

Gut the old, Google the new

By using online resources to purchase materials, score tools, and even draw up a floor plan, this couple turned a chopped-up attic into a sunny master suite **By LAURA FISHER KAISER + Photographs by DAVID PRINCE**



← Skylights lend the illusion of height when raising the roof isn't an option.



{ before }

before Partition walls around the stairwell obstructed the flow and blocked light from windows at either end. **after** A half-wall now encloses the staircase to open up the space and allow sunshine from the new skylights to flood the room. Built-ins keep the space clean and functional.



WHO> Claudia and Felipe Menanteau
WHERE> Piscataway, N.J.
WHAT> Converted their attic into their master bedroom, bath, and home office.

The small 1950s ranch suited its new owners, except for one thing. They wanted a master suite. But how to get it when the first floor was jammed with the kitchen, living and dining rooms, the home's sole bathroom, and two tiny bedrooms, one

soon to be a nursery? Adding on wasn't an option. So Claudia and Felipe Menanteau looked up—to the attic. While the ceiling was pitched from 7 feet down to 4 and makeshift walls sliced up the space, the couple saw they could open it up and even add another bath. To cut costs, they did the work themselves—once they learned how. Felipe, an astrophysicist who wanted to work with his hands, and Claudia, a graphic designer who shared Felipe's passion for details, taught themselves from library books with tools they bought secondhand. After mastering basic skills (and with help from friends who are licensed plumbers), they tackled everything on their own, except the skylights and drywall. They even drew the floor plan: Felipe fed room dimensions into Google SketchUp, a 3-D software program he downloaded. Start to finish it took 11 months, then baby Nathaniel arrived. "In a way, the renovation was our first baby," says Felipe.

PRODUCED BY COLETTE SCANLON. STYLING: PATRICIA GAYLOR

before+after: **attic**

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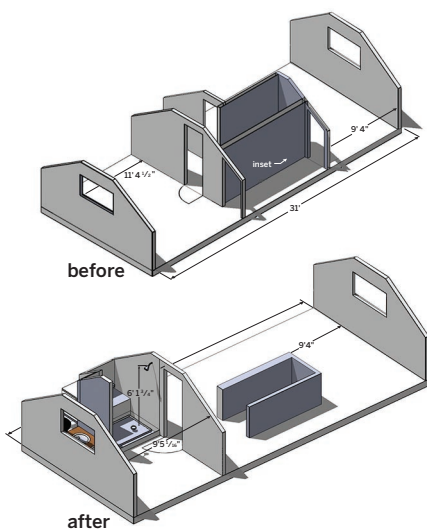
Google SketchUp puts an architect at your fingertips



Rather than hiring an architect and paying design fees he could scarcely afford, homeowner Felipe Menanteau downloaded Google SketchUp for his attic remodel. The free, easy-to-

learn program allows users to create room plans in 3-D. You can paint the walls, add furniture, and even rotate your masterpiece in space to see every angle.

The application, available since 2006, has become a favorite of TOH staffers, including technical editor Mark Powers. "It helps you understand the project," he says. "You can stand back and see how it fits in with other rooms. It's like building without lifting a hammer."

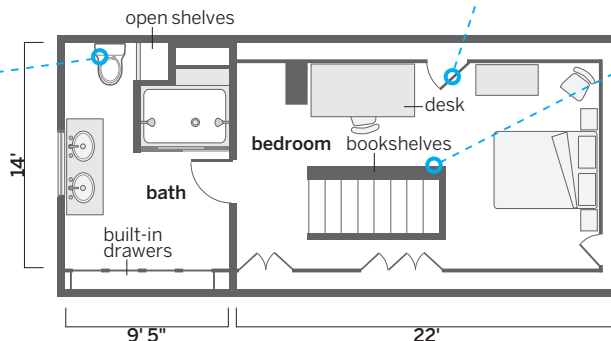


Claudia and Felipe's attic as seen in SketchUp before and after Felipe's design work. Go to sketchup.google.com.

• before + after

The existing attic was a warren of tiny rooms. After removing the interior walls, Felipe invited over two friends, gave each a hammer, mask, and goggles, and they finished the demolition in an afternoon. Now a single wall separates the bathroom from the bedroom.

1 A rear-discharge toilet looks plumbed to the floor, but its waste pipe—too big to pass through the floor joists—snakes behind the knee wall instead.



2 Seven doors now access knee-wall storage closets where the homeowners keep everything from out-of-season clothes to suitcases to holiday decorations.

3 A half-wall, 9 inches thick to allow for bookshelves, makes the stairs' enclosure less of an obstruction and lets light reach the center of the space.

• the key details

↓ Built-in bookshelves on the staircase wall provide the home office with a place for a library.



↑ A prefab drawer unit with an MDF interior was built into a crawl space in the bathroom. Bin pulls: House of Knobs. Vanity: KraftMaid. Bar pulls: Lowe's



← Skylights supplement the windows and cast light on the room's edges (here over a small home-office nook) where the ceiling height slopes down to 4 feet. Skylight: Velux. Monitor: Dell. Speakers: Creative Labs. Keyboard and mouse: Apple



↑ Open shelves, made of red oak plywood and fronted with red oak nosing, provide a spot for towels and toiletries, lending purpose to the dead space under the eaves behind the shower enclosure. Towel rack: Target



↑ A shower clad in mosaic tile demonstrates Claudia's new skill; she did most of the tiling herself (with an assist by Felipe). Carrara marble tops the built-in seat. Shower door: Kohler. Fittings: Delta. Pan: Jacuzzi. Mosaic tiles: Giorbello