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3/18

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BATH REMODELING REPORT • 46

SPA-STYLE BATH TRENDS

BUYING GROUPS • 58

Strength in
Numbers

KBIS 2018 • 72

Post-Show
Product Review



Spa-Style Bath Trends

Spa-style master bathrooms continue to dominate design, providing a place where consumers can alleviate the stresses associated with today's busy lifestyle.

BY KIM BERNDTSON

Master bathrooms can be traditional or contemporary in style, spacious or petite in size and everything in between. But a common denominator of many is that they feel like a luxurious spa.

In fact, for many designers, including Trudy Voigt, descriptions like 'oasis,' 'retreat' and 'escape' are often the first words they hear when clients discuss the environment they want for their master bathrooms.

"We don't really do any master bath projects that aren't relaxing or spa-like," says the kitchen/bath designer at Tribute Kitchen & Bath, in Plano, TX. "Whether it's a busy mother

with three kids, a professional entrepreneur or anyone in between, everyone wants to be able to close the door and take a deep breath."

"Given today's fast-paced world, where work and home life demands can be overwhelming, our clients continue to desire a personal, private space where they can relax and find respite," agrees Emily Castle, ASID, Castle Design, in Clayton, MO. "For that reason, spa-style baths are as popular as ever."

"People want more specialized bathrooms," adds Kathy Lyle, principal designer, Interior Trends Remodel & Design. She and Kathy Nieto, principal builder, own the Tucson,

Emily Castle planned this bath to be a calm, Zen-like oasis for the homeowners. Clean lines and contemporary fixtures combine with warm custom cabinetry, while spa-style elements include a heated towel rack, calming abstract artwork and artistic blue glass vessel sinks as well as the focal-point soaking tub that sits atop a raised platform.

Talli Allen-Roberts created a spa-like environment in this master bath with wave-like, hand-carved limestone tile behind the focal-point freestanding tub. She further enhanced the atmosphere by adding a shelf and a linear fireplace.

AZ-based design/build firm. “Whether they are waking up or winding down, they are seeking multiple spa-like elements in a calming, soothing environment where they can melt away stress in a place where time almost stands still.”

While everyone seems to want a spa-style bath, defining it can admittedly be a moving target. It can also be dependent on where someone lives. For example, spa-style baths designed by Davida Rodriguez, CKD, have ranged from baths with white/gray finishes and cool marble to those with warmer earth tones and pebbles. “It’s really a matter of personal taste,” says the designer at Davida’s Kitchen & Tiles, in Gaithersburg, MD.

Jim Meloy, CKD, Kitchen & Bath Concepts, in Roswell, GA, agrees. “Every client is different,” he says. “Some want the wood look, others paint. We see a lot of white and dark paints, but every job is different.”

For Nicole Raffensperger, interior designer, Design Tech Remodeling, in Mequon, WI, her midwestern clients are looking for spa-style design that is warm and inviting to help combat cold winters. “It’s really all about what someone considers to be spa-like,” she says. “What works for one person may not work for another.”

NEW FEATURES

Even with a relatively loose definition, designers have become well versed in the spa-style bath since it’s been at the forefront of design for a number of years. Given its longevity, designers are seeing some changes in how clients express that spa style.

“Over the years, the style is changing to feature a minimalist, sophisticated feel,” says Castle. “Clean lines, modern lighting and lux products are paired with natural finishes to create a calm and contemporary design.”

“Design style is always changing and we are continually innovating,” adds Lyle. “For example, in recent years we have been doing more all-inclusive wet rooms, combining numerous amenities such as a tub, shower, bench and steam features all within the same room. It lends itself to a true, five-star, spa-like environment.”

Angie Gardeck, owner/principal, New Perspective Design, in Algonquin, IL, is also seeing a trend toward wet rooms where tubs and showers share space behind glass. In one recent project, it proved to be the perfect solution by making better use of the space while allowing for both a freestanding tub and a large, walk-in shower.

“Without the wet room, we were extending the shower further into the room and placing the tub in front,” she says. “By integrating the tub with the shower, we didn’t need the same clearances as we would if each was on its own. It was a great way to create a big walk-in shower and open up the space.”

Gardeck indicates wet rooms can also maintain a warmer environment for clients who like to take baths since the tub is located in an enclosed area. “I think tubs will start to make a comeback, albeit in a different form,” she says, noting a preference for freestanding models. “We’ve put tubs into our last two projects. Previously, there had been a focus on making



Photo: David Dietrich



This master bath designed by Angie Gardeck in collaboration with Overstreet Builders showcases several trending features, including wet rooms and finishes with warmer tones. The vertical column of iridescent mosaic tile adds warmth against the cooler striated porcelain tile and mimics the verticality of the cabinet towers on the opposite side of the room.



Photos: Bob Nirod



✎ The cool, crisp tones of this master bath, designed by Davida Rodriguez, are popular with many of the designer's clients, as is the more open floor plan, where closets are often incorporated into the master bathroom.

she says, adding that she likes to incorporate a ledge, shelf or table for candles or a glass of wine to create an inviting, luxurious experience. "Air baths are popular, too, because the holes are small and those tubs are much easier to keep clean compared to old styles with huge jets that would tend to clog."

Castle agrees, noting deep soaking air tubs with gentle massaging bubbles are popular, as are steam showers. "It's important to incorporate fixtures that help homeowners relax and feel rejuvenated," she says. "High-end fixtures, and technology, can make a homeowner's bath feel like a spa at a destination five-star hotel. It's really all about finding personalized therapeutic ways to relax in your own home."

For Lyle, there are advantages to undermounted tubs. "Undermounted tubs, and sinks, with solid surfaces provide minimal maintenance and multi-function," she maintains. "They allow a solid surface top to serve as a bench, with easy access to sit and turn for accessibility, and safety when wet."

Conversely, clients of Meloy and Voigt often opt for large showers in lieu of a tub of any style.

"One of the main requests today is for an expansive shower," says Voigt. "Most times that involves removing an old garden-style tub."

"We just aren't seeing tubs much anymore," adds Meloy. "Clients often replace it with a bench that offers a place to sit and dress, as well as [a place] for storage."

Rodriguez sees master bathrooms becoming part of an open floor plan where they are combined with dressing rooms,

the shower as large as possible. But I think there's a bit of correction going on now as far as scale. We are starting to see smaller showers that are more balanced, putting a focus back on the tub."

The tub-versus-shower debate continues to be a common discussion point. Raffensperger still sees tubs being removed in favor of walk-in showers. But when space can accommodate both, her clients trend more toward a freestanding version. "People like the look of a freestanding tub," she says. "It's more contemporary and feels more spa-like."

Talli Allen-Roberts, ASID, principal/interior designer, Allard + Roberts Interior Design, in Asheville, NC, echoes the preference for freestanding models. "We have been specifying a lot of freestanding bathtubs with floor-mounted tub fillers,"

closet areas and toilet rooms, similar to the open floor plan seen in today's kitchens and family rooms. "It's more of one space as opposed to individual rooms with doors," she says, noting the resultant enhanced flow and limited use of built-ins in favor of freestanding tubs and floating vanities.

Lyle also sees closets more frequently integrated into the bathroom. "Traditionally, closets are located outside of the bath," she says. "We try to provide closet access into the overall design so there is not a need to leave the master bathroom to access clothing or linens."

The addition of more technology is trending as well. Gardeck recently included a smart shower system where clients can control shower features from a smartphone or the control panel on the wall.

"Basically, if they are lying in bed, they can get their shower going," she says, noting that the project included a TV as well.

Meloy is also seeing the inclusion of more televisions. "The bathroom is where people start their day," he notes. "They want to be informed, and they want to be comfortable in a space with a great shower and great flow, storage and lighting combined with music to pamper themselves."

Raffensperger also often adds televisions as well as built-in sound systems and electronic docking stations in drawers.

ADDING WARMTH

A monochromatic color scheme is still overwhelmingly popular in spa-style master baths, notes Voigt, who indicates that gray and sea salt hues combined with natural stone, especially marble, are still the norm for her clients.

However, she is beginning to see a shift toward warmer finishes and more organic elements. "It's a bit of 'back to nature' with a lot of greenery and wood elements that make it feel more natural and serene. I think the style is evolving to encompass more natural elements than it did maybe five years



Photos: Mike Kaskel Photography

■ This condo bathroom features light, contemporary finishes. Nicole Raffensperger also included a floating vanity for a spa-like feel. In the shower, she added body tiles, a hand-held showerhead and ceiling tiles.

■ Earth tones showcased in the wall, floor and shower tile as well as the cabinetry add warmth to this spa-style bath. Nicole Raffensperger contrasted them with a white freestanding tub accented with a fireplace and floor-mounted tub filler.



➤ Wet rooms, with numerous amenities such as tubs, showers and benches, are becoming a more frequent request of Kathy Lyle's clients, who want to create a five-star, spa-like environment.



Photos: Robin Standliff

ago,” she says, noting a greater use of live plants as well as wood benches and shelves.

Gardeck, too, is noticing more warmth making its way into the space, as is Meloy. “When you think of ‘spa,’ you typically think lighter tones, but it doesn’t necessarily have to be,” he says.

“A focus with a lot of projects recently has been to balance warm and cool finishes so as clients move forward over time, they can make updates without fully renovating,” adds Gardeck, as illustrated in one recent project that utilized warm, iridescent mosaic accent tile mixed with cooler porcelain in the shower and wood-look porcelain on the floor. “We

don’t want to get too much in the blue-gray trend because I think it will feel dated, especially here in the Midwest. Because of our weather, people will tire of those cooler undertones more quickly than in other areas of the country. As we approach projects, we try to choose finishes that will bridge into the next trend cycle.”

As such, she’s seeing more requests for gold-tone fixtures, particularly in lighting, but also in plumbing. “It isn’t the 1990s polished brass,” she clarifies. “It’s much more sophisticated...almost between bronze and gold. It’s very beautiful.”

Lyle is seeing an organic, earth-like feel make its way into the bath as well. “We like to include pebble floors, natural stones and travertine, while minimizing grout and including texture to the flooring to help prevent slipping and allow for easy care, combining both function and aesthetics,” she says.

In addition to warmer, more organic elements, Rodriguez is adding more texture, as highlighted in a project with a textured black vanity and rough-hewn, barn-style entry door. “These elements provide a contrast to the really smooth marble and porcelain for a crisp look with high contrast,” she states.

CONSTANTS REMAIN

While there are new features making their way into spa-style master baths, some constants remain, most notably a continued emphasis on the shower. In particular, multiple showerheads are a top request, with handhelds being especially popular. Interest in rainhead showerheads is high, as are toiletry niches, barrier-free access and grab bars.

Although some designers have seen a waning of traditional body sprays, flush-mounted body spray tiles are popular for some.

“They have more of a contemporary look,” comments Raffensperger, who notes flush-mounted ceiling showerheads are popular for the same reason.

Lyle notes the importance of flexibility with shower accessories. “A key element to include while designing a spa-style bath is convenience and adjustable features while maintaining the function of the bathroom,” she says. “Adjustable showers,



■ Lighting plays a key role in spa-style master baths for Kathy Lyle's clients. LED lighting on dimmers in the shower and vanity areas is essential. The designer also likes to utilize clerestory windows for privacy to provide natural light and views of the outdoors.



↑ ➤
Showers, often with multiple showerheads, are a focal point for many of Jim Meloy’s clients who want their master baths to be more of a retreat, rather than just a place for hygiene.



Photos: Chip Hatter



Photo: David Dietrich

■ The master bath addition designed by Talli Allen-Roberts was an exercise in using texture to create visual interest within a subdued, neutral color palette. The hexagonal tiles, stained oak cabinetry and painted shiplap play well against one another to create interest without over stimulating the eye.

body sprays, hand-held showerheads and rain shower fixtures can be customized to suit the needs of the client.”

There is also a greater emphasis on lighting. “We use almost exclusively LED lights,” says Meloy, noting the importance of soft, warm lighting and the increased availability of a variety of Kelvin ratings.

For Lyle, light plays a key role as well. “LED lighting on dimmers in the shower, and over the tub and vanity areas, are essentials to include,” she says. “When possible, we like to utilize skylights and clerestory windows above eye level for privacy to provide natural light and views of the outdoors.”

Voigt often enhances lighting’s usefulness, especially at night, by adding motion detection. “We have cabinets underlit with lights on a motion detector,” she says. “When people walk into the bathroom in the middle of the night, the lights softly turn on.”

A focus on storage remains popular, too, according to Gardeck and Rodriguez, who add that they see continued demand for specialized storage, including hampers and pullouts for hair products such as dryers, flat irons, etc.

FLEXIBLE PRICE POINTS

While spa styling may often be thought of as only high-end, designers stress that it can be achieved at all price points, and in all sizes of bathrooms.

“There is a vast range of options available to fit any budget,” says Lyle. “You can very easily find medium-range fixtures and finishes that deliver the style and function of a designer spa-style bath.”

“Incorporating natural materials like wood and stone is an absolute must for a spa,” adds Castle. “However, marble or travertine can get expensive in a large space. I often recommend a high-quality porcelain stone-look tile for homeowners on a tight budget. Today’s porcelain technology is impressive, and in many applications, it’s hard to tell the difference between porcelain and natural stone.”



Photos: Shoot 2 Sell Photography Dallas

Trudy Voigt completely reconfigured this master bathroom to accommodate a large shower sheathed in natural stone. A barrel ceiling leads the eye toward the freestanding tub. Other amenities include motion detection lighting, custom cabinetry and heated floors.

Trudy Voigt's clients often want large, luxurious showers for their spa-style retreats. In this bathroom, the designer utilized space from an adjacent master closet to accommodate the request.



Voigt agrees. "There are so many product options available that can create the spa look for less," she says. "For example, when talking about marble, there are plenty of gorgeous porcelain look-alike options available. The same goes for tubs, plumbing fixtures and mirrors where there is a wide price range of available products."

Footprint size needn't limit the spa-style feel either, designers indicate, including Allen-Roberts and Meloy who say many customers include thermostatic shower controls.

Raffensperger notes the use of two-in-one showerheads as being a cost-effective solution to achieving a spa-style feel. "With these showerheads, you don't need a separate water line or valve," she says, "yet you get the benefit of a dual-purpose showerhead."

Allen-Roberts cites her personal bath as an example of a spa-style bath created on a more petite budget. "I wasn't able to completely replace the existing vanity, so we painted it in a gray tone and replaced the sink, faucet, countertop, cabinet hardware and floors instead, and repainted the walls. The new white quartz top, chrome fixtures and gray and white marble hexagon floors contrast well against the white plumbing and soft gray-blue walls. Using a muted, soothing color palette is an excellent start in a budget-friendly bathroom renovation or design.

"Our busy world and hectic lives don't always prioritize self-care," she continues. "But I see a shift these days in people understanding their own need to recharge. Being treated to a special experience in your own home is a luxury for sure, but there are simple things that can make even the simplest bathrooms feel special."

Regardless of how it is achieved, the desire for a spa-style bath is rooted in our lifestyles, designers agree.

"People are taking less time for themselves so they want to find new ways to pamper themselves, without having the expense of going to a spa," states Raffensperger.

Voigt agrees: "I think the driving force behind spa-style design is to counteract today's very busy, and many times chaotic, lifestyles,"

"We live in a busy world and our attention is constantly divided between work and home obligations and deadlines," adds Allen-Roberts, noting additional influences of constant availability to media outlets and communication devices. "I think people need a place in their home to rest and rejuvenate. Enjoying a spa-like experience at home may be more necessary now than ever before. Everyone needs a way to recharge, and a spa-like master bath can be the perfect antidote to a stress-filled day." ■