

kitchen & bath DESIGN NEWS[®]

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Beautiful Refuge

Bathtubs and spa-related amenities with a range of therapeutic options help create home sanctuaries for self-care and personal wellness.

BY ELIZABETH RICHARDS

A FOCUS ON self-care and personal wellness reinforces the trend of designing spa-like spaces in the home bathroom. Those spaces not only include soaking and jetted tubs, but now also incorporate aromatherapy, chromatherapy, steam showers and sauna rooms.

“Self care includes creating sanctuaries that facilitate putting our hectic, high-speed lives on hold and relaxing,” stresses Michael Zimmer, founder of Stone Forest in Santa Fe, NM.

Justin Storm, director of category management at House of Rohl in Irvine, CA adds, “With homeowners focusing more on their mental and physical wellbeing, the bathroom, naturally, is where they turn in order to de-stress and wind down. This, in turn, has impacted bathroom trends as consumers look to create spaces that are designed like a wellness retreat.”

The bathtub is an integral element in this personal oasis. Zimmer says, “[People are] bringing the essential energy and beauty of nature into the bathroom with natural materials that evoke the expansive and restorative powers of nature.”

Tubs that can be customized with a range of options to create the exact therapeutic experience the end user craves are also important. “Homeowners want their bathrooms to be a place of relaxation, and bathing is now more of an experience,” offers Storm. “Customizable showers and baths that include extras such as hand showers and body sprays are popular ways to emulate a spa environment.”



Whirl systems from **Schmidlin** turn a simple soak into a gentle massage. Tub offerings including Silent, a quiet bubble system; Aqua Silent, a quiet jet system; Hydro Silk, with tiny bubbles; Jet, with jets for an intensive massage; Spa, with air jets for a bubbly wellness experience, and Jet+Spa. schmidlinusa.com



Distinctive veining and nuances, together with attention to thickness and ergonomics, express the **Kreoo** freestanding bathtub collections. The tubs are carved from a single block of marble, then mixed with wood and metal objects. Shown is Kalypso, customizable in seven different materials. kreoo.com



Sculpted from **Acquabella's** signature Dolotek, an eco-friendly mineral composite that has antibacterial properties, the Carezza freestanding tub offers heat-retention properties that keep water warm longer. It is offered in gloss or matte versions in Snow White or one of four colored exterior options. acquabella.us



Devon&Devon showcases three retro-style bathtubs created in Florence. The tubs reinterpret the Victorian Age, Romanticism, Art Deco, the Jazz Age and La Dolce Vita with classic-contemporary lines in marble and porcelain as well as sustainable materials such as White Tec Plus. devon-devon.com

In addition to custom therapeutic options, technology that adds value to the space is in rising demand. “Consumers are also looking for simplification and meaningful technology that will help educate and guide them on their wellness journey, such as guided experiences,” explains Huston Sprang, global senior product manager-steam at Kohler, WI-based Kohler Co.

Other current trends include continued interest in freestanding and deep soaker tubs, pops of color that make a statement, and increased attention to accessibility issues. That’s according to manufacturers recently surveyed by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*.

SOOTHING REFUGE

Managing stress and focusing on wellness has garnered much attention in the past several years, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consumers are more often creating spaces in their own homes that promote relaxation and offer the same therapeutic features they can find at a spa.

“The bathroom, in general, has been a focus for wellness in recent years as the increasing focus on mental wellbeing has driven the importance of the bathroom space as a sanctuary for self-care,” remarks Bryan Huie, product manager at Duluth, GA-based Duravit USA. “The bathtub is no exception as designs are continually focusing on therapy and serenity.”

“[Wellness] has become a larger part of the design conversations with



Created in partnership with Studio F.A. Porsche, the Qatego Freestanding Bathtub from **Duravit** is inspired by stones gently polished by water. The bathtub is made of DuroCast Plus, a strong mineral composite material with a matte, velvety finish, notes the company.
duravit.us



The Evok Oval freestanding bath features a 17" depth that allows for a deep, immersive soak. With seamless acrylic construction, the **Kohler** tub includes integral lumbar support, built-in integral overflow, toe-tap drain and location versatility.
kohler.com



Airmada's AirJet Shower Drying System delivers a maintenance-free shower experience. Available in eight finishes, the system uses a series of air-jet nozzles, set flush to the ceiling or walls of the shower, to rid the area of dampness. It reduces drying time as well as mold and mildew.
airmadadry.com



Victoria + Albert's Seros Collection by House of Rohl captures the rippling motion of water in sculpted form, states the company. Its oval silhouette is surrounded by the flowing lines and contours of currents for an organic shape. The freestanding tubs are offered in a variety of sizes in RAL colors.
vandabaths.com



Tubs from **StoneTouch** are fashioned in Italy and blend the look of classic with modern, with a claw-foot inspired design. The Elton tub, shown, is derived from the Dolomite Mountains in Italy and crafted for maximum comfort and functionality, states the firm.
stonetouchbath.com



Amerec's AK Generators add a steam shower option to the home shower. The technology allows for consistent flow of steam and temperature maintenance during the steam bath. The stainless steel tank and water level probes provide years of trouble-free operation, notes the company.
amerec.com



Sbordoni's Livia tub features softly shaped edges and bases, with its neoclassic style recalling the Roman thermal spaces, notes the firm. The solid surface tub showcases a delicate and elegant pattern of grooves that create a balance of light and shade, the company adds.
sbordoniceramica.com



The Fraser stainless steel cold therapy plunge spa/pool from **Diamond Spas** is kept at 59 degrees or colder and rapidly cools the body. The cold therapy is said to stimulate blood circulation, close pores, detoxify the body, numb the joints, reduce pain and relieve muscle spasms, states the firm.
diamondspas.com

the client and is influencing new product development," says Bob Gifford, director of business development at Hastings Bath Collection in Freeport, NY. "Spa products are being used more than ever in homes."

"The current focus on self care and wellness is not going away. In fact, this is much more than a trend – it is a societal shift and movement," stresses Alejandra Thompson de Jordan, v.p. of sales & marketing for Thompson, based in Greensboro, NC. "Wellness extends deeply into health and longevity practices. It seems like cold plunging is the new pickleball." The impact on the home bathroom and spa is huge, she adds.

"Homes are building out extensive spas with saunas, hot tubs with jets that have health implications, salt water over chlorine and arctic and cold plunge solutions integrated," she continues.

Consumers are becoming more open to investing in these options that promote health, manufacturers say.

"We are seeing more 'conservative' customers wanting bidets, essential oils in the shower, tubs with experiences, and wellness environments in their homes," reports Dean Camastro, Northeast regional sales manager at Duravit USA.

"There continues to be a surge in transforming bathroom spaces into spa-like experiences, and consumers are prioritizing products, like steam showers, that focus on well-being," states Martha Orellana, v.p., marketing, MrSteam based in Long Island City, NY. "Homebuyers are increasingly

willing to pay a premium for quality features, like steam showers, that support their health and fiscal goals."

Kim Frechette, national sales director at North Hollywood, CA-based Americh says, "Since COVID, the consumer has stayed interested in at-home spa therapies that can be accessed easily, in their own bathrooms, without sharing space with strangers. Hydro-massage in all its forms, as well as any other therapy – aroma, light, salts, etc. – to enhance the basic soak, are more mainstream and accepted."

CUSTOM FUNCTION

Designers understand that no two clients are the same – nor will they want the same features and therapeutic options. That's why a range of features that add exactly the experience the individual is looking for are critical.

"Usually customization will be around placement of the jets – one-size does not always fit for everyone – and the extras like chromatherapy or the hydro-massage add-ons," explains Frechette. "Low-profile tub edges and undermounts, with understated, quiet systems like soaker heating systems and skin conditioning systems, are making sleek, minimalistic tub areas primed for tranquil soaking."

"Our baths and showers are incorporating sensory elements such as lighting, sound and aromatherapy. In new builds, homeowners are ensuring they have the footprint in the bathroom to accommodate the products



The Soake Cold Plunge from **Soake Pools** is a 4'x4' cold plunge that can be installed indoors or outdoors. The compact unit is intended for sitting for one or two people, with an interior that is finished with porcelain tile that is customizable in terms of color, finish and tile orientation. soakepools.com



Designed for smaller bathrooms, **Drummonds'** Regent tub is a more compact version of the Meon, and offers above-the-floor plumbing while retaining the style of a traditional cast iron bath. With a double-ended design, the tub is cast from iron and then finished in painted enamel. drummonds-uk.com



Inspired by the need for a safe and contemporary-style freestanding bathtub, **Americh** presents Maude, which has a substantial deck that can be used for sitting or safety getting into and out of the fixture. Additional features include armrests and a sloped backrest, as well as optional grab bars and air system. americh.com



Ceramica Cielo has expanded its freestanding bathtub offering, fashioning the tubs from LivingTec, a soft-touch material. Shown is Febe, a flat-bottomed tub that can be positioned either in the center of the room or against the wall. The small-sized tub has a shelf on one side to hold toiletries. ceramicacielo.us



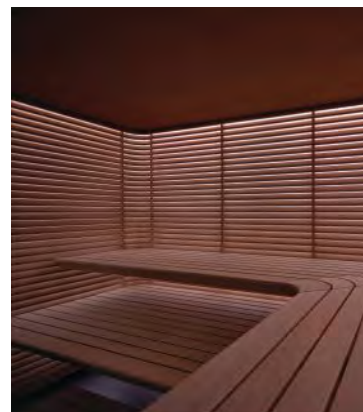
Fleurco's Lucia solid surface bathtub, part of its Aria Stone Collection, is designed with a vast interior for a luxury soak, states the firm. The tub is available in a range of color and finish options for personalization. fleurco.com



The Mendocino Freestanding Tub from **Native Trails** sports slanted slides and a deep interior. The tub, made from a sustainable blend of natural jut fiber and cement, features thick walls that provide insulation to maintain water temperature. It is available in five colors, including the new Ocean. nativetrailshome.com



The newest tub from **Barclay Products**, the Olivia 59" freestanding bathtub features a modern oval design. Made from lightweight acrylic, the soaking tub is available in a matte white finish and is compatible with the air jet system. Six drain finishes are offered. barclayproducts.com



KLAFS partnered with Studio F. A. Porsche to design the S11 sauna, a new type of sauna cabin that delivers a sensory experience of warmth, light, color and sound. Users can choose between different ceremonies or choose an individual selection. klafs.com

that attribute to their wellness routines and rituals," stresses Sprang. "We are also seeing great demand for our steam showers with all the benefits that they can deliver to a user. [They] can be easily integrated into a showering space and not require additional footprint space, and are able to achieve contrast therapy when combined with a cold shower."

Cold therapy plunge spas or pools are being requested more often as well, says Stephanie Bennet, president of Diamond Spas in Longmont, CO. "Clients will put these chillers next to their baths, saunas or hot tubs. Cold-plunge therapy has many health benefits and has become the new rave for total body wellness."

In addition to a wide range of therapeutic options, functional features and integrated technology are increasingly important to consumers, manufacturers say.

"Ease of use, control and connectivity are basic expectations with all new products, I would venture to say in all categories," reports Thompson de Jordan. "The ability to turn something on, off, set the temperature, set the steam levels, surveillance of the device or product, etc. needs to be easily accessible through a mobile device. This is quickly evolving from a 'nice to have' to a 'must have.'"

"Integrating advanced technology with smart features into steam products aligns with the well-being trend, offering users comfort and convenience at their fingertips," adds Orellano.

NATURAL CALM AND POPS OF COLOR

Natural tones evoke the calm, serene atmosphere of a home spa, making natural materials and finishes a top choice for tubs, manufacturers say.

"There are lots of natural elements like stone and raw copper on display," notes Thompson de Jordan. In addition to nature-inspired stones, metals, woods and raw surfaces that feel and appear to be unfinished, green is a top choice, she adds. "Everything at KBIS 2024 was green," she offers.

"With high-end bathroom design, customers are also conscious of the material and finish. Our epiStone solid surface bathtubs have a modern satin finish that is silky to the touch, but not glossy. This goes very well with earth tones and textured stone and tile surfaces that are very trendy in bathroom design," remarks Sally Edenfield, brand strategist and content manager at Ruvati in Round Rock, TX.

"We're seeing high demand for our bathtub designs carved from natural stone," states Zimmer. "Designers like to use them as sculptural focal points, designing the entire bathroom around these dramatic sculptural statements."

He adds, "There seems to be some momentum away from more neutral stone colors towards marble bathtubs with more dramatic veining and color, including green marble."

Designers and consumers are making the tub a focal point that makes a statement, and using unique colors helps them do so.



Photo: Courtesy of David Marlow

Stone Forest's Facet Bathtub is carved from a single block of Antique Gray Limestone or Noce Basalt. A departure from traditionally shaped tubs, this handcrafted collection is an updated ovoid with faceted detailing on the exterior and squared ends for toiletries. stoneforest.com



Inspired by nature, traditional clay ovens and the shapes left behind from Wyoming snowstorms, the Permanente Tub from **Thompson** is defined by sweeping curves and a signature aged copper finish. One of four products from the new Permanente Collection, this tub has a low height of 16". thompsontraders.com



The Mystix Steam System from **Brizo** creates a restorative shower experience, notes the firm. The Mystix Transcendent Experience features a Digital Interface with up to 12 presets. The system includes a suite of spa options: Mystix Aromatherapy, Chromatherapy and Audiotherapy. brizo.com



MrSteam has launched SPAH2O, a thermostatic, pressure-balanced valve that allows for a smooth transition between shower and steam, states the firm. It integrates MrSteam's iSteamX control, and allows for connection of up to three shower fixtures, auto shutoff and anti-scalding regulator. mrsteam.com



Helo custom saunas transform unused, existing residential space into a home sauna, states the company, with saunas manufactured to fit existing framed and insulated walls. The saunas provide cut-to-size tongue-and-groove paneling, benches, backrests, electric heater, rocks and more. helosauna.com



EMPAVA's Whirlpool Hydromassage Bathtub with Glass Panel provides numerous therapeutic options including hydrotherapy from 11 massaging jets and a waterfall spout, and chromatherapy via seven built-in color-changing LED lights. A variety of tub color options and hardware finishes are offered. empava.com



Designed by Daniel Debiassi and Federico Sandri for **antoniolupi**, the Dafne tub is available in both Cristalplant and Carrara white marble. The new marble offering resembles sculpture due to its controlled geometry. The raised edge on one side holds the shoulders while the curved lines cradle the body. antoniolupi.it



Ruvati has entered into a new product category with the introduction of the Sinatra tub. Crafted in Italy, the piece features a satin gold exterior and oval silhouette. It is made from the company's epiStone, a non-porous surface that holds the water's heat and has a smooth touch. ruvati.com

"Colored tubs are in demand as well and help bring to life a feeling of calm and harmony," offers Storm. Victoria + Albert's Cravings Collection from Food & Wine by House of Rohl includes three color palettes inspired by a tasting menu in partnership with *Food & Wine*, he adds.

Gifford notes, "New technology is allowing bathtubs to be available in many colors, both inside and outside of the product. This is expanding the designers' use of statement pieces in a bathroom with pops of color."

Frechette, however, says white and biscuit are still the top choices. "Industry color trends are reflected in baths as well, but the homeowner intrepid enough to commit to a color is still rare," she explains.

STAND-ALONE SOAKERS

Some manufacturers say that demand for "bells and whistles" is decreasing as consumers return to freestanding soaking tubs in organic shapes.

"Surprisingly, manufacturers such as Duravit are finding very little custom requests in the bathtub category as the soaking tub offering is the greatest demand," explains Hule. "Spa tubs were removed several years ago and the downward trend on demand continues as the health effects using bath salts and other bath additives have proven positive results."

"Tubs, particularly freestanding tubs, are now being thought of as a focal point for bathrooms. Those who have larger spaces are opting to keep their tub separate from their shower, which emphasizes the continued need

for a spa-like bathroom environment," says Storm.

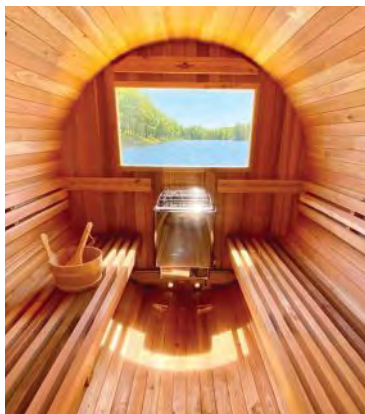
"Deep tubs that provide roomy comfort are popular, and there's also an increased interest in more compact freestanding baths," he continues. "Homeowners recognize the health benefits of tubs and are trying to accommodate them even in smaller bathrooms."

"We've seen great success with our tubs because of their sleek design and freestanding installation," notes Edenfield. "Since they're freestanding, they can be placed anywhere and allow for a dynamic bathroom design. Especially in larger bathrooms, a freestanding tub can be a statement piece."

"Bathing never goes out of style. A soak is always beneficial, but even if you aren't a 'bather,' a sore back, a sore knee, a child, a pet are only a few reasons baths are a must in any home," says Frechette. "Freestanding tubs continue to be popular but, interestingly, drop-in tubs have made a strong comeback."

Hule notes that alcove tubs, like Duravit's Architec, are trending upward. "The integrated front apron and tile flange are great features that provide an ease of install into a niche space."

"Right now, we're seeing an increased interest in soaking baths," says Sprang. "They provide a deeper soak, and a couple of Kohler's soaking baths offer an immersive experience with overflow to create a calming atmosphere."



ThermaSol's luxury indoor and outdoor sauna selection includes products with a full range of features standard. The saunas are available in outdoor barrel, outdoor canopy and indoor, all hand-crafted from Clear Western Red Cedar. Luxury detailing includes mood lighting and WiFi accessibility. thermasol.com



The **Libra Stella** from **BainUltra** is the roomiest of the company's **Libra** collection of tubs, and is outfitted with symmetrical heated backrests for two people. The sleek and opulent design sports curved edges for an elegant look. It is offered with ThermoMasseur, Illuzio chromatherapy and Aromaflow. bainultra.com



Artisan-made freestanding copper bathtubs from **Premier Copper Products** are available in a variety of shapes and styles. The tubs are hand hammered of copper, making each a one-of-a-kind piece with distinctive attention to detail. premiercopperproducts.com



Hydro Systems adds hydro therapies to freestanding bathtubs with two systems: **Hydro Fusion** enables longer soaks by keeping water heated at a constant temperature, while **Hydro Indulge** infuses bath water with millions of oxygen-rich bubbles. **Cold Plunge** and thermal air are also available. hydrosystem.com



The **Evalina** oval tub from **MTI Baths** combines clean lines with a flat rim. Part of the **Boutique Collection**, the handcrafted **Evalina** is offered as a soaker or air bath and made of the company's **SculptureStone** material. It is available in white or biscuit with six different exterior color options. mtibaths.com



The **BMD 01**, an elegant tub that is part of **Wetstyle's** **Mood Collection**, is fashioned from the company's **WETMAR BiO**, an eco-friendly thermos-insulating material composed of soy and mineral stone. Designed by Pierre Belanger and **Wetstyle Design Lab**, the tub has dual inclined backs. wetstyle.com



Hastings Bath Collection's **Poli** tub showcases an oblong shape and features optional legs and an array of accessories to enhance the bathing experience, notes the company. The tub is available in 12 contemporary colors. hastingsbathcollection.com



The **Element Glacier Chill Plunge** tub allows the user to immerse in icy-cold water set at 3°F (37°F). **Valley Bath & Kitchen's** **Plunge** tub seamlessly transitions to a hot water bath, reaching up to 104°F. The tub can be installed both indoors and outdoors. valleyacrylic.com

Rounded shapes are popular, and size preferences vary, with many manufacturers seeing tubs from 58" to 66" in highest demand.

Camastro says the 60"x30" tub is still a leader, but adds that smaller freestanding tubs are being used in remodeled bathrooms with limited space. Round organic shapes for freestanding tubs are trending, he adds.

"Tubs have been oversized over the last few years, but I'm seeing a shift toward a more sustainably minded tub that requires less water to be filled, less power to heat that water, and a quicker fill time," observes Thompson de Jordan. "I wouldn't call this trend a petite tub, but a personal tub – exactly what one person needs to be comfortable, no more and no less."

Frechette adds, "The sweet spot for sizing continues to be the 66" bath. It accommodates a smaller bather solo bathing or two bathers when the time is right."

She continues, "Ovals are still queen. Sleek ovals in all sizes and installation types are great looking and comfortable."

ENHANCING ACCESS

Universal design and accessibility issues are increasingly important to design, allowing all who live in the home to fully utilize each space. At the same time, trends like freestanding tubs can make accessibility tricky.

"Accessibility is really on the rise and will only become more important," believes Thompson de Jordan. Two major factors drive this shift, she adds:

increased popularity of ADUs and vacation rental properties and the aging U.S. demographic. "New U.S. Census projections estimate that, soon, 1 in 5 Americans will be senior citizens, which means the interest and need in beautiful and accessible home bath products will be more important and more in demand than ever," she says.

Hule remarks that there is always demand for ADA products when it comes to the bathtub. "As we have a large aging population, [there is] the need to have mobility-friendly products," he says.

Frechette agrees. "ADA features are in demand. Whether that is an 18" depth, a step, a substantial deck on a freestanding tub that can ease sitting or a strategic grab bar, baths can be adapted to the consumers' needs."

"Freestanding soaking tubs, unfortunately, being large and tall, are not the most accessible. Usually, they are added in addition to a walk-in shower that is more accessible," says Edenfield. "We are always looking for ways to make our tubs user friendly for all consumers. There are some innovative designs in the market that convert bathtubs into walk-in tubs. Unfortunately, it's not possible to do it with freestanding tubs or solid surface tubs yet."

"There should be more design-driven accessible products in the market and it is something we are working on," reports Gifford. "Many of our bathroom sinks and vanities can now be made meeting ADA standards but with design as the focus." ■