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The Perfect Spa Shower
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Framing the Past

A trio of shapely alcoves anchor this bath's no-fuss redux of grand, old-world style.

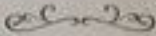
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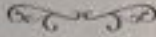
This bath is easy to share because of twin vanities in their own dedicated nooks and a roomy pedestal tub sited in the windowed nook in between. High ceilings and a skylight add to the airy scheme.







SCULPTED NICHES add architectural intrigue to even the most standard bath corridors. The recesses of this alcove follow the outline of a stately keyhole arch.



Marquetry's Mystique

NOTHING SAYS EUROPEAN CRAFTSMANSHIP LIKE THIS ELABORATE MIX OF WOODS.

Marquetry is the technique of inserting multiple materials into a wood-veneered surface to achieve decorative pictures and patterns. Often associated with 18th-century furniture, this decoration is equally suitable for use on paneled walls or as medallions on wood floors.



Baroque architecture isn't known for its spare, clean lines. Nevertheless, interior designer Arlene Critzos of Annapolis, Maryland, envisioned curvaceous silhouettes and intricate marquetry—similar to those on the antique furniture she loves to collect with her husband, John—inside the simple, serene architecture of their new master bath. “I felt it was important to create a clean, simple decor that was also sophisticated,” she says. “I wanted today’s luxuries but with a distinct reference to the past.”

Arlene’s plan revolves around a trio of unusually shaped alcoves that divide the room for architectural focus. The central alcove rests on axis with the main doorway and offers a cozy nook for the romantic princess tub and windows looking out over Chesapeake Bay. “The tub’s niche is the first thing you see when you step into the room, and so it was the first puzzle piece of the layout,” Arlene says.

Two alcoves flanking the tub niche offer a departure. Unlike the tub alcove’s simple rectangular frame, these recesses follow the lines of tall, grand keyhole arches. Each is a decorative solution that works with the home’s turreted roofline. The unusual angles of this room, which sits in a transition area between two wings of the house, seemed a challenge at first, Arlene says. Imagining these angles in the form of alcoves proved a beautiful solution. “It’s simple dry-wall, just presented in a bold way,” she says.

Opposite: A mirror out to fill the alcove maximizes the impact of this unusual space, reflecting light to make the room feel more spacious.

Above Left: Evocative of early-1800s furniture, this modern chest boasts an array of exquisite veneers and inlays, including a lovely urn design.

Above Right: Relying on various wood grains for decoration, this cabinet sticks to clean lines on its legs and hardware.



Opposite: The shower's attractive stonework offers a decorative variation on the two-color limestone floor.

Right: This quiet nook connecting the bath and dressing room offers a pleasant place to relax and unwind.

Below: Two coordinating bands of ornately carved stone complement the limestone grid pattern in the shower, revealing a definite old-world influence.



Custom-cut, oversize mirrors in the alcoves emphasize the unique shape and match yew-wood vanities fashioned to appear as dressy 18th-century French commodes. Inlaid with handsome marquetry—ranging from simple borders to floral festoons—the drawers of these freestanding chests offer flair as well as considerable storage.

"From a functional standpoint, the vanities offer my husband and I our own spaces," Arlene says. "But because they're also beautiful pieces of furniture that could just as easily go in a living room, they make the bath feel special."

The chests' golden wood grain melds well with the room's refined palette of butterscotch and cream. Amidst abundant natural light, each color feels especially warm and inviting—an important factor in a space filled with hard surfaces.

Two hues of limestone cover the floor in a grid pattern and line the shower, while milky white marble tops the vanities. Natural stone is also used on light fixtures: Alabaster shades distinguish wall sconces and a chandelier.

"It's a clean, classic, buttoned-up look, but the colors help to soften it," she says. The soft, sinuous curves of the tub and alcoves also offset the room's boxy shape and linear moldings. Arlene upped this contrast by dressing the window niche with curving curtain rods and delicate sheers.

"I think we achieved a great mix," she says. "The look is old-world, but also straightforward and relaxing, to the point that anyone could feel comfortable here."

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