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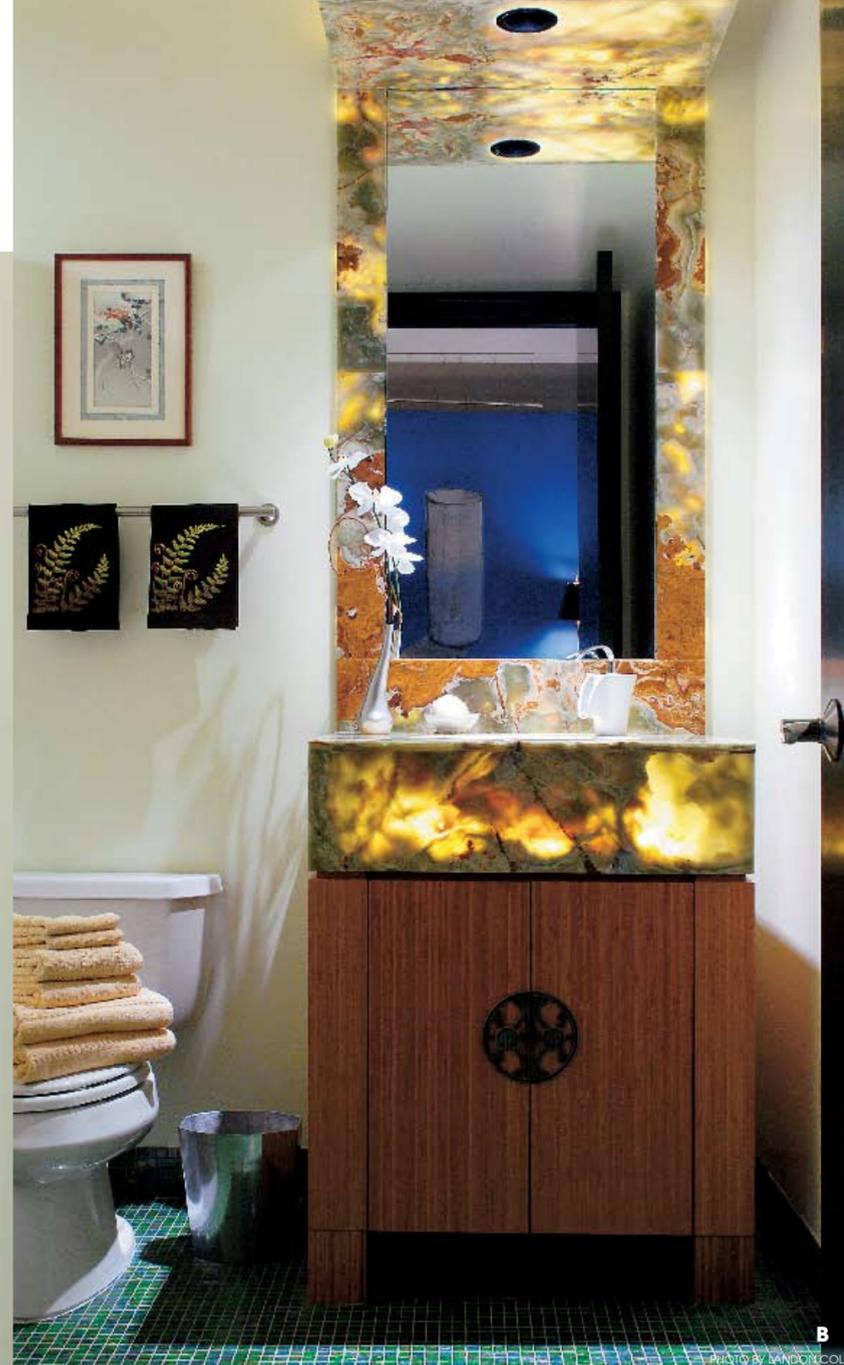
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KANSAS CITY HOME DESIGN

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the jewel box



A
PHOTO BY MICHAEL SINCLAIR



B
PHOTO BY LINDON COLLIS



C



D

STORY BY Wendy Dow

All that glitters is not always gold. Sometimes it can be a vanity made of illuminated onyx, as is the case in the Plaza condo of retired pathologist Dr. Earl Wright (B). Local designer Eric Negrete, who was responsible for the project, just laughs about the redefinition: "I have so many crazy ideas in my head and willing clients to go along with them."

This condo is the second Negrete has designed for Wright. "Eric is the perfect designer because he listens to your ideas, and he will embellish or work with them without ever being confrontational," Wright says. "A lot of times when you finish a project, you would think it was your own idea, the way he incorporates your personality and taste into it."

Such collaboration can be most important, especially in small spaces. For the tiny guest bathroom just off Wright's foyer, Negrete wanted "a more contemporary Asian feel." He went shopping for a material to use for the vanity top and found a colorful slab of mostly green onyx he thought would complement the bathroom's theme nicely. Wright, however, was underwhelmed by its appearance.

"I didn't like it," the doctor says. "Not at all. But at the shop, as they were wheeling it outside for us to get a better look at it, the sun shone through it, and it lit up. That's how we came up with the idea of backlighting." When it was illuminated, a transformation occurred; all of the different colors and designs in the onyx just seemed to jump to life.

So with the help of contractor Erwin Bolinger of E & E's Quality Builders, the journey began. "The challenge was how to build it and backlight it without the frame showing through," Negrete says. "The top canopy part was the trickiest detail, figuring out how to attach it going up into the ceiling."

But Negrete had faith in Bolinger's abilities. For the contractor's part, Bolinger says that the fabrication of this sink was the first time he worked on such a comprehensive project involving the backlighting of stone. "It grew from the idea of just lighting up the vanity top to lighting up the sides of the mirror and eventually going all the way up the soffit to the ceiling."

The team continually experimented with different onyx configurations and the placement of the fluorescent light bulbs to achieve the best effect. And what does Bolinger think of the final product? "It's beautiful. Absolutely beautiful. And the customer is happy with it—that's what really matters."

But a small, "jewel box" space doesn't have to be quite so sensational to make an impression. Different materials—Opera Glass tile from International Materials of Design (D), unlit onyx or marble shelves, even Lalique crystal faucets from manufacturers like THG (C)—offer small punches of glam.

And sometimes, even minimal design schemes achieve the desired jewel box effect. While renovating the master suite of their Westwood, Kansas, home, Dixie and Robert Junk of Junk Architects created a gem from unused attic space and quite understated materials (A).

The area is about 6 feet wide by 9 feet long, and their first thought was to put it to use as extra closet space. "(But) we decided that we wanted to have an intimate place for spiritual reflection," Robert Junk says. "The bamboo wall (that is opposite the doorway) has an integral water fountain, which creates a soothing background noise," he says.

"Since the space is so small, we didn't want 'loose' furniture in it, so we developed the low, floating bamboo shelf under the skylight, which allows for kneeling or sitting on the floor. We also did not want to have distractions, but we did want natural light. So we designed the skylight to bring in light and allow a view of the sky and passing clouds without the distraction of the street below."

The skylight, manufactured by Velux, also operates as a window to allow fresh air into the meditation space. ■