

2024 Washingtonian Residential Design Awards

Project Title: Urban Bower

Location: Washington DC

Date of Completion: 06.01.2021

Project Statement

This primary suite has been transformed into a contemplative urban cabin looking out toward a mountain range of urban rooftops.

Simple concepts: Material continuity, Skylit daylighting, and Selective Reflective and Mirrored surfaces bring in light in unexpected ways. Our goals were to create a bedroom better connected to the outdoors, using an organic material palette and to provide privacy while still taking advantage of a southern exposure for plenty of natural daylighting. Strategic placement of mirrors elongates the space and the axial relationships, and reflects the sky, the window wall, and the textured wood surface back into the interior.

Many years ago an original sleeping porch, common in Northwest Washington DC, had been turned into a primary bedroom suite. This found condition consisted of a narrow bedroom and a dark unused transition space. The bedroom was re-oriented and connected both visually and materially to the bathroom. The floor and vertical surfaces of the suite are wrapped in a white oak, punctured by windows and an organic wool-wrapped headboard wall, framing views to the city's trees and houses below.

Design Narrative: How does this project address Design for Integration, Wellbeing, and Discovery?

The clients report a true sense of calm when they enter their new bedroom suite. The natural palette of materials made of paper, warm woods, wool and flax provide a contrasting refuge to its active urban neighborhood environs. The textured walls and mirrors create a constantly changing light, producing a dynamic display of shadow and steaks of light, both sharp and soft. Surprise elements such as hidden mirrors, bookshelves, a peek through from vanity to shower, and hidden storage are subtle but effective discoveries packed into this compact suite.

Community Engagement: How does this project address Design for Equitable Communities and Economy?

This urban home is walkable to two metro stops and has been lovingly cared for and renovated slowly over the years that its inhabitants have owned it. It is small in footprint and we chose not to expand the footprint and instead focused on improving the layout from within. Many homes in this region have existing sleeping porches and often the instinct is to expand for larger walk-in closets or expansive bathrooms with freestanding-but-seldom-used tubs. Instead, we sought ways to draw together light, reflection, and palette to create a dynamic, spacious experience, and addressed storage needs with creativity and beauty in order to build less in order to build better.

Sustainability and Resilience: How does this project address Design for Ecosystems, Water, Energy, Resources, and Change?

Local and natural materials are used throughout the renovation including white oak slats with a water based finish, an organic wool and flax headboard, paper yarn carpet, clay tiles, locally-sourced recyclable FSC certified wallpaper, and concrete countertops. Shades for south-facing windows and a light-colored reflective TPO roof help to reduce solar heat gain during the day.

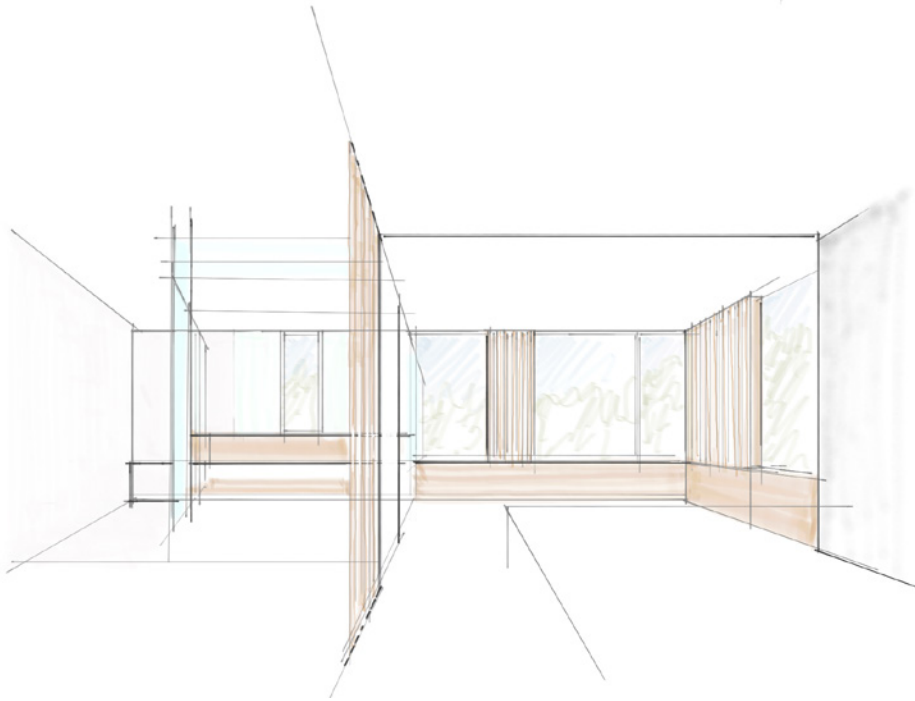


Urban Bower

bower (n)

- 1 : an attractive dwelling or retreat.
- 2 : a lady's private apartment in a medieval hall or castle.
- 3 : a shelter (as in a garden) made with tree boughs or vines twined together; arbor





This owners suite has been transformed into a contemplative urban cabin looking out toward a mountain range of urban rooftops.

Simple concepts: material continuity, overhead daylighting, and deliberate surfaces reflecting or mirroring light in unexpected ways.

Our goals were to create a bedroom better connected to the outdoors using an organic material palette and to provide privacy while still taking advantage of a southern exposure for plenty of natural daylighting.

Strategic placement of mirrors along a new axis elongated the space, and amplified the sky, window wall, and textured wood surfaces into the interior.

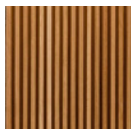
Many years ago, an original sleeping porch, typical of this Northwest Washington neighborhood, had been turned into a master bedroom suite. We found the result of this was the condition of a narrow bedroom and a dark unused transition space.

The bedroom was re-oriented and connected both visually and materially to the bathroom. The whole suite is clad in a warm white oak wrapper, punctured by windows and a wool wrapped headboard wall. The textured wood walls help frame views to the trees and houses below.

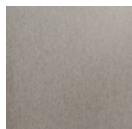




material palette



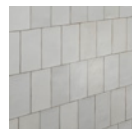
Wood Slats



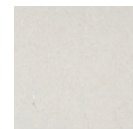
Wool Headboard



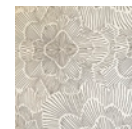
Paper Yarn Carpet



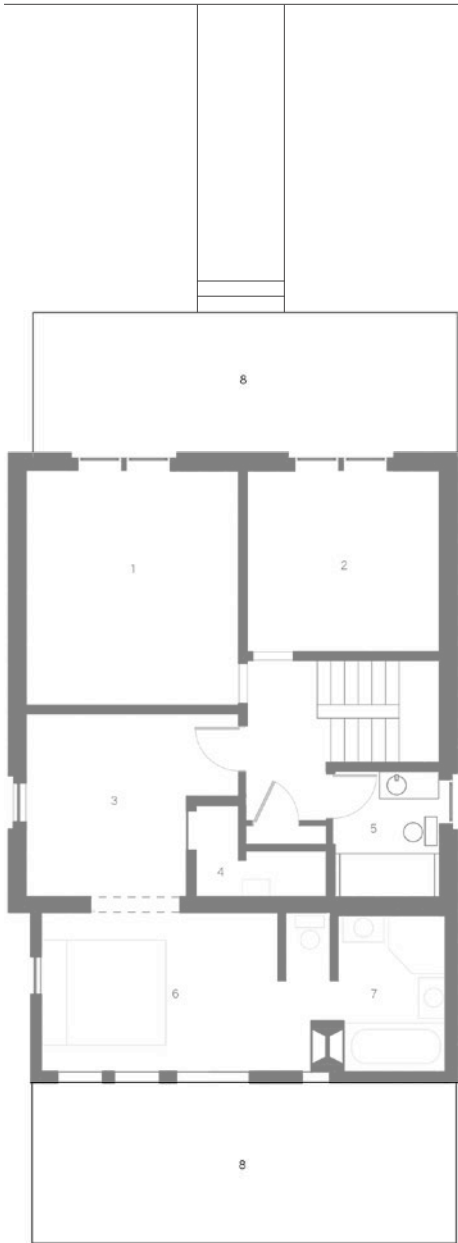
Clay Tiles



Concrete Countertops



Locally Sourced Recyclable Wallpaper, FSC Certified



Before



After

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Second Floor, renovated

- 1 Bedroom 1
- 2 Bedroom 2
- 3 Sitting Room
- 4 Primary Closet
- 5 Hall Bath
- 6 Primary Bedroom
- 7 Primary Bath
- 8 Porch Below



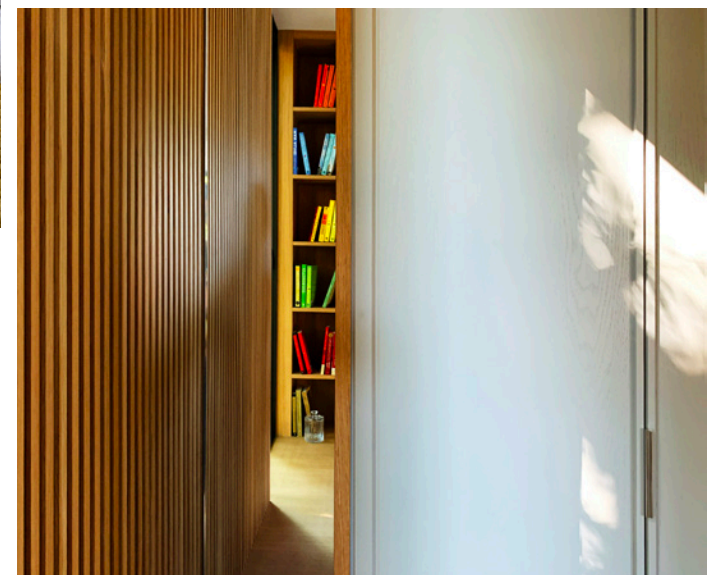
Before and After, views toward the Primary Bath

(right) The original bathroom was dark and had only small windows up high for privacy.

(left) A new 7' skylight aligned with a floor to ceiling mirror blurs the line between wall and sky and bounces light into the bathroom eliminating the need for additional side windows.

A mirror placed to the right of the bathroom opening reflects back the window wall and continues along the line of the vanity beyond.





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Hidden Bookshelf behind headboard

