

Bathroom BLISS

Go on, pamper yourself with your own luxury day-spa retreat at home

>> Words **Tony Fawcett**

Bathrooms are undergoing a revolution. Once purely a place to clean face and body, they're now fast becoming pamper palaces to cleanse the body and mind. For some, today's bathroom needs to be a personal day spa, a room to soothe away stresses, somewhere to be revived in soaker baths, caressed under multi-jet showerheads and seduced into a trance-like state by calming scents and music.

"It's a trend that started about three or four years ago, based on what they call 'wellness centres' in Europe," says award-winning bathroom designer Royston Wilson, of Royston Wilson Design.

"They're really big over there and are becoming popular here."

Owen Barnes, head designer of Bubbles Bathrooms, which won five bathroom awards in last year's HIA Awards, puts it down to more Australians travelling overseas and discovering just what soothing luxuries are available.

"It's about extending the space of the bathroom and making it a little bit more than a straight-facility room," Owen says.

So how do you achieve that day-spa feel? Try these suggestions.

perfect fittings

Think large Japanese-style soaker baths, spas, vast walk-in showers and steam rooms. Indeed, Owen Barnes predicts steam rooms in home bathrooms will be the next big thing.

"It's quite an easy procedure," he says.

"All it requires is a steam pump. A lot of the top hotels have them. You can close off the door of a shower and it becomes a steam room.

"All this involves is making the shower a little bit larger than normal and incorporating a bench so you can sit down and relax."

And a good bath is vital. According to Royston, baths are happening all over again: "A bath is somewhere you can go to soak away your troubles, close yourself off from the rest of the world, regain strength before moving on."

Becoming popular are deep Japanese ceremonial-type baths, some in traditional timber and others freestanding, and sometimes with soothing water jets. And a bath with a view is a definite relaxant.

Some overseas baths, spas and showers now even use lighting set-ups to change the colour of the water.

And Owen Barnes says some double showers today are almost as big as standard ensuites.

Importantly, seek out easy-care fittings such as suspended vanities and wall-mounted toilets with hidden cisterns. >>

Pure indulgence
Soak away any stresses with a bath in a luxurious tub

Elegant statement
Sleek lines and neutral tones create an elegant setting for a bath (above)

Lasting impression
Today's bathrooms are inspired by the wellness centres seen in Europe (left)



>> Bubbles Bathrooms

Rather than vanities, the move now is to "bathroom furniture", with freestanding pieces and storage that can be moved around at whim and co-ordinated to suit surroundings. Above-bench vessel sinks are still good options for that clean look.

On a more practical level, heated towel rails, built-in shower seats, under-floor heating and steam sensors that come on when steam reaches a certain level are becoming popular.

Bathroom sound systems are being used and (although some might not consider them relaxing) bathroom televisions, sometimes concealed behind mirrors, can be installed.

light touch

Plenty of natural light and airiness are paramount, and an outlook through glass to a serene garden area, or maybe a water feature such as a wall fountain, is desirable.

According to Royston, consideration should be given to replacing power-guzzling lighting systems and fluorescents with combinations of 10-watt or 11-watt lights using dimmers.

colour it soothing

Colour can play an important role, says Royston. No longer restricted to whites, these "escape" rooms can use inviting bone and sand tones, with greater use of cool-palette colours, such as blues and soft greens.

grand finishes

Minimalism is still the fashion, with stone, marble and large tiles right for the look. Easy-clean surfaces are vital, and mirrors are a good idea for suggesting spaciousness. Consider glass bricks for bringing in light.

set in comfort

Seek out pampering, sensual additions: slippers, robes, body scrubs, bath salts, plush towels, herbal teas and aromatherapy candles.

Owen is increasingly incorporating small wall alcoves for candles, aromatherapy gear and maybe somewhere to rest a glass of bubbly.

>> For more information on Royston Wilson Design, phone 9822 3173. For Bubbles Bathrooms, phone 9796 3000. ■



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