

## CHAPTER 14

# child-centered homes

IN THIS SECTION WE LOOK AT ACCESSIBLE HOMES for families with children, where either a child or a parent—and in some cases, both—has a disability. Designing for a family means anticipating the changing needs of growing children and their exhausted parents. Sibling dynamics also play a role, requiring both equitable private spaces and adequate shared facilities, which may be a little larger than usual to allow for both active recreation and assisted care.

When a parent has the disability, children step up to help with household chores, and so dimensional clearances and reach ranges may need to be tailored to children rather than adult users. Designing for a family means considering the needs not only of individuals but also of their patterns of interaction; designing for disability raises the bar for creating appropriate environments because the inhabitants are less able to make adaptations on their own.

# bathroom for mother and son

**A** little pampering goes a long way when coping with life's challenges. For Gayle and her family, caring for an autistic son with cerebral palsy is a full-time job. Gayle and Davis have a special relationship. At age 12, Davis is largely nonverbal and uses a wheelchair; he relies on his mother's assistance for all the activities of daily living. Their bathroom on the first floor of a 200-year-old house is a place where Gayle and Davis spend a lot of time.

Concealed within the lines of trim, the mobility lift sits unobtrusively against the wall between toilet and tub. A lightweight motor and sling can be stored elsewhere and hooked up to the lift when needed. A recessed storage cabinet near the toilet puts diapering and clean-up supplies within easy reach.



## IN THEIR OWN WORDS

*“My favorite part of the bathroom is the tub cover, because I no longer have to change Davis on the floor. Davis’s favorite place to be is the shower listening to music, where the marble walls amplify the sound from his CD player.”*

Gayle approached Stephanie Gilboy about designing the bathroom with her short wish list: a shower large enough for two people and a rolling bathing chair, a lift to get Davis in and out of the tub, a Washlet toilet with cleaning supplies close by, and two sinks: one accessible and child-sized, the other with a large mirror and vanity. She also wanted in-floor heating and a heated towel bar, as Davis’s slight frame chills easily. And somewhere near the toilet she wanted a changing table. The room’s footprint could not change.

Beyond these functional requirements was a more subjective list. Gayle wanted her bathroom to be luxurious as well as convenient. Her husband Mark was in full agreement. He felt his wife had worked so hard and long with Davis that she deserved the Ritz: crystal chandeliers, marble floors, rich wood hues, the whole nine yards. And because of the additional challenge that Gayle is visually impaired, the bathroom had to be a place where creative design made it easier for her to see.


### GETTING IN AND OUT OF THE TUB

Davis is happiest submerged in a few inches of water, without his chair, free and independent for a part of each day. Splashing around, his spastic muscles relax and he becomes calm and happy. Gayle wanted a deep soaking tub for herself too.

Getting Davis in and out of the tub was becoming more of a challenge as Davis grew older, and Gayle couldn’t take the chance of dropping a wet, slippery body. Stephanie loves a design challenge and set herself the goal of finding a transport system that was both beautiful and useful. There were several cumbersome portable lifts on the market that would need space for parking when not in use. Built-in lifts comprising a large framework with attached motors and slings seemed intrusive. Most devices seemed institutional, and Gayle didn’t want her guests to feel uncomfortable using the bathroom. Stephanie’s research paid off; she found a lift system that fits tight to the wall, with a removable sling and lightweight motor for easy transport to other parts of the house (a future pool, for example).

### DESIGN FOR CLEANUP

A changing table for an adolescent occupies a lot of space. Stephanie sketched fold-up and drop-down devices, then plunged into the Internet to find something that might work. She found a tri-fold upholstered panel system



By removing interior walls and reconfiguring the dressing room, Stephanie was able to create a larger bathroom. The toilet gains privacy from its placement behind the closet wall. Light marble and dark wood finishes offer both brightness and improved visibility in a room with few windows.

designed for lounging over a whirlpool tub—an undermount system that seemed adaptable for this bathroom. Stephanie detailed a lip around the tub's marble platform, then secured the panel's flanges over the plywood substrate below it, and sealed the edges for a water-tight installation.

### DESIGN FOR VISUAL LIMITATIONS

Color contrast makes it easier to see, so bathroom finishes use dark walnut paneling and variegated marble. Plentiful light is also important, so Stephanie installed frosted-glass doors at the windowed closet and fixed glass in the shower's interior wall. White plumbing fixtures brighten the room and reflect light, complemented by sparkling polished nickel fittings. A brick wall, the original building exterior, clearly marks the bedroom entrance. The finished bathroom is a place that makes life easier, and happier, for all members of the family. ♦

### THE ABCs OF MEETING DESIGN CHALLENGES:

**A**void preconceptions about the final outcome; it will evolve over the design process.

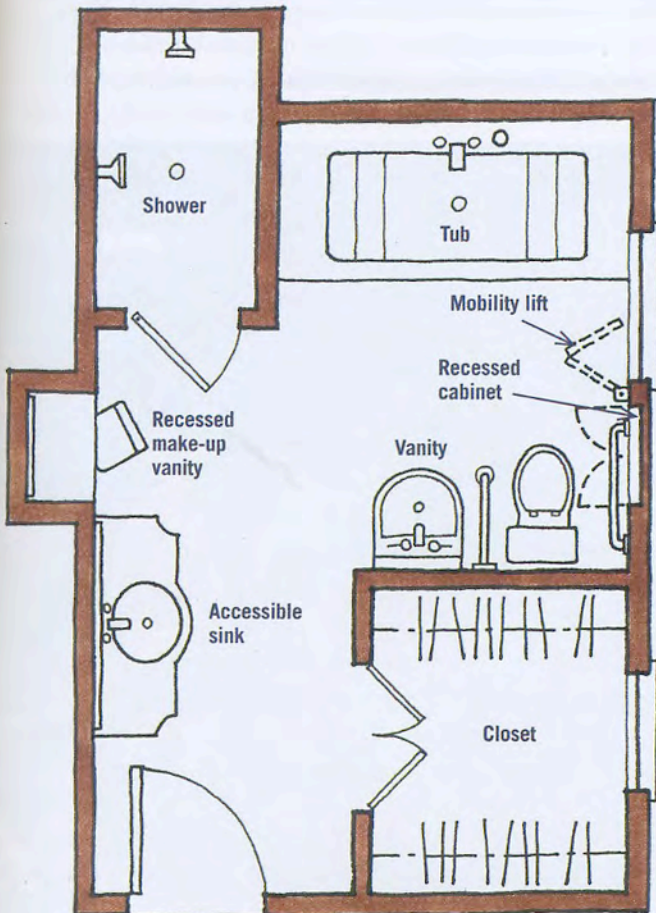
**B**e persistent. Keep hunting until you find a product that meets all your criteria.

**C**onvert products for new uses.

**D**esign unobtrusive accessibility features to work for the client.

**E**ase accessibility into the design (rather than the other way around) for a natural feel.

### Bathroom Floor Plan



Luxurious materials contrasted with rough brick make a bathroom that appeals to the senses.