



SPA SPACE

Your bathroom *may look like a spa*, but with some of the market's new luxury plumbing treatments, *it could feel like one, too.*

By Sherry Thomas

SPA ENVY IS CONTAGIOUS, and it infects even the most practical among us. All it takes is one stay in a five-star hotel with a five-star bath, or a weekend at a luxury spa, to make us realize what we are missing in our daily bathing rituals.

For years now, we have attempted to remedy our at-home cleansing deficiencies with clever décor and "spa-mbiance." The thinking was, if the old bathroom looks more like a spa, it might feel more like a spa. So we (or our designers) stacked fluffy Egyptian-cotton towels in baskets, stocked cotton balls in apothecary jars, bought the fanciest bath brushes on the market and lathered on every high-end sugar scrub/aromatherapy/exfoliation/relaxation product we could find.

We cut cucumbers and lemons into water. We lit candles. And we soaked. But no matter how hard we tried (sigh) it just wasn't the same.

Today, innovations in plumbing technology combined with the industry's desire to meet the increasingly sophisticated demand for residential spa luxury is changing all that. From tubs with built-in chromotherapy features to steam showers that automatically dispense an aromatherapy treatment, creating an at-home spa experience is now easier than ever.

"It seems that is the trend right now," says Michelle Henderson, showroom manager at Buffalo Grove-based Banner Plumbing Supply. "People are so stressed and so busy they're buying more products to enhance their bathrooms ... they're even taking more space out of the bedroom and putting it into their bathroom."

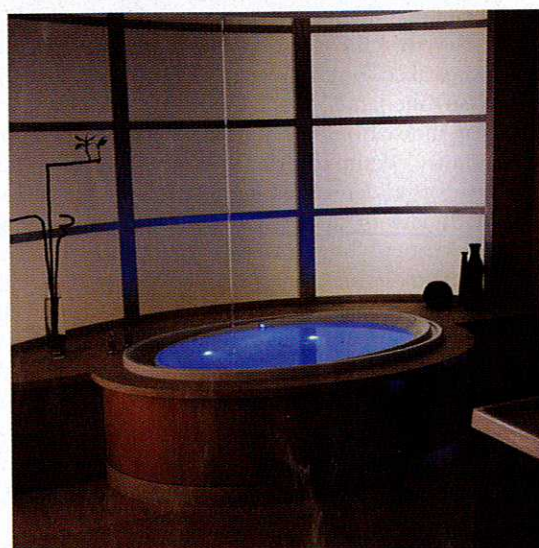
One of the hottest spa technologies to spill over into the residential bath market is chromotherapy, based on a holistic healing theory that uses color to enhance mood and physiological well-being.

Several of the Mr. Steam products offered at Banner Plumbing feature a chromotherapy light, and Henderson says colored lights have also recently become available to install in existing showers. But perhaps it was Kohler and its overflowing tub, sok, with optional chromotherapy, that first intro-





This luxurious master bath at IMAGINE Your Home by Orren Pickell features dark stained wenge floors and a custom fountain with granite surround. The water cascades over the wall to offer the tranquil sounds of a waterfall for a relaxing, spa-like retreat.



Kohler's decadently overflowing sok tub with chromatherapy is pictured at the top left; below it is another Kohler bathing vessel with similar spa features. To the upper right is a master bath designed by IMAGINE Your Home By Orren Pickell that marries modern plumbing technology with zen-like spa décor for the ultimate sanctuary.

duced the concept to the mainstream residential market. Barrington resident and North Shore-area homebuilder Susanne Tauke says when she saw the product at a Home Builders International Show a few years ago she knew she had to have it.

"It was brand-new on the market," says Tauke, who installed the tub as the "center-piece" of her new spa-bath makeover. "I thought it was terrific. It was just so different." While she can't vouch for the affect on her "moods," Tauke says the chromatherapy tub experience is relaxing and "kind of hypnotic."

Other spa-like features in Tauke's luxurious master bath retreat include a walk-in limestone rain shower with multiple heads and built-in thermostat, heated floors and a separate water closet with a sauna and bidet.

Cathy Schager, a showroom manager at IMAGINE Your Home by Orren Pickell, says

Kohler's new DTV shower (developed with expertise used at its famous Kohler Waters Spa) takes the home-spa experience even further. In addition to massage and chromatherapy preferences that can be customized and pre-programmed for up to six family members, the shower has an electronic panel mounted outside the unit that allows you to control everything from temperature to the volume on your speakers.

"You can program for six different people, so you can each have your own individualized spray pattern and temperature," Schager says. "So it's really a pretty cool thing."

Another at-home spa trend Schager is seeing at her showroom is more connected to layout and design. "We're seeing more people using vanities and tubs and showers in the center of the room, rather than against the wall, which allows you to utilize your space differently."

For example, Tauke's decision to install her sok tub away from the wall allowed her to "undermount" it and create a customized, spa-like sitting area. "What I did was pull it off from the wall and in a sense created a bench on three sides of it," she explains. "So if you want to cool off after you come out of the spa, you can lie on the limestone shelf, which is just a couple of inches below the tub and behind the tub."

Sounds absolutely heavenly, doesn't it? More fodder for our spa envy. But wait until you hear what's coming next.

At Banner Plumbing Supply, Henderson says she just got one of the latest and greatest new products into her showroom — a Roborn mirrored medicine cabinet with cold storage. "On the left, you have the traditional medicine cabinet. On the right is a mini refrigerator where you can keep bottled

water, chilled wine, if you want to relax in your bathroom."

And if light therapy isn't quite enough to elevate your spirits, all Mr. Steam showerheads now have a "well" for essential oils and an "automatic aromatherapy" option. "That is kind of nice," adds Henderson. "You don't have to worry about putting oils in. It works with the head of the steam head to put essential oils into your shower — lavender if you want to relax, or if you have a cold, eucalyptus."

Henderson, a 14-year veteran of the plumbing industry, says it's a very exciting time for the market — and the consumers.

"People are doing more things at home because they're out, out, out so much and going; they're making their bathrooms nicer and more user-friendly," she says. "It's just a fun time to be in plumbing because there are so many things you can do to enhance somebody's life."