



# Adding an Attic Suite

Custom storage and a new bathroom helped transform a garret into an airy nest for a teen **BY KATE ASHFORD**

For seven years, Paul and Gina Gamble used the cramped, dark attic in their Chevy Chase, Md. home as a storage spot for luggage and other rarely used items. But when the oldest of their two daughters approached her 13th birthday last year, the Gambles enlisted designer Herbert Stanwood to turn the 170-square-foot space into a cozy, modern bedroom suite. Besides the obvious aesthetic issues—the '70s-esque space featured dark wood paneling and an acoustical tile ceiling—the biggest challenge was airflow: “In the summer the room was too hot and in the winter it was too cold,” Paul says. To make the small space seem larger and brighter, Stanwood removed the low ceiling and replaced the paneling with white drywall that stretches up to the steep roofline. Half of the beams between the overhead rafters were eliminated to give the room a more open feel, and recessed lighting helps illuminate the room’s unusual shape. The pine flooring stayed, but it was refinished to add shine. They also put in a bathroom, with a skylight for natural light. The Gambles installed a separate HVAC system, which, as a bonus, provides additional heating and cooling to the lower-floor bedrooms. One wall features a built-in closet and custom drawers that are 24 inches deep, utilizing behind-the-wall space and making plenty of room for teenage clothing without stealing square footage from an already small bedroom. And of course, they installed a phone outlet. “It’s a great teenager space,” says Paul, “and when she goes to college, her younger sister can move in.” **\$**

## THE NUMBERS

VALUE IN 2006

**\$1.2 million**

RENOVATION COSTS

**\$250K**

MARKET VALUE TODAY

**\$1.5 million**

**WHERE DID IT GO?** About 60% of the Gambles’ total costs went toward the new attic bedroom suite (they also updated the master and hall baths on the second floor). An attic room has to be extra-nice to be valued the same as a main-floor bedroom, says area realtor Sherry Davis, and this one qualifies: “The big closets, built-in dressers and high-end fixtures were smart dollars spent,” she notes.



#### RAISE THE ROOF

A low tiled ceiling and paneled walls made the original attic bedroom seem cramped and dark. The Gambles removed both, giving the room an airy, cathedral-ceiling feel, and replaced the dated style with smooth drywall (\$7,000). A Bryant HVAC system (\$13,000) allows them to use the room year round, kicking in some bonus heating and cooling for the second floor.

#### STORAGE TO SPARE

A built-in closet and drawers (\$2,600) now line one side of the room, providing ample storage. The new bedroom also features recessed Lightolier lights, new electrical work (\$7,500) and refinished pine floors (\$1,200) that add polish.



## DOS & DON'TS Renovating the Attic

BY DUO DICKINSON

**DO** extend existing plumbing if possible, which will save you a minimum of \$5,000 a bathroom.

**DON'T** think that plumbing can be placed anywhere. Plan around the location of lower-floor bathrooms.

**DO** replace low, flat ceilings, which make the room look dark. Use collar ties, or small beams, to connect two planes of a pitched roof.

**DON'T** rely on floor and table lamps to illuminate open, angular spaces. Instead, add some overhead lighting.

**DO** use bright colors and full mirroring in tight baths for greater impact.

**DON'T** forget that bathroom vanities can have real storage capability.

**DO** go for an all-white paint scheme when dealing with unusual wall and ceiling shapes.

**DON'T** cover beams with Sheetrock, since cracks will often develop over time. Protect them with wood trim.

**DO** use under-eave areas that are at least five feet high for built-in storage to eliminate the need for extensive closets.

**DON'T** try to cram anything into spaces lower than five feet. Fill them with insulation and seal them off, which will help you save on heating costs.

**DO** refinish wood floors (as little as \$1 a square foot) instead of replacing them (which will cost \$7 or more a square foot).

**DON'T** neglect to put sound insulation in the floors. That's especially true if you plan to have a teenager live in the room.

Contributing writer Duo Dickinson is an architect in Madison, Conn.

#### A BATH OF HER OWN

In the new bathroom, a Velux skylight (\$3,500) lets natural light in and a jetted BainUltra tub (\$2,300) promises total relaxation.

