



Ensuite in a Chimney

Building from scratch allows you to make room for everything, but trying to find space for an ensuite in an old villa is another problem entirely.

Words **Soraya Nicholas** Photography **Melanie Peters**





The ensuite fits cleverly into the space of two old fireplaces and their respective chimneys. "It looks just like a giant wardrobe. Like a secret place," says Rosanne.

WHEN HOMEOWNERS ROSANNE AND Graeme thought about adding an ensuite to their old character villa in Dunedin, they struggled with the idea of changing the rectangular shape of their master bedroom. But after a decade of playing with ideas, and even longer wishing for another bathroom, they finally decided to do something about it.

Like many villas, Rosanne and Graeme's home had multiple long-unused fireplaces. As fortune would have it, a back-to-back fireplace was walled over in the master bedroom. "I collected photos from magazines for years," says Rosanne. "There were plenty of small wet rooms or tiny hotel bathrooms, but nothing like this."

The fireplace did bring its own set of issues to the table, but creating an ensuite there did satisfy Rosanne and Graeme's main goal. "We didn't want to take space from any other room, or compromise the shape of our bedroom, or the one it backs on to." This meant a longer build period than a standard bathroom addition; not to mention dealing with back-to-back fireplaces that didn't match up with precision.

An extended floor with boxing was required beneath the chimney to reinforce the space, along with full tanking, but Rosanne says it "was well worth the six weeks of disruptions."

Although there were times they considered not going ahead with the ensuite, a family that included teenage children and a home that had only one bathroom, meant it was time to add a contemporary convenience. Cleverly designed doors, chosen to match the new wardrobes flanking both sides of the ensuite hide the new bathroom's existence. "We wanted it to remain hidden," says Rosanne. "So if someone came into our room, it just looked like a row of doors, as if it was one large wardrobe. Like a private, secret place."

While small, the ensuite is very practical. Space was well utilised, with a surprisingly large shower, vanity, toilet and even a heated towel rail. Lights automatically turn on when the doors open, as do those in the wardrobes.

Despite the ensuite doors opening straight out on to the carpet, water from the shower never escapes. "We have special exterior seals on the doors," she explains. "It works like a

ABOVE LEFT The shower curtain is suspended from ball and chain style thread rather than a fixed track, which adds to the feeling of space. Once pushed back, the curtain completely disappears.

proper wet room, so there is never any worry about water escaping when the doors are closed."

The ensuite renovation came at a difficult time for Graeme and Rosanne, with Graeme being made redundant then starting a new business at the same time as the renovation commenced, but they are pleased with their decision to proceed. "It's wonderful not having to leave the bedroom at night. It's a real parent's retreat!"

Since the ensuite has been completed, Rosanne and Graeme have inspired friends to consider the same option. "All these old villas are designed the same way," says Rosanne. "But then again, nothing in a villa is ever straight, so it's not always easy!" And in most character homes, where rooms cannot afford to be reduced in size, and where a second bathroom is non-negotiable, utilising this type of space can make a huge difference. ■