



# Universally Elegant

Luxurious details take center stage in a bathroom designed for lifelong accessibility.

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**this photo:** From the leaded-glass arched window to the marble floor, this bathroom offers luxury—and universal design. The focal-point tub has a side-entry door for easy accessibility. **opposite:** A 36-inch leaded-glass door, wide enough to allow universal access, reflects the scrolled design found in transom windows throughout the house.



“There is a strong relationship between the master suite and the formal gardens. The homeowner loves her flowers. She loves her music. This house is a symphony of architecture.”

**Kelly Kerlin-Ropposch**  
architect

Perhaps it was her years of singing opera on artfully designed stages. Or her fondness for warm pastels as a palette perfect for accentuating her red hair. Either way, when this Texas homeowner with mobility problems decided to build a second home in Michigan, she wanted an elegant bathroom with discreet barrier-free access—not an institutional space that screamed disability.

With her daughter to represent her locally, the homeowner pulled together a Traverse City-based team to work on the long-distance project. Architect Kelly Kerlin-Ropposch heads Archkinetiks, a firm that considers human movement in its architectural designs. Interior designer Lynn Pettyjohn, owner of Lynnteriors, previously worked with the homeowner’s daughter on her Victorian residence.

“The homeowner said in our first meeting that she wanted the White House,” Kerlin-Ropposch says. “She rattled off three pages of things she needed like the ingredients of a recipe in a cookbook.”

Keeping the homeowner’s expectations in mind, the team collaborated to create a barrier-free temple of relaxation that engages the senses in a symphony of style. This meant a masterful detailing of space, cabinetry, and lighting built around a centrally located walk-in tub—flanked by magnificent pilasters that reach toward a barrel ceiling.

A wood-profiled subcornice wraps the entire space, channeling direct light for the wall art, indirect light for the ceiling, and task lighting for the sink and tub areas. The carefully planned lighting was important, the architect says, because the client wanted refurbished historical light fixtures “that weren’t designed to produce the amount of light we now consider necessary to see what we’re doing.” A single light panel by the door controls the layers of lighting—which include a choice for illuminating the room in a soft glow of rose.

Keeping potential needs in mind, the architect also designed a vanity, makeup table, shower enclosure, and water-closet area that include ample room for a wheelchair. The shower features the same Calacatta marble floor that runs throughout

## Go Online

Bathrooms designed to be accessible aren't just easier to use by those with physical issues. Universally-designed features ease use for everyone who takes advantage of them. See how you can incorporate universal design at [BHG.com/accessible](http://BHG.com/accessible).

the bath. "We had to be concerned about slipping and falling," Kerlin-Ropposch says. "So we used 1½-inch tiles, which require more grout joints, which create more texture and places to grip."

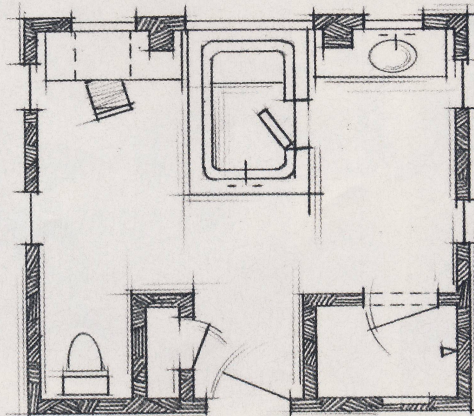
Chosen by Pettyjohn, the pretty marble tile is one of many exquisite details that amp up the room's level of luxury. The same golden-veined marble is used for the countertops and tub surround. A wainscoting of blush-color subway tiles exudes Victorian beauty. Polished-brass fixtures, an antique crystal chandelier, and French golden candlestick sconces add sparkle. Pettyjohn also found the classic pieces of furniture that inspired the hand-painted tub surround, vanity, and makeup table accented by 14-karat-gold bandings.

"We were going to use the original pieces as sink cabinets," the designer says. "But we decided it would be better to have Kelly design cabinetry at exactly the right height to work correctly with the tub surround. Everything was taken into consideration for aging in place."

The proof of the architect and designer's successful collaboration is in the way the bath is used. The homeowner is as comfortable in the space as she is in her primary Texas home, Pettyjohn says. "Every time she returns, she walks into this room with joy," the designer says. "In fact, every time she walks in is like the first time."

RESOURCES BEGIN ON PAGE 118

**opposite:** Delicately turned legs give the dressing table the look of fine furniture, while the knee well is wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair. Drop door handles are easier to maneuver than knobs. **top right:** A barrier-free walk-in shower with a 36-inch-wide door boasts the same luxurious materials used throughout the room. Shower controls are located at an easily reached height. **above right:** Regency-style hardware, gold banding, and dramatically veined marble give this vanity furniture-style elegance. Lever faucet handles are ideal for turning with the whole hand rather than gripping. Although the cabinet offers storage now, the doors can be removed to make it accessible should the homeowner ever require a wheelchair.



### DESIGNER TIPS

## Barrier-Free Basics

Consider these basics of universal bath design:

**Footprint:** Should be at least 5 feet square to allow wheelchair users to make a 360-degree turn.

**Doorway:** Should be at least 32 inches wide (36 is best) to provide wheelchair access when open in a 90-degree position. The threshold should be ½ inch or less; no threshold is best.

**Tub:** Should have 30 inches of floor space in front if approached from the end and 48 inches if approached from the side.

**Shower:** Should be 36 inches square with a seat or at least 30×60 inches without a seat—and should have no lip on the floor at the entrance.

**Vanity:** Should be roll-under construction with 34-inch maximum from countertop to floor and 29-inch minimum from underside of sink to floor. Exposed pipes and water lines should be insulated.

**Sink:** Wall-hung models need at least a 17-inch depth to allow space for knees.

**Toilet:** Should be at least 18 inches from sidewalls, both for access when using a chair or walker and to allow room for grab bars.

### Also consider:

- Texturized nonskid floors
- Full-length mirror
- Wall-mount grab bars
- Single-lever faucet handles
- Movable showerheads
- Chair-height toilets
- Easy-grasp hardware
- Extra lighting