

Bending the Rules:

Curved wall, skylights and interior windows of textured glass give this third-floor master bedroom suite a sense of privacy and openness.

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by Dave Page

"I guess I'm just my mother's daughter," said Katherine Hayes about her penchant for launching home improvement projects. "She was always redoing something." Hayes has kept herself busy with several remodeling projects since she and husband, Jim, bought a century-old house in Summit Hill in August 2001. By Thanksgiving of that year she had rearranged the kitchen, and by Christmas had started thinking about how to transform the third floor into a master bedroom suite.

An artist by nature, Hayes immediately began to sketch out her ideas. "I didn't want to divide the space into enclosed rooms," Hayes said. "I wanted an open feel." Hayes speculated that the third floor of her home originally served as a servant's quarters. There was a small bedroom with a separate bath at the top of the stairs, but the rest of the attic was storage space. At some point, the bathroom had been updated and a kitchen added to create an apartment, but the kitchen had been removed by the time Katherine and Jim purchased the property.

Hayes hit on the idea to install windows in the interior walls of the bedroom suite to provide some privacy, yet create a sense of openness. An architect friend, Guy Williams, suggested that the walls be curved. Hayes hired The Transformed Tree of St. Anthony Park to carry out her and Williams' ideas. Construction began in April 2003 and was completed by the end of June.

"Older homes always present (remodeling) challenges," said Pete Hagen of The Transformed Tree. "The floor and ceiling joists are often undersized for today's building codes."

For Hayes' project, the workers had to haul materials up a narrow staircase with a 180-degree switch-back to reach the third floor. Fortunately, the floor joists were large enough to meet building codes, but the roof joists had to be strengthened and slightly altered to provide for the proper thickness of insulation.

However, it was Williams' curved interior walls that presented the carpenters with their biggest challenge. "We see curved walls occasionally," Hagen said, "but you don't often see curved walls with windows in them. The trim work on curved windows is hard enough, but when you throw in a sloped ceiling, that provides a challenging geometric shape." The finished walls divide the third floor into several spaces: bedroom, bath, toilet, dressing area and laundry. The divided-light windows in the walls are trimmed in maple to match the custom-made cabinets in the dressing area. The window panes have various patterns of textured glass and diffuse the sunlight streaming in from two skylights, which are equipped with electronic blinds.

The only door on the third floor leads to the toilet, which sits behind one of the windows of the curved walls. The toilet is a Porcher, a European model that is mounted on the wall. The toilet's tank is located behind the wall on a special metal bracket. A crawl space allows access in case of repairs.

Hayes' inspiration for painting her new suite came from the dust jacket of *Japan through the Eyes of Nine American Artists*, a book that belonged to her mother. "I liked the color combination on the cover,"

Hayes said, "the turquoise, browns and reds."

The curved double bathroom sink is turquoise-colored Avonite, a composite material much like Corian. His-and-her towel warmers sit on a floor of Pebblestone tile that is laid in a sweeping curve, mimicking the walls.

"Cutting the tile into shape isn't that hard," Hagen said. "Finding bendable trim pieces for the transition to the carpeted areas was a little harder."

The earth-tone carpet complements the browns in the tile. Hayes completed her palette with a red bedspread. Glass tile imported from New York forms the shower walls, except for the one corner that is made of glass block. Hayes said the glass block was the only deviation from her goal of creating a design that pays tribute to the original turn-of-the-20th-century architecture of the home. The entire space is topped off with dramatic fixtures from Muska Lighting. Besides monorail track lighting in the bathroom, Hayes positioned a chandelier over the bed that looks like Medusa's hair with slender flower blossoms where the snakes' heads are supposed to be. Another fixture at the entrance to the bathroom resembles an airplane propeller. "It was supposed to go into the room with the toilet," Hayes said, "but it was too big." A separate heating and cooling system was installed to heat the third floor and air-condition both the second and third floors. Hayes is now working with The Transformed Tree to install a screened porch off the back of the house. After that, she thinks she will take a break from remodeling.

"Besides, Jim doesn't like living in a construction zone," she said. "Come to think of it, neither do I."