the bedroom, the master bath was transformed from "a white, cold space, to an inviting refuge," says Forman. Coordinating the colors and finishes in bedroom and bathroom is the key to establishing a visual flow between rooms and enhancing the feeling of a suite.

Achieving this continuity and comfort need not require a hefty budget. Scan's Dailey says many homeowners save the cost of dressers by building them into their closets, allowing more room for the bed, nightstands and TV cabinet. "These days, you can get a quality hardwood bedroom set for about \$2,000."

#### Capturing Space and Light

In older homes, owners are knocking out walls to an adjoining bedroom to create a larger suite, add a closet or enlarge the bathroom—and boost resale value. "Buyers zero in on the kitchen and the master bedroom," says Lorrie Hunter, a real estate broker with Re/Max Gateway in Chantilly. "A lot of opinions about the house are shaped around those areas. They want spacious master bedrooms with sitting areas where they can curl up with a book. They also want lots of natural light from windows and skylights. Walking into a small, dark master is a turnoff."

This seemingly conflicting desire for light and privacy can be challenging, says Bob Gallagher, vice president of Sun Design Remodeling Specialists Inc. in Burke, Va. He often solves the dilemma with highly placed windows and glass block next to the tub or shower.

Walk-in bedroom closets with built-in shelves for shoes and multiple clothes racks are also pluses for resale, says Hunter. In the bath, she says a separate partitioned area for the toilet and a steam, multi-spray shower "aren't essential, but they add value."



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## Ornamental Grasses

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#### Serenity Is the Word.

LEFT: Sherry and Fred Afshar designed the master suite in their Annandale home for maximum relaxation. They sacrificed an extra bedroom and bath to create a large sitting room outside the master bedroom. Completing the picture are his and her vanities and lots of light from the very large picture window behind a luxurious Jacuzzi bath. Arches on either side of the tub are decorated with 2-inch-square cobalt blue ceramic tiles with gold veining. The house was built by Seville Homes. (Photo by Omar Salinas, Hi-Tech Photo Inc., courtesy of Seville Homes)

sonal belongings, from clothes and shoes to hats and handbags, but also incorporate elements such as large dresser islands, chandeliers, lounge seating and windows to allow in natural light.

#### Step Into My Closet

Larry Nordseth, president of Capitol Closet Design, says half of his business is for custom walk-in closets that cost on average \$3,307. "People want their closets to be as beautiful as a kitchen or a bathroom," he says. "They want crown moldings, granite tops and cherry or oak cabinetry. Closets aren't just for clothes anymore." He says it's not unusual for homeowners to spend \$20,000 to \$50,000 on a closet with "every bell and whistle," including tri-view mirrors, velvet-lined jewelry drawers and electronic safes.

For a couple in Potomac, Nordseth turned a sitting room next to the master bedroom into a huge closet, leaving the gas fireplace intact. Running down the center of the closet is a 10-foot-long dresser island and a chandelier above to light the space. At one end of the island is a padded bench for putting on shoes and a vanity for applying make-up. There's even a

flat screen TV. "It's a dressing room for starting and finishing the day," explains Nordseth.

"Closets have become small rooms," adds Jan Stotemyer, president of Closet Factory. "They've become bigger, from the average walk-in of 6 feet by 8 feet to 10 feet by 12 feet." Stotemyer says that in the newest closets, clothes, shoes and other stored items are concealed behind doors to keep out the dust. "People want a large center island that houses drawers and shelves underneath in woods that complement the bedroom furnishings or the bath finishes," she adds.

As homeowners invest in more luxurious master suites, builders and manufacturers are responding with an expanded range of cabinetry, plumbing fixtures and finishes. Overflowing spa tubs, heated towel racks, marble floors, Venetian plaster walls, barrel-vaulted ceilings and hand-painted frescos are just some of the ways in which homeowners are creating the ultimate escape for relaxation and solitude. "The design choices are virtually unlimited," says Latessa. "The trends in master suites are all based on the desire to have a one-of-a-kind home that reflects the owner's personality and lifestyle." ■