

Pure Bath

Ben Kelley at
Building Shelter, Inc.
Creates a
Unique Space
with a
Positive Impact



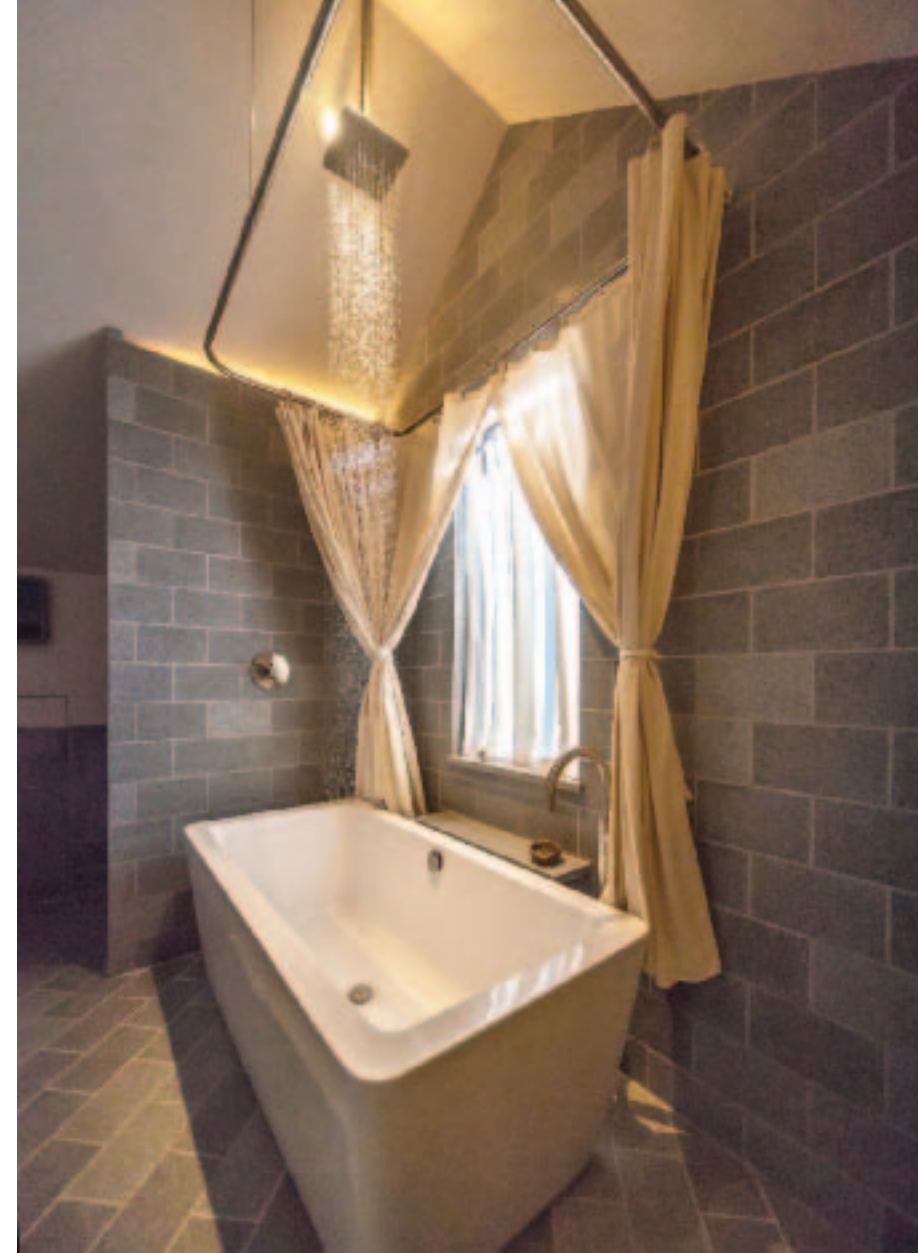
A bathroom is a place for cleansing the body, dedicated to maintaining an essential part of our everyday health and well-being. This year, Ben Kelley's company *Building Shelter Inc.*, designed and renovated a bathroom which goes beyond the usual set fixtures to become a space of beauty, personal health and environmental responsibility. The bath's clean, modern lines and a vaulted cathedral ceiling suggest an airy, clean atmosphere, but its materials are what bring that atmosphere to life, creating a place with an overall positive impact on the occupants' health.

Where possible, Ben sourced building materials locally, avoided the use of toxic and carcinogenic items, and took steps to mitigate the impact of any component materials he incorporated.

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The bathroom is part of a master suite sitting on the top floor of the house, with high cathedral ceilings and no clutter to speak of. The window treatment and shower curtains are woven from unbleached, undyed organic cotton, their warm cream color contrasting with the cool gray of the granite tiles and counter.

Story by Amelia Smith
Photography by Gil Jacobs



The sink (left) sits in a sleek gray granite countertop which runs the width of the room. Below the counter, rather than a cabinet, there's a simple shelf made of two planks of charcoal gray granite. Reflected in the wall-to-wall mirror, opposite the collection of plants, there's a set of built-in drawers for linens and storage, their interiors are made of reclaimed aromatic cedar, their fronts are flush to the wall. These drawers have the same granite-tiled surface as the rest of the lower walls, and blend in seamlessly.

Building Shelter Inc's work is partly inspired by the Living Building Challenge, which Ben Kelley has been working with for several years. It's a building certification program, which, like Passive House, aims for sustainability in the built environment, but the Living Building Challenge also includes standards of community sustainability, a healthy interior environment, and universal access to nature.

The paint in the bathroom is an Atmosphere Purifying Paint, which is not only VOC-free, but absorbs 98-99% of volatile pollutants, 24 hours a day, without needing to turn on an air filter.

This mitigates the buildup of toxic chemicals inside, which can be a serious concern in well-insulated, energy-efficient houses. This bathroom's window and shower curtains are woven from unbleached, undyed organic cotton, their warm cream color contrasting with the cool gray of the granite tiles and counter. Other materials and products were chosen for their beneficial health effects.

The sink sits in a sleek gray granite countertop which runs the width of the room. The granite for the bathroom tiles and counter came from Maine, off-Island,

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Builder
Ben Kelley
In His Own Words

“Twenty five years ago I worked in the entry level housing market where speed and efficiency were the first priority. I remember working with a 5 gallon bucket of glue that had “DANGER” written across it with a skull and crossbones. The effects of buildings on our health were not seriously considered back then. While speed and efficiency are still valued, it is imperative we build in a way that will benefit all of our clients' needs. To achieve this, at Building Shelter Inc., we understand the house as a holistic system. We bring high performance building methods, superior quality, intelligent material selection as well as inspiring design. With experience, passion and a commitment to learning, Building Shelter, Inc. brings the highest quality and design intelligence to all of our projects for a result that will enhance both our client's lives and the natural environment on which we depend- “Better Home, Better Life” to quote my colleague Jamie Wolf. If we can do this, then *shouldn't* we? Yes, not solely for our own health but for the earth on loan to us from our children.”



The countertop's most charming feature are five plants set into the counter, growing in stainless steel drinking glasses. The plants not only absorb CO₂, as all houseplants do, but were chosen for their additional health giving properties. The peace lily filters a range of chemicals out of the air, including benzene, formaldehyde, and ammonia. It also thrives in the shade, making it an ideal houseplant. Wintergreen has many health promoting properties, then there's aloe vera, a common household remedy for burns and dry skin. Ginseng is reported to boost the immune system, lower blood sugar levels, and enhance learning and memory. Its dried leaves can be used in tea and the berries can be eaten. Chocolate mint, rounding out the collection, is both stimulating and breath-freshening. Containers for the sun-loving plants can be easily moved over to the sunny windowsill in the daytime.

but still local enough to reduce the material's carbon footprint when compared to granite shipped for thousands of miles across the ocean. Underneath the counter, there's a simple shelf made of two planks of charcoal gray granite, rather than a cabinet. The countertop's most charming feature, though, are five plants set into the counter, growing in stainless steel drinking glasses. The plants not only absorb CO₂, as all houseplants do, but were chosen for their additional health giving properties.

First, there's a peace lily, which according to a NASA study helps filter an impressive range of chemicals out of the air, including benzene, formaldehyde, and ammonia. It also thrives in the shade, making it an ideal houseplant. In the next pot over, a small wintergreen plant grows. The wintergreen has many

health promoting properties, but is best known as a flavor for mints and gum. Then there's aloe vera, a common household remedy for burns and dry

When people put great effort into improving their health through diet, exercise, and lifestyle, it's natural to extend those concerns to the structural environment they spend time in.

skin. Next to it is a ginseng plant which is reported to boost the immune system, lower blood sugar levels, and enhance learning and memory. Its dried leaves can be used in tea and the berries can be

eaten. Chocolate mint rounds out the collection, stimulating and breath-freshening. Containers for the sun-loving plants can be easily moved over to the sunny shower windowsill in the daytime.

At the far end of the bathroom, opposite the collection of plants, there's a set of built-in drawers, their interiors made of reclaimed aromatic cedar, their fronts flush to the wall. These have the same granite-tiled surface as the rest of the lower walls, and so blend in almost seamlessly. When they're pulled out all the way, the opening becomes a doorway into a crawlspace under the roof. The toilet, tucked into the same corner of the room, has a water-conserving dual flush mechanism.

The bathroom is part of a master suite sitting on the top floor of the house, with high cathedral ceilings and

no clutter to speak of. The area just outside the bathroom serves as a home yoga studio, with two mats rolled out side by side. When people put great effort into improving their health through diet, exercise, and lifestyle, it's natural to extend those concerns to the built environments they live and breathe in. One prominent builder in Chicago builds high performance homes with intelligent material selections for "high performance people" like athletes who are heavily invested in their health, and want to return to a home that heals and enhances their health, as this project does.

Sharon Strimling is an Integrative Health Coach who refers her clients to Building Shelter Inc. when building or renovating, or if the homes they currently live in are detrimental to their health. "My role as a health consultant is to help my clients live in optimal health," she says. "To achieve that, their home environment is a critical piece. And as a person who both feels the immediate health impact of high or low air quality, as well as a person who thrives in spaces of harmonious design, Building Shelter Inc's spaces quite literally offer me and my clients a breath of fresh air."

Ben faces some challenges in trying to create buildings with optimal health in mind. "With programs that are trying to change what a building can be, you're pushing against an industry whose first concern might not necessarily be the health and wellbeing of their consumer," he says. But as more and more people are demanding healthy homes that can benefit the health of the occupants, the materials are becoming increasingly accessible and affordable, which is already happening with sustainable energy solutions, like home solar panels.

"Building in a truly responsible and sustainable way has changed me," Ben says. "What kind of planet do we want to live on? What impact do our buildings have on our natural environment and on the families that are going to live in them?" He answers these questions with ambitious and creative projects, imbuing in his clients homes artful design, high performance building methods and building science for the optimal benefit of those who will inhabit them. **vs**



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