

Bringing the spa home: Bathroom trends incorporate cleanliness and relaxation

Sure, the bathroom for most is the place where you get business done, but for many, it's much more. The bathroom is an oasis; a place to relax after a long day and a place where four walls separate you from the outside world.

Home designers are taking notice and are working with more and more clients who want their bathrooms to be more than just a necessity.

"Clients are desiring master suites that are luxurious, peaceful and spa-like retreats that they can come home to after a long day at work," said Susan El-Naggar, principal of Healing Environments, an interior design firm with offices in Valparaiso and Chicago. "The bathroom is becoming a place to relax with a fireplace, soaking tub and possibly even a sauna."

Want to remodel your bathroom or add some excitement with a new color or accessory? Here's what local experts say is hot in bathroom design.

A splash of color

While some choose bolder colors for bathrooms, El-Naggar said clients she works with are requesting more calming shades.

"A variety of neutral colors and muted tones are being implemented into the design of bathrooms to create a peaceful, relaxing atmosphere," said El-Naggar, whose company was named as a Trends "Top 50 American Bathroom" for 2014.

Grays, whites and creams are all popular choices, Davidsen said, though hints of colors that are white-based but have just a tint of green or gold are being chosen more frequently as well.

"They keep the appearance light and clean while still offering the warmth of color," she said.

Cathi Lloyd, an interior designer with Decorating Den Interiors, said spa-like colors such as watery blues, greens and metallics are popular choices.

"Don't forget about wallpaper," she said. "It can give great personality to a small space."

Some also choose to make a bold statement with color choice, Davidsen said.

"We're seeing more and more designs with statement-making black walls or other bold accents," she said.

Common features turned spectacular

Energy saving toilets that use less water are becoming more popular as people are utilizing sustainable products and becoming more aware of the environment, El-Naggar said.

Janet Davidsen, president of the Illinois chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers, said in terms of toilets, people love comfort.

"Toilet designs that are trending are easy to clean and feature a soft-closed seat," she said.

Water efficiency is also important to many consumers making changes to their bathrooms.

"The shower heads are becoming enriched with multiple types of water pressure such as a soft rain, a cascading waterfall, or even one that feels like a massage all in one shower head," El-Naggar said.

Large rain-heads are popular among men, while women tend to prefer the body spray head, Davidsen said.

"Designs that are rounder, sleeker, simple and minimal in both toilets and showerheads offer a modern appeal and are appreciated by most," she said.

Freestanding tubs also have become a favorite and can serve as a focal point for the space, Davidsen said.

"When it comes to baths versus showers, however, we find people are still gravitating toward showers unless the bath carries an element of relaxation - aromatherapy, light therapy, jets, etc.," she said.

Accented to perfection

Glass tiles can make great accents in a bathroom, or be used as a focal point, covering the whole wall, El-Naggar said.

Natural stone can be perfect in a large walk-in shower, Lloyd said, and lighting can be used to design features to the space.

"Just like jewelry adds the finishing touch to an outfit, lighting can make a decorative statement in the bathroom," she said.

Bottom up/top down cellular shades and silhouette shades also allow privacy and light to shine into the room, while those looking to soften the room can add fabric treatments to the windows that match the shower curtains, Lloyd said.

While some clients prefer a few added touches here and there, El-Naggar said she has some who turn their bathrooms into an experience through the addition of extreme accents.

One owner's request was to design a master suite that felt like a 5-star retreat.

"The bathroom included an 8-foot long, three-sided fireplace imported from Israel, which was the focal point of the room," she said. "The shower was 10-feet tall with natural rocks on the walls and an incredible rainfall shower head."

Sustainability also was incorporated throughout the process and included products such as an infrared sauna, porcelain wood-look tiles and LED energy saving lights.

"The natural colors with accents of muted aqua set the tone for a very tranquil and spa-like space," El-Naggar said.