



Black rose: The owners kept the pink tile because they wanted to preserve something from the original house. Everything else was overhauled. Says owner Paul Jacobs: "As we designed the cabinetry, it started to take on an English clubby feel with the cherry woodwork. The pink tile gave it a very different feel. It was very dressy, so we picked the paisley wallpaper."

ADDING SPLASH TO A COLORFUL BATH

HOMEOWNERS ARE EMBRACING, RATHER THAN REPLACING, THEIR VINTAGE POWDER-ROOM TILE

BY KHRISTI ZIMMETH/PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEFF GARLAND

TINA BLAKIAN BURNS RECOGNIZED A KEEPER when she saw the first-floor powder room of her 1927 Grosse Pointe Park home.

"The white tile with lavender accents was a 1920s classic," she says. "I loved it from the start and never thought about replacing it."

Instead, Burns, who is a decorative painter, put her talent to work, painting the ceiling a sheer red-gold, then antiquing it to play off the age of the house. The walls were stenciled, then washed with violet.

Burns is one of a growing group of individuals who embrace, rather than replace, their vintage tile. While some homeowners rip out their retro pastels to follow a real estate dictate toward neutrals, a more creative approach is to work with your tile and play up its value, many local painters and designers say.

Because Detroit's building boom in the 1920s coincided with the Arts and Crafts movement and the rise of colored tile, many area homes are finished with irreplaceable materials, says Charles Dunlap, an interior designer from Pleasant Ridge. The late 1920s through the 1950s are considered tile's heyday and even the most common examples are difficult — and expensive — to replace.

"Detroit homes are a treasure trove of vintage tile," Dunlap says.

"If you're lucky enough to have the original, why replace it?"

Well-chosen paint, fabric, wallpaper and modern fixtures help vintage powder rooms shine again, Dunlap says. The bathrooms of his 1936 Colonial-style home offer a rainbow of tile finishes, including light green (with pink geometric accents) and yellow (with gray and pink accents). When decorating the baths, he replaced the dated fixtures but let the floor and wall tile stand on its own. "The color combinations are quirky, but have an undeniable charm," he says.

Grosse Pointe resident Sue Martin kept the 1920s-era green tile in her daughters' second-floor bathroom for more practical reasons. Her home-improvement budget was earmarked for a new kitchen, family room and master bath.

"The girls' bathroom wasn't a priority, but I wanted it to be fun," she says. "The tile was in good shape and was a good color, but it needed some oomph." Decorative painter Jane Shook provided that oomph with large murals depicting seahorses, fish and shells. Martin then added fresh fabrics and other inexpensive accessories.

Restoring '20s: Decorative painter Tina Blakian Burns used three layers of color, stenciling and texture, which added depth to the rich violet-colored walls of her '20s-era bath. On the ceiling, she applied several layers of gold with burgundy undertones.





The bath bloom: Jane Shook used her talents as a decorative painter to accent the late 1950s turquoise tile in her Grosse Pointe Farms bath. "Sometimes people are too quick to rip out and modernize and it's not always an improvement," she says. Shook removed "loud" wallpaper, coated the wall in a soft blue and then added a mural of branches, birds, leaves, bugs and butterflies.

"The bathroom got a whole new look for less than \$1,000, which includes cleaning and repairing the grout," she says. "A new bathroom would have cost 10 times as much."

But how can homeowners determine whether their tile is worth saving? Dunlap says considerations should include overall condition, design and whether it's original or appropriate to the house. Even the pre-1920s white "subway" tile has found renewed appreciation among homeowners. Many Detroit houses have what Dunlap calls "pedigree" tile such as Pewabic, Grueby or

Rookwood. Homeowners should consult an expert if they suspect theirs is the creation of a highly coveted tile-maker.

Even the ubiquitous pink and turquoise tile of the 1950s is well worth saving, says interior designer Bob Endres. For Paul Jacobs' and Jim Stout's "Pepto" pink-tiled 1950s guest bath in Bloomfield Hills, Endres chose a tailored, multicolored paisley print wallpaper, covering both the walls and ceiling to unify the space.

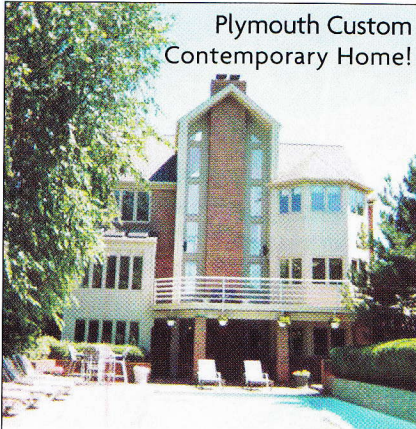
"Old tile can be great fun to work with," Endres says. "The trick is to play it up, not try and hide it."

Tile that has potential but is not in the best of shape can be preserved. Cracked tile can be replaced by companies that stock vintage colors, discolored grout can be bleached, stained or replaced by a professional without damaging the main tile.

Keeping old tile also can have unexpected benefits, as Dunlap experienced. "After I updated my bathroom," he says, "a designer from a major tile company loved my floor tile so much she wanted to reproduce the design." □

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Want to keep your original tile, but you're missing a few sections? Minneapolis-based North Prairie Tileworks stocks more than 1,000 colors. If you can produce a sample, they'll match the color and finish. Their artists also can copy painting or other designs. Color-matching is \$230 and tile costs \$30-\$50/square foot. For more information, contact the company at: 612-871-3421; www.handmadetile.com.



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