

# Medicine Cabinets: Walk Right In

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of mind-boggling," said Steve Bissell, the company's president. "People are saying 'I can't live without these things.' No matter what income level, they are able to pamper themselves with these products, and it does create a crisis."

The singer Melissa Errico, who opened at the Oak Room this week, stood at a glass-fronted Waterworks medicine cabinet that she shares with her husband, the tennis champion Patrick McEnroe, ticking off the contents: "perfume, stuff from Pharmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella — and he has so many vitamins it's embarrassing."

"He's obsessed with muscle power pills," she added. "There's no word for how many there are in here."

Waterworks, based in Danbury, Conn., spent a year tinkering with the design of its new wall-hanging Metal cabinet, said Peter Sallick, the chief executive, who calls the cabinet the company's holy grail. It has hand-finished nickel, piano hinges and a lining of Corian (\$2,490) or marble (\$3,200).

In many households one is never enough. "People need more space, so it's grown to 'his' cabinetry and 'her' cabinetry," said Christopher Pagliaro, an architect in South Norwalk, Conn., who describes bathroom design as an exercise in product management. For example, "I use completely different products from my wife," he said. "So how do you handle and manage both?"

When the first commandment of a shared bath is "Keep your clutter away from my nicely organized things," the answer can lie in a two-sided vanity, with neutral territory in the middle. Without boundaries, said Jackie Goodrich, a New York mediator married to a New York lawyer, Matthew Wilkes, "there is creep."

Cabinetmakers say they wrestle with conflicting demands from consumers, who want to grab what they need when they need it, and to hide the mess the minute the doorbell rings. One Robern model comes with a lockbox to prevent Seinfeldian

friends from checking out supplies of Viagra, Prozac and sex toys.

Steve Schappacher and Rhea White, New York architects, say they interview their clients extensively before designing clutter camouflage. One woman, for example, could not let go of a very tall can of professional hair spray, requiring a special shelf in her custom cabinet.

The partners, who are married, confronted their own challenge after buying a Midtown loft with an extra-narrow bathroom. Both love clean open spaces yet are serious collectors of beauty and health care products. Ms. White has a vintage vase for her makeup brushes; Mr. Schappacher likes to open the cabinet door to see his childhood matchbox-car collection and shaving gear handed down by his grandfather. Their shared dream? A shelf deep enough for a roll of toilet paper.

What they got was a \$4,000 row of 6 mirrored cabinets, each 13 to 16 inches wide, 4 to 11½ inches deep and 6 feet tall: from the left, hers, hers, hers, his, his — and theirs.

The cabinets, with their Tylenol-toothpaste-mascara-and-designer soap collections as meticulously arranged as the Egyptian artifacts at the Metropolitan Museum, were made by a millworker, using four concealed hinges to swing open each door.

During the 1970's many builders omitted cabinets in favor of flat mirrors over three-drawer vanities. For reasons science cannot yet explain, however, objects multiply in deep drawers, burying essentials. Then the vanity disappeared with the revival of the pedestal sink.

Gopal Ahluwalia, staff vice president for research at the National Association of Home Builders, says two-thirds of those surveyed are disappointed by the amount of space for storage throughout the house, bathroom included. In his own 1980's-era master bathroom in Potomac, Md., he said, there are two medicine cabinets. "It's me and my wife only, but I would have preferred a little bigger, a little deeper."

Pulte Homes, a national builder, used to put in only vanities, said Sean Degen, vice



Laurie Lambrecht for The New York Times

## Without boundaries in a bathroom, there can be 'creep.' Solution: a two-sided vanity.

president for architectural services. But now active adults say they want a medicine cabinet, too, the better to find their Lipitor without searching for their glasses.

Eye-level cabinets eliminate the need to "grub around and hunt" in the vanity, said Mr. Bissell, the Robern executive. His company offers several lines of extra-tall, extra-deep medicine cabinets, along with kits to add shelves along the sides or underneath.

Mirrored doors, front and back, improve visibility but add weight. Mr. Bissell said a door on one of his popular modular cabinets weighs 40 pounds.

Georgia Christenson, a Robern representative, was watching customers stream past bath cabinetry at the Home Depot Expo Design Center in Queens one recent Sunday. She noted that the modular units can be "ganged" across a wall or stacked, and expressed optimism about a freestanding variation called the Fairhaven Full-Length,



Photographs by Barbara Alper for The New York Times

due this spring.

Harry Elson, a New York architect, says Roberns have the cachet of sports cars. "Because it has a neoprene gasket, you don't hear a clink," Mr. Elson said of the one in his new house on Shelter Island, N.Y.

On Central Park West, Eddie and Kim Rodriguez recently commissioned a seven-foot-wide walnut vanity with drawers and shelves. Their architect, David Wales, also put in separate medicine cabinets. To "eke out" some extra space, he even wrapped a

shallow drawer around the double sinks.

Mr. Allan, the Minnesota architect, said the personalization of products and storage space is a byproduct of affluence. He no longer asks clients how big they want their medicine cabinets; he automatically assumes the answer will be the biggest that will fit through the door.

And for those who can't afford to commission custom medicine chests? "I tell them to go to Home Depot and buy a broom closet," Mr. Allan said.

### CLEAN LIVING

Big storage in a narrow bathroom by Rhea White and Steve Schappacher, above; left, Grier Eliasek and Tristana Waltz, with one of their two cabinet-vanity complexes.