

## A clean look

The guest quarters in one Providence home have a decidedly original feature: a bathtub out in the open.

By [Elizabeth Gehrman](#)

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When contractor Neal Kaplan bought his 1854 Greek Revival Colonial in the eclectic Smith Hill area of Providence in 1990, the only guests he had in the attic were of the decidedly nonhuman variety. "The place had been abandoned for a year and was neglected for years before that," he recalls. Dogs lived in the property, he says. "They were raising puppies in there, so it was flea-infested, and we were catching squirrels coming through the eaves and soffits."

Kaplan did what he calls a "modest renovation" -- in keeping with his budget at the time -- taking one side of the 6,000-square-foot building for himself and splitting the other side into two apartments. Then, after moving out in 2001 and renting the place, Kaplan returned in 2006 and decided "to do a really thorough transformation," he says. "At that point, I had the funds to do it right." And part of doing it right was the addition of a guest studio on the third floor with a unique centerpiece: an open-plan bathroom with the tub functioning, essentially, as furniture.

Working with interior designer and architect Lisa Foster, with whom he collaborates frequently, Kaplan decided on the unusual arrangement for several reasons. "First," he says, "where the bath is situated is a beautiful view of the dome of the State House. It's high up, and there's a nice little panorama of downtown."

Another factor was the tub itself. "It's just such a beautiful piece to look at," Kaplan says.

Finally, there was simple modernity. Kaplan liked the open feel and exposed plumbing, and, as Foster points out, the trend in bathrooms is ever-larger. The bathroom sink is on a wall opposite the bed, and the toilet is inside a windowed room behind the tub. "I had to be somewhat sensible," Foster says.

When company comes, the 30-by-30-foot space provides the feeling of a trendy hotel, but Kaplan and his live-in girlfriend also have used the loft as a respite when no one's visiting. "We have stayed up there on the rare occasion," he says. "It's so pristine, and because we don't use it much, it feels that much more special when we do."

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