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GROWING WELLNESS TRENDS
 CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO
 MEET CONSUMER DEMAND

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Growing Wellness Trends Create New Opportunities to Meet Consumer Demand

By Linda Jennings



There is a fundamental shift underway in the decorative plumbing and hardware industry that may forever change the way we perceive the bathroom. This transformation not only influences consumer expectations, but the way that we, as industry professionals, promote and sell our product lines.

Once a place of practical necessity, the bathroom has evolved into an epicenter for wellness and relaxation, an oasis of serenity that refreshes the body and soothes the spirit. As lives become increasingly hectic, people have come to realize that making time for themselves and their health should be a daily priority. The concept of creating a luxurious in-home spa is gaining mass appeal in today's market, with dealers, designers, architects and manufacturers leading the way.

Consumer Motivation

Different people have different motivators for investing in a home spa. For some, indulgent therapies allow them to shut out the demands of the outside world. Others want to express their own personal style with a one-of-a-kind retreat. There are practical reasons, too, such as convenience, privacy and the significant health risks associated with unabated stress. Creating a wellness-themed bathroom is about making small but important lifestyle changes that can have a great impact on one's overall quality of life.

Today's consumers have indicated that they are willing to invest in products that offer the benefits of enhancing their health and wellbeing. In this post-recession era, people of all ages are focused on stress relief more than ever. As homeowners realize that remodeling is the best option to achieving the home of their dreams, they will invest in products that go beyond offering esthetic pleasure to those providing longer-term benefits and experiences.

"The concept of luxury nowadays is about the quality of the time dedicated to oneself in spaces of one's own where moments of indulgence to relax, rebalance and recover energy are possible," observed Larry Allen, managing director of Gessi USA. "Personal needs, once considered only as functional, increasingly concern the emotional sphere."



1. A Victoria + Albert bath is placed in an outdoor wellness setting at Hotel Faru Faru Lodge in Tanzania, Africa.



2. BainUltra's Universal Massage Table on the Essencia Bathtub.
3. Essencia Wellness Tub by BainUltra.

Rebecca Whiteleather, president of B&C Custom Hardware in Calif., finds that many of her customers, the majority being well-educated and well-traveled, are exposed to wellness products while staying in fine hotels and want to incorporate them into their own personal space. Their expectations of a spa-like home retreat are more sophisticated than a simple upgraded showerhead.

A Hands-On Approach to Sales

Tony Vanario, president of Richmond Tile & Bath, promotes wellness to his clients by first educating his sales staff on the benefits of a holistic approach to health — the measurable effects of meditation and massage — and then lets them speak with the sincerity of true believers. Of course, nothing is as convincing as first-hand experience. As an authorized BainUltra dealer, the company installed a private relaxation room where customers can actually enjoy a massage bath in the freestanding Ayoura tub or experience the pleasure of Vedana®, which combines five relaxing therapies in one water-free wall unit.

"The relaxation room is a wonderful sales tool that really drives home the benefits to the customer," Vanario said. "Our goal is to continue introducing innovative products that require a one-on-one showroom experience, thus putting the customer in a position to make better, more informed choices."

Whiteleather is also a firm believer in the power of such interactive displays to sell customers on the wellness concept. Her showroom is one of the first in the country to offer BainUltra's new Inperience Bathroom™, with intensive therapies that utilize air, heat, water, light, sound and scent.

"Let's face it; some of these products can be expensive and somewhat unfamiliar," she said. "Letting customers take a 'test drive' eliminates any uncertainty."

On Trend

Alice Liao, executive editor of *Kitchen & Bath Business*, notes that while an interest in spa-like bathrooms has been going strong for a number of years, the focus has shifted from general aesthetics to an emphasis on specific products.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported on a trend among high-end hoteliers to replace traditional tubs with elaborate showers featuring oversized stalls, marble walls, body sprayers and multiple shower heads.

“Over the last two years, wellness has become a major factor in the bathroom, as evidenced by the popularity — emerging or continued — of certain product and product features,” she said. “The demand for chromatherapy is thriving, and it continues to be integrated into showers, steam showers and tubs. If Europe is any indicator of trends to come, it will not be going away anytime soon.”

Other key trends incorporate technology into the bathroom. Liao likes products that feature the ability to play music, a phenomenon that includes showers, tubs and even toilets. Next year, Villeroy & Boch will bring to the U.S. market its +Sound mirror, which is equipped with six speakers and Bluetooth capability to allow users to play their iPod without having to plug it in.

“Digital controls also play into the interest in wellness in the bathroom,” Liao said. “Different users require different temperature settings and bathing experiences, and a control system that remembers personal preferences can be enormously useful in a home with more than one bather and a shower that has more than one showerhead.”

Dornbracht makes innovative use of technology with its Ambiance Tuning Technique that literally “choreographs” the showering experience. Electronic controls regulate the water volume, temperature and stream sequence through a modular system of sprayers, jets and outlets. Bathers can create their own custom program or choose pre-programmed sessions that are designed to relax, energize or balance the body.

LEED-certified designer Pam Durkin, a principal at New Line Design and past president of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) Florida South Chapter, is pleased to see the wellness trend translating into eco-friendly products that look good and are good for the environment.

“Natural materials continue to be a solid investment,” she said. “There are some amazing products coming out. I just completed an ASID Showhouse using Ann Sacks tiles — a leather herringbone on the walls coupled with a concave-shaped recycled glass tile. Fabulous!”

Veronika Miller of Modenus.com is seeing a distinct trend amongst consumers toward an overall better quality of life as it relates to health and interior spaces, resulting in a continued desire to create a spa-like ambiance at home. She has built an impressive following on the social media front reporting on design trends from around the world.

“We see the home-spa concept being carried beyond the bath and into the home with overall more relaxed, less formal designs that embrace or reflect the outdoors. And even into the kitchen where healthful materials and appliances are becoming more prevalent and can strengthen the holistic aspect of design,” she noted.

Showers vs. Tubs

There has been some discussion about the peaceful co-existence of showers and tubs. Some predict that as showers evolve to provide a greater relaxation experience, they may eventually replace bathtubs altogether.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported on a trend among high-end hoteliers to replace traditional tubs with elaborate showers featuring oversized stalls, marble walls, body sprayers and multiple shower heads. Some even have chandeliers, hammocks for lounging, and — for the high-rise penthouses — floor-to-ceiling windows. The report found that hotels with high volumes of business travel tend to favor shower-only layouts, while hotels popular with families continue to include tub designs, as did resorts targeting leisure travelers who enjoy the luxury of a good soak.

Alan Anderson, a principal at leading Florida architecture firm CA3, reports that while his clients want the luxury of spa-like showers, they aren't quite willing to let go of their tubs. A popular compromise solution during his bathroom renovation projects has been to remove the large traditional tub in the master suite and replace it with a roomy shower, while adding a soaker or air jet tub to a secondary bathroom.

“People are downsizing these days, and they want to make the best use of their space,” he said. “Taking out the tub frees up room to add a large walk-in shower, double sinks, private toilet, maybe even a makeup or dressing area. And they still have access to a bathtub if they so choose.”

“I think it is safe to say that showers and tubs can live harmoniously together, each meeting a different range of needs. What is certain is that both will continue to evolve,” he continued.

Manufacturers are responding to the public's clamor for sophisticated shower systems. Methven introduced a new concept in showering with its revolutionary Maia system. Its water-saving showerhead is imbedded with a vitamin C cartridge to neutralize harmful chlorine in the water and deliver a cleansing facial massage. A complimentary Shower Infusion Kit continues the wellness concept with powerful combinations of essential oils, extracts and pure New Zealand water to create a personalized mood-enhancing spa experience.

In a similar vein, Gessi offers a new Private Wellness line of luxurious multi-functional rain showers. Square showerheads allow

the bather to select water flow, from a light summer shower to a drenching waterfall, all to the accompaniment of fixed or changing chromatherapy lights.

Bathtubs are evolving, too. Freestanding tubs are enjoying a significant surge in popularity and often serve as the nucleus of wellness therapies. The new Essencia tub by BainUltra promotes a soothing feeling with its organic oval silhouette, dual row of air jets and Hydrothermal massage.

Another new (yet not so new) trend among tubs is the concept of outdoor bathing. Victoria + Albert are the pioneers here, reinventing an ancient ritual for modern times. All of their tubs are durable enough for al fresco settings, thanks to their ENGLISHCAST® composition, making them a natural fit for an outdoor venue. This trend may be inspired in part by the hospitality industry, as visiting guests discover the pleasures of outdoor bathing from the privacy of secluded balconies and courtyards.

Options Galore

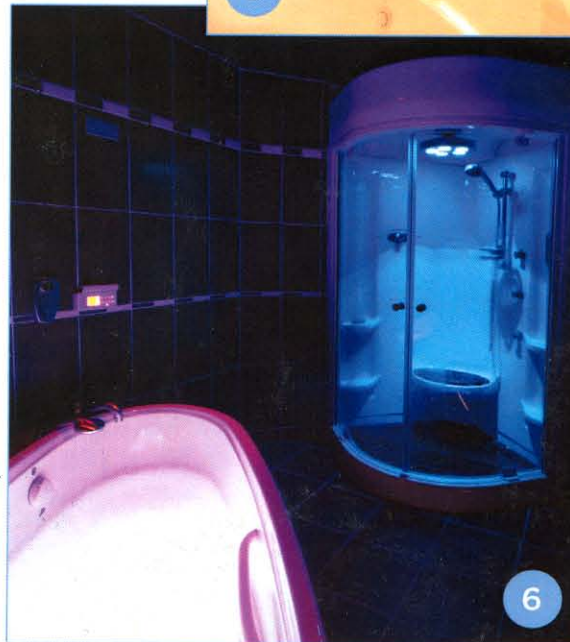
Manufacturers from all aspects of the bath industry are joining the wellness movement. BainUltra's Akasa™ collection is meant to provide complementary products to complete a wellness-themed bathroom, such as a relaxation chair with footrest and an espalier for yoga and stretching. The Universal Massage Table is designed to fit over the top of any of their freestanding tubs to provide a comfortable surface for a relaxing massage, or it may be used at ground level as a platform for meditation.

Even toilet manufacturers are taking an interest in wellness, such as TOTO's Neorest, Senso Wash and Inax' Regio. Kohler raised some eyebrows for its Numi™ toilet with its motion-activated lid and all manner of luxuries, including a heated seat, foot warmer, deodorizer and integrated air dryer.

As Liao mused, "I have to wonder if the growing popularity of high-tech toilets and bidets isn't part of the wellness spa trend. It's almost as if the toilet is the last frontier." ●



4. Minimal showers with Chromatherapy from the Gessi "Private Wellness" Collection.



5-6. Customers can experience different therapies at Richmond Tile & Bath's relaxation room.



Linda Jennings is president of Jennings & Company, a public relations agency specializing in the decorative plumbing and luxury hardware industry. More than a 20-year tenure, she has worked with the most significant editors and journalists in the consumer home market identifying trends and providing newsworthy products. Jennings welcomes your feedback and can be reached at linda@jenningsandcompany.com.