SPOTLIGHT: A NEW URBAN MODEL IN ROPPONGI HILLS, TOKYO

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THE BATHROOM: Welcome to Planet Relax

It's a Spa, Spa, Spa, Spa World

In pursuit of relaxation, we head to the baths. By Liz Mazurski

THERE ISN'T AN EXECUTIVE alive today who has not been forewarned of the negative effects of stress on health. Personal trainers, yoga and meditation sessions are part of the contemporary working vernacular. Regular visits to the spa are at an all-time high, especially for men. A new survey conducted by the International Spa Association (ISPA) reports that men constitute 29 percent of all spa-goers—up 4 percent from last year. But not everyone wants to leave the comforts of home just to de-stress. The master bathroom still reigns supreme as the hands-down destination for the great unwind.

Ray Booth's Fonderie bathroom suite at the Kohler Design Center, using Iron Works Historic pieces, is a modern update of vintage Victoriana.

It's a Spa World

"A weekly regimen of spa treatments reduces stress levels while improving health and longevity," observes New York architect Robert Henry. "And people are finally realizing that these attributes also make for better business." As the designer of such serene spas as Ajune in Manhattan and the Spa at Amelia Island Plantation, Fla., Henry is frequently hired to create spalike bathrooms for residential clients. One project on the boards for a Long Island Sound weekend residence is a freestanding pavilion with specific spaces designated for elliptical and weight training, massage, sauna, steam, a cold plunge pool and hydrotherapy. The centerpiece of this zone is a deluge shower defined by its 2-inch column of water that falls from 14 feet to pummel tense shoulders, the neck and lower back muscles.

Showers are at the vanguard of this new age of bathrooms, a testament to the American ideal of practical (and daily) indulgence. The best are customized creations likely to include combinations of body jets, body sprays, handheld showerheads and, as a gesture to the spa mind-set of bringing the outdoors in, waterfalls. The new thermostatic Total Escape custom shower from Delta Select is a mix of showerheads, spouts, body sprays and jets, with volume controls that independently adjust each outlet.

Standing in the hallways of Tru, a day spa in San Francisco, a stretch of curvy walls leads the eye to treatment rooms that glow in mesmerizing shades of red, blue, green and orange. Hidden beyond these modern surfaces, designer Chris Kofitsas, a cofounder of New World Design Builders in New Jersey, pulled his favorite trump

Opposite: Chris Kofitsas created the first blue glass tile room with an aromatherapy tub at the DePasquale Spa in New Jersey five years ago.
Above: If you have to take a shower in Napa, why not look at rows of vines. The estate is for sale through Pat Taylor (707.947.6323).

JOHN ALVES/MYSTIC WANDERER IMAGES

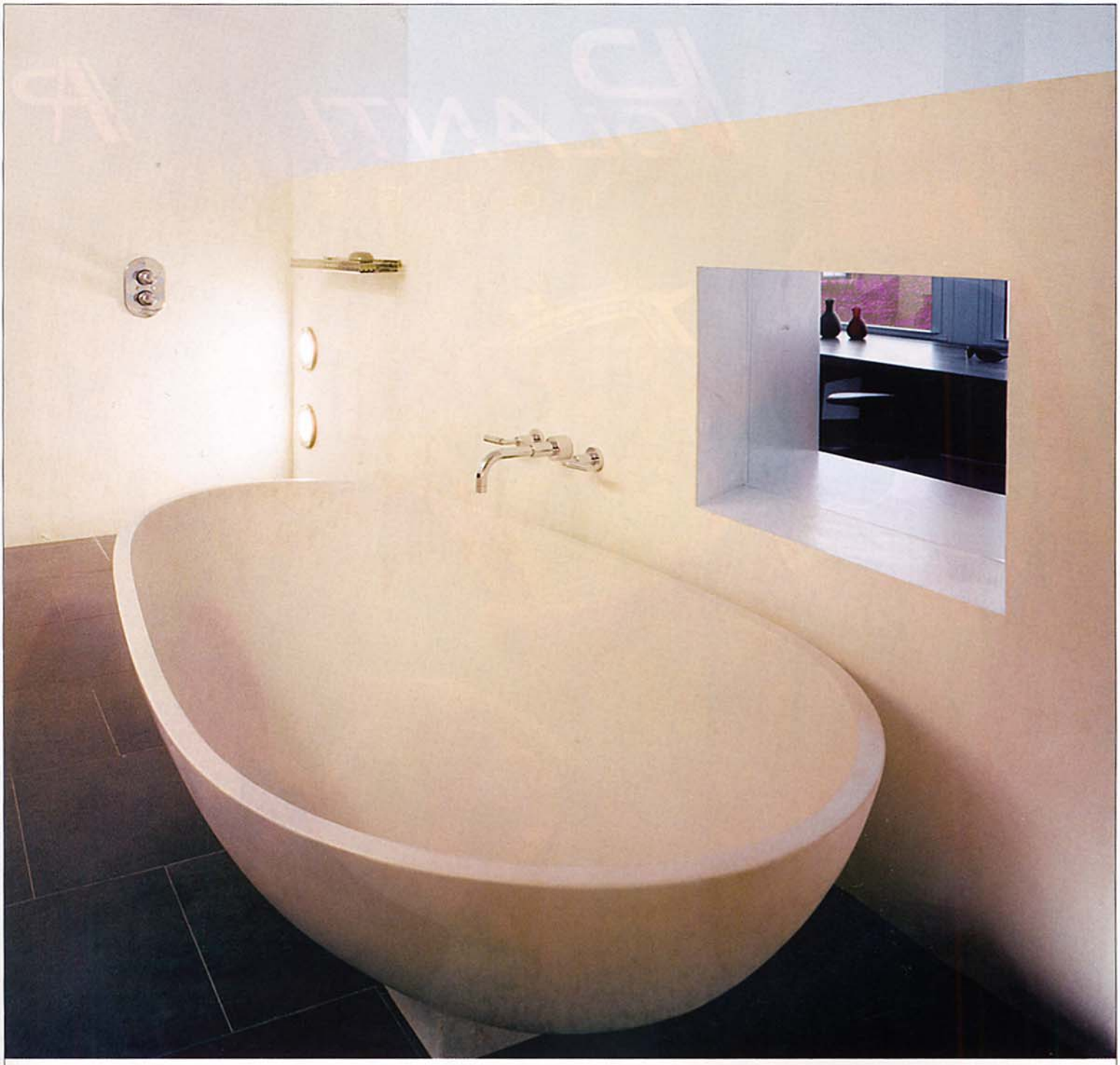
It's a Spa World

card—falling water, and lots of it. Its primal effects are most profound in Tru's Rainforest Room, a private treatment space outfitted with its own waterfall for showering off body wraps and various skincare infusions. For the Manhattan penthouse of a male business executive, Kofitsas applied the same mind-set to an oversize shower. Numerous showerheads were set into the ceiling so that the entire shower "rains." He also leveraged the mechanics aesthetically by exposing the stainless steel pipes that route the hot water, using them to heat towels and robes in the process. To warm the visual and underfoot cool of the marble-clad space, electronic mats laid under the floor provide a mild, muscle-relaxing temperature.

While many of the fixtures used in the new state-of-the-art spa bathroom are custom creations, Kofitsas and other architects readily cite a number of innovative manufacturers that are combining modern design with therapeutic benefits and filling their product catalogs with the lexicon of spa culture. Ideas such as illumination therapy (the use of color and light to alter your mood), aromatherapy (ditto, but using botanical essential oils), reflexology (pressure point massage of the feet) and hydromassage (the stimulation of skin and muscle with water jets, usually in a prescribed sequence) are casually peppered in among technical details. Kohler straightforwardly embraces the genre with its HomeSpa collections, where the infinity-edge Sok tub comes with a choice of color therapy lighting options. (The savviest consumers check into luxury hotels where they can try out these products firsthand. The Kahala Mandarin Oriental in Hawaii, for example, has the Sok tubs installed in its deluxe spa suites.)

Calm is a spa state of mind and a trend that dovetails smoothly with contemporary interiors. From aromatherapy and water massage to serene East meets West

Above: The Purist HomeSpa whirlpool by Kohler. The company offers an upgrade package for its tubs to provide different degrees of hydromassage. Opposite: Architect Peter Guzy used Agape's Spoon tub as the centerpiece in a minimalist bath he created for a New York loft.



AMY BARKOW

aesthetics, the parallel objectives of therapeutic relaxation and personal luxury are coming together as bathrooms gain square footage and modern design takes over. "The beauty and sensuality of materials that people touch are more appealing in the bathroom," says Peter Guzy, a principal of Asfour Guzy Architects in New York. "People appreciate them more." He could easily be referring to his own firm's design for a downtown loft bathroom, a generous space with dark floors, custom sinks and cabinetry made of Corian and teak, where an elegant Spoon bathtub by Agape, with its smooth lines and shape that resembles a water-carved stone trough, takes center stage. The installation sits serenely in a frame of luminous plaster and transparent white glass. "The room is spare, which makes it relaxing," says Guzy.

Minimalist designs by Italian resources such as Boffi, Agape (its wave-shaped wood bathtubs reference Japanese bathing rituals) and Kos exemplify this sentiment as they ease the divide between those who desire a luxurious environment and those who crave instant relaxation. After all, the art of unwinding should not be a stretch.

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