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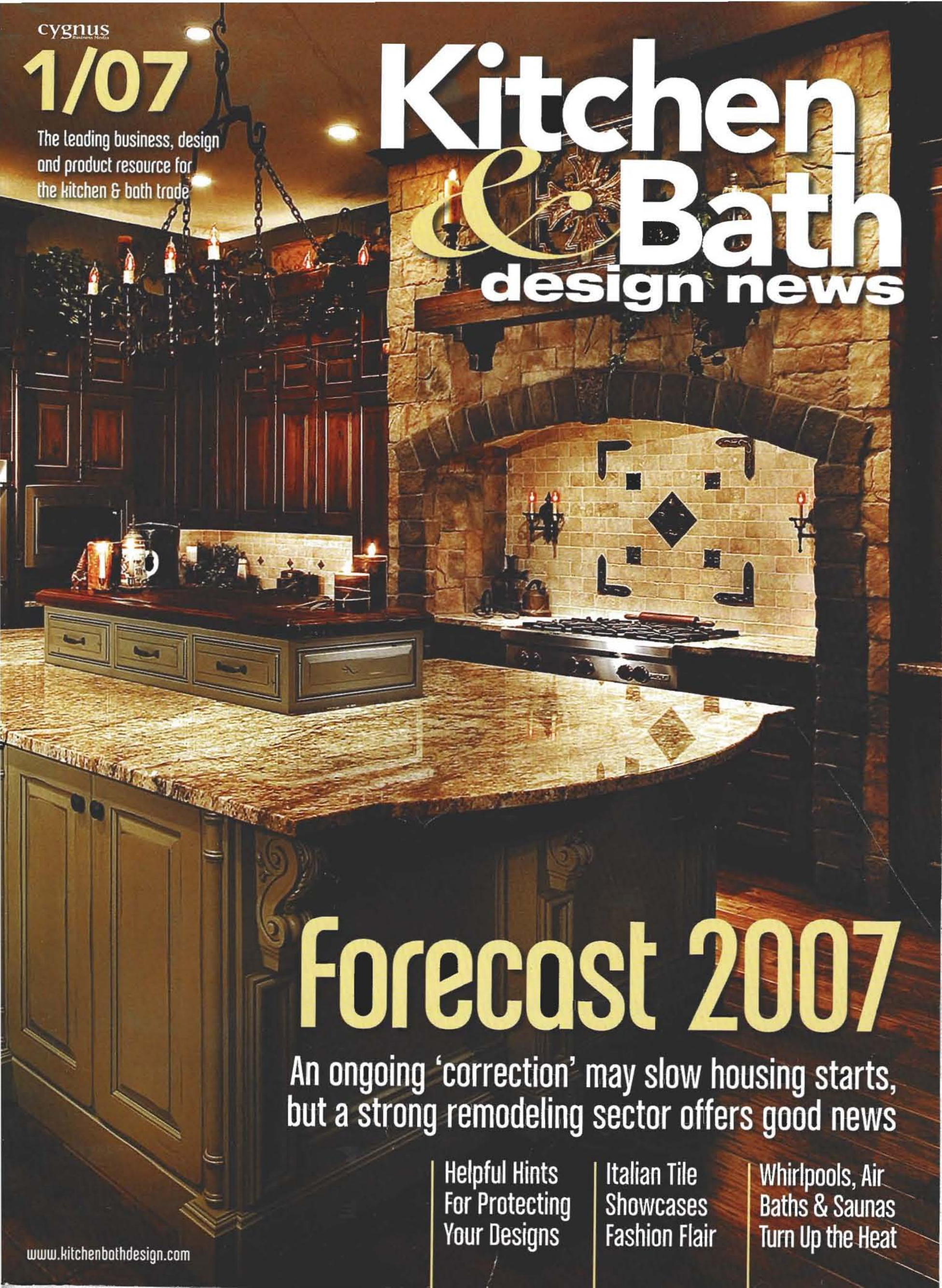
Kitchen & Bath design news



Forecast 2007

An ongoing 'correction' may slow housing starts, but a strong remodeling sector offers good news

Helpful Hints For Protecting Your Designs

Italian Tile Showcases Fashion Flair

Whirlpools, Air Baths & Saunas Turn Up the Heat

www.kitchenbathdesign.com

1 | The Caribe overflow tub from MTI Whirlpools features a minimalist design and measures 79"x47.5"x21.75" for two-person bathing. It is available as a soaking tub, whirlpool, air bath or whirlpool/air bath combination.
Circle No. 115 on Product Card

THE HEAT IS ON

Heat therapy products play an important role in home wellness routines, with an abundance of features creating a full-sensory experience.

By Elizabeth Richards

These days, a bath is not just a bath – it's a cascade of sensory input, from sight to sound, scent to touch. Chromatherapy, aromatherapy, soft lighting and the ability to integrate entertainment into the surroundings are current hot trends in the whirlpool market. Consumers want the benefits to mind, body and spirit offered by whirlpools, saunas and steam baths, but they are also interested in getting the most out of their time by incorporating these other elements to help them relax.

"People are working harder than ever, hence, are turning their homes into personal sanctuaries. Enter the cocooning phenomenon where homeowners consciously decide to spend more time at home. In order to do so, they are revisiting their lifestyles, their needs and recreating the comforts of a chic spa resort atmosphere in their own home," says Pat Henaire, corporate v.p./sales and marketing for MAAX Corp. in Montreal, Quebec. Henaire believes that a great whirlpool can be the cornerstone in creating that spa-like atmosphere.

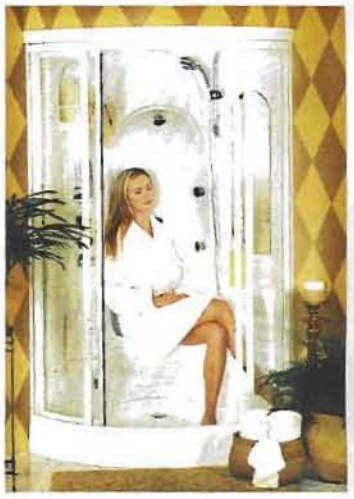
Increasingly, the most desired whirlpool and sauna features are those that offer a combination of sensory experiences and new technologies designed to create a total relaxation experience.

AIR OR WATER?

In a whirlpool or air jet tub, the biggest sensory input comes from jets working to create a massaging action. Depending on the type of massage desired – whether a deep tissue, focused massage or one that is gentle and rejuvenating – there are several choices in the type of jet system to use. They include channel air, injection air, water or a combination thereof.

Manufacturers cite an increase in popularity of air systems or combination whirlpool/air systems. "The biggest trend we see is a move toward air systems being offered

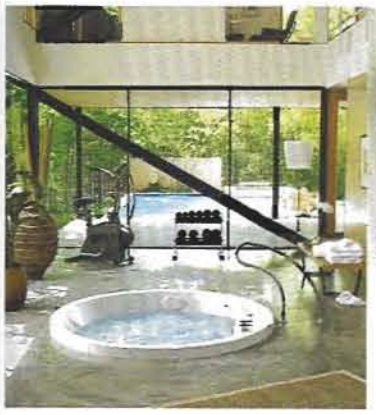
2 | SteamShower Generators from ThermaSol transform the traditional shower into a steam treatment. Thermostatically controlled, self-cleaning steam heads are housed with an integral Aroma Oil Well, which provides users the option of adding aromatherapy oils.
Circle No. 116 on Product Card



3 | Harmony from Aqualair is a shower/spa unit that has a range of options, including body sprays, hand shower with slide bar, ceiling showers, lights, luminotherapy, steam, aromatherapy, stereo and TV/DVD combo.
Circle No. 117 on Product Card

4 | Bain Ultra's Temazkal is now available in two models that feature luminotherapy, thermotherapy and aromatherapy.
Circle No. 118 on Product Card

5 | Mr.Steam offers the Allegro modular self-contained sauna collection, which includes three designs that feature wall lights, heater fences, benches and decorative trims.
Circle No. 119 on Product Card



6 | Jason International Inc.'s Home Spa Collection features a fill and drain Air-Whirlpool spa large enough to accommodate three or more people. The spa features ergonomic armrests, two jetted neck pillows and 25 jets, and has a 200-gallon operating capacity and dual-heating system.
Circle No. 120 on Product Card

7 | The Virginia Aquamasseur tub model from Acryline U.S.A. Inc. features a 1HP heating blower with muffler and 12 white air injectors/check valves. The white multi-function control includes a 20-minute timer, variable speeds, wave and pulse modes, auto dry cycle and on/off heat control.
Circle No. 121 on Product Card

8 | The Blueline series from Zuma is an infinity bathtub collection that is available as a soaking tub, whirlpool tub, airbath or combination system.
Circle No. 122 on Product Card

9 | Nature 24 from Oceania Baths is a rectangular, freestanding bathtub available in white or biscuit. Personalized embedded corners in chrome, brushed chrome, oil-rubbed bronze and gold finishes are featured.
Circle No. 123 on Product Card

by all system bath manufacturers, including the stalwart jetted water manufacturers," says Scott Tennant, COO of Acryline USA, Inc. in Cliffwood, NJ. "The market has shifted to air with a dizzying array of offerings," he continues.

"As the consumer becomes better informed on the advantages of both types of hydrotherapy, they are choosing the combination baths," agrees Jeff Cunningham, v.p./engineering at Jason International, Inc. in North Little Rock, AR.

"The dual functions allow the bather to customize the hydrotherapy experience," notes Shelly Roberts, senior marketing manager for Lasco Bathware in Anaheim, CA.

Michael Kornowa, director of marketing at MTI Whirlpools in Sugar Hill, GA concurs: "Depending on the type of day that they've had, the type of therapy that they need, or [the different] users in the household, [consumers] could enjoy a whirlpool or an air bath, or have them both going simultaneously."

Marianne Truchon, marketing director for Neptune in Saint Hyacinthe, Quebec, says "[When] both whirlpool and air systems are installed in the bathtub, you have the ultimate massage."

"Our higher-end whirlpools infuse warm air from the blower into the water jets. This air and water combination generates more force yet the air softens the effect so that the massage action doesn't feel like a fire hose on the skin surface," says Roberts.

Another benefit of the combination system is the ability to tailor the bathing experience to multiple users. Chet Millerd, executive v.p. of Home Living Solutions in Temecula, CA says, "There might be more than one person using the tub, and each one has his or her own requirements and needs for either system. Jetted is great for massage therapy but can also be very harsh on the elderly. Air systems are very therapeutic and relaxing and gentle on the skin, especially for people with skin ailments."

KEEPING IT CLEAN

Manufacturers say that sanitation issues also factor into the decision when choosing a spa. "The sheer amount of discretionary time available to people these days is so limited that anything that adds to the overwhelming pile of demands feels exhausting, and this feeling is contrary to the purpose of buying a system bath, which is to escape – however briefly – from everyday pressures and relax," says Tennant.

Cunningham says these issues are pushing responsible bath manufacturers to develop better draining baths with easier ways to clean and maintain the plumbing systems on all types of hydrotherapy baths. These technologies include inverted "V" drain jets, ozone sanitation, check valves and automatic purge cycles.

THE DEEPER THE BETTER

Today's tubs are getting larger, provided there is space in the bathroom, according to manufacturers. "In the high-end market, overall size and depth of the bath is continuing to increase as the size of the bathroom itself continues to increase,"

10 | American Standard's Evolution whirlpools allow users to choose the water flow – from a gentle swirl to a deep-tissue massage – and fill the tub with 30% more water for a deeper soak. A new jet design also allows for easier maintenance.
Circle No. 124 on Product Card

11 | The Panorama, the new modular room by Finlandia Sauna Products, Inc., is a seven-sided sauna made from clear western red cedar on the inside and out. An all-glass door and four clear sidelight windows are featured, along with an AV EverReady Sauna Heater. The sauna fits four to five people.
Circle No. 125 on Product Card

12 | Aquatic Industries, Inc. has added the Century 45, a 66"x42" whirlpool bath, to its Century line of whirlpool baths. Designed for undermount installation, the bath features an underwater chromatherapy lighting system, as well as eight hydrotherapy jets and two extra deep and wide contoured lounge seats.
Circle No. 126 on Product Card

13 | Baltic Leisure carries a full line of saunas for the home, including the company's Millennium and Simplicity lines, as well as pre-cut and pre-built models. Outdoor saunas are also available.
Circle No. 127 on Product Card

14 | Sundeck from Duravit features a 73"x34" acrylic spa tub set in rich wood for a striking yet clean-lined aesthetic.
Circle No. 128 on Product Card

15 | Tubs from Home Living Solutions are available in soaker, hydro massage, air massage or combination hydro and air massage. All models include the option of a right or left door, and feature non-slip floor, low 6" entrance, 18"-wide door opening, 17" seat height and stainless steel tub frame and grab bar.
Circle No. 129 on Product Card

16 | The Windward baths and whirlpools are part of the ProFlex collection from Kohler. Windward is available in two sizes and features a decked oval shape. A bathing depth of 21" and integral armrests are also part of the bath, which features six ProFlex jets.
Circle No. 130 on Product Card

17 | The Radius Series shower modules from Lasco Bathware can be ordered as a complete steam package, including a pre-plumbed steam generator.
Circle No. 131 on Product Card

notes Cunningham.

Whatever space limitations there are on length and width, deeper tubs are a must, say manufacturers. "Minimum depth for a luxury model is 22", still much deeper than a standard tub," says Roberts.

Henaire agrees: "To maximize the bather's experience, a deeper tub makes all the difference. Homeowners are often willing to sacrifice a bedroom or hall closet to increase the size of the bathroom, thus accommodating larger tubs."

In new construction, people are going with deeper, longer tubs, say manufacturers, but in renovations, space is often limited. "Usually you only have one space to put the bathtub, so it's from 32"x60" up to 34"x66". In that size, we gain immersion," says Truchon.

Tubs are also being made to accommodate special needs, such as those of the physically challenged, as well as aging Baby Boomers who want to age in place. One such product to cater specifically to this market is the Hammet bath, by Sanicor International. According to Bob Weygnad, managing director for Sanicor, the tub, which will be available early this year, has a unique, soft bed that "sits at the top of the lip of the tub, and the person can step or slide into it, and then be lowered into tub in a comfortable fashion." The soft bed is non-porous, addressing sanitary concerns, and allows everyone from quadriplegics to those who have trouble bending to easily access the tub. Because, as Weygnad points out, "It's not just about products being attractive [to look at]. They need to work in such a way as to make people's lives better."

INTEGRATED SENSORY EXPERIENCE

"The trend today is to have an 'experience' every time you use your bath," believes Cunningham. There are a multitude of features available to this end, including floating remotes, LED chromatherapy lights, in-line heaters and pulsing pillows, among others.

"Chromatherapy, coupled with the new heat therapy technology, offers consumers an indulgent escape unlike any other to rejuvenate their mind, body and soul," says Henaire. "Dispersed through the water, individual digitally controlled underwater LED lamps create a unique energy with proven ability to heighten or alter a mood."

Truchon says, "If you go back in history, colors have always been connected to the human body for sensations, the vibrations of the colors, so Neptune launched a chromatherapy system to make people relax."

Tennant sees custom lighting as the most sought after option in today's luxury whirlpools. "Here the consumer is looking for the ability to tailor the ambience of the bathing experience to his or her mood or to the mood sought," he says.

Strategically placed jets offer massage where it is most needed, on the back, neck, shoulders and feet. Manufacturers are also responding to a desire for consistently hot water with in-line heaters, which keep the water at a constant temperature for as long as the user desires.

Dealers and Designers See Demand for Smaller Air Baths, Massage Therapy

Designers are increasingly touting therapeutic tubs and steam showers as a great way to bring the health and wellness routine into the home. And, according to dealers recently interviewed by *Kitchen & Bath Design News*, many consumers are asking for tubs fitted with air jets over those with water jets, or both types of jets being included to maximize the bathing experience.

Bev Adams, CMKBD, president of Interior Intuitions, Inc. in Denver, CO, says that an overall trend in the bathroom is peace and tranquility, "a place to just let the energy plop down." The gentle massaging bubbles of an air bath, rather than the forceful, focused massage of water jets, help achieve that goal, she believes.

Sanitation issues also drive the trend toward air baths, according to Joe Sardy of the Birmingham, MI-based Birmingham Kitchens & Baths, who says, "Air baths are more in demand. They are not only quieter than water jetted tubs, they are more sanitary, due to no recycling water."

Heather Alton, president of New England Kitchen & Bath in Londonderry, NH says that "airpools" with chromatherapy have been her firm's best seller, but she also sees a demand for combination baths. "The benefit of the airpool is [that it is] more sanitary, but both means are therapeutic and relaxing," she says.

Despite manufacturers who see tubs getting larger, dealers interviewed believe the size of tubs is trending toward the smaller side, especially in remodels, where space is often at a premium. "Smaller spa tubs, approximately 32"W x 66"L, have been a popular choice for a lot of our clients," says Sardy. "It is a comfortable-sized tub that is both practical and economical."

"I think the days of the giant tubs are over," agrees Mary Lou Kalmus, ASID, Designing Edge Interior Design in Clarendon Hills, IL. "They take too long to fill up and require too much water. Comfortable, ergonomic, people-sized tubs for one or two will get used more."

Adams also believes that some consumers will sacrifice a whirlpool tub for a larger super shower due to the speed factor. "You have to wait for the tub to fill and then get in. With a shower, you get in and turn it on."

Kalmus has similar feelings about the shower craze. "Most people are more interested in the function of the shower than the bathtub. We live in a 'go, go, go' society with not a lot of time for pampering. But people like the idea of a luxury room, hence all the extras."

Adams feels that therapy tubs still have their place, and she points out, "If you need to chill out, you go soak in a tub."

18 | The Jacuzzi Sedona Steam Seat features a SteamPro generator built into the pre-assembled fiberglass box seat. It can be added to any shower and covered with tile to match the existing shower.
Circle No. 132 on Product Card

19 | The Seneca II whirlpool from Laurel Mountain Whirlpools is shown with the Hydrotherapy Back Massage, which has two jets working at one time. The unit can also be equipped with an air massage system, Mountain Fresh Ozonator, lumbar jet package, chromatherapy light package and more.
Circle No. 133 on Product Card

20 | Troy Adams has created this teak-framed, stainless steel soaking tub as part of the Julien Bathroom Suite by Troy Adams Design from Julien.
Circle No. 134 on Product Card

21 | MAAX Inc.'s Pearl tubs now feature Aerofeel, a range of massage and therapeutic systems. The Aerofeel system features tiny air openings that create a gentle rippling massage, and includes ThermaZone, a built-in heated backrest.
Circle No. 135 on Product Card

Focused heating systems within the bath shell are also on the rise. MAAX Pearl's ThermaZone heat therapy system provides constant warmth and vital heat therapy after a stressful day or workout, says Henaire. "Much like seat warmers found in today's luxury cars, we've added a built-in heating pad to provide warmth directly to the neck and shoulder area," he explains.

MTI has a patent pending on a product called Radiance, which applies radiant heat technology to the bath shell. "The primary purpose is to make the bath surface comfortable when you get in, but because you are keeping the bath shell warmer in itself, that keeps the bath water from getting as cold as quickly. Then you could add an in-line heater and stay in there all day if you chose to," says Kornowa.

Perhaps because of the hectic lives people lead, manufacturers are adding entertainment options to help create a place where they can truly relax, such as surround-sound systems in the bath shell itself, and even pop-up televisions.

COLOR AND DESIGN

When it comes to color, basic is best, according to manufacturers. "White is always a popular [color]. About 80% of production is in white," says Truchon. "People are coordinating the bathtubs with toilets and sinks."

Kornowa agrees, adding that soft earth tones are also popular. "As trends change, those who must have the latest trend go with aggressive colors. Those trends come and go, but white, bone, biscuit and almond prevail across the fads," he says.

Tennant adds, "We do see some movement toward sand hues and muted hues with the occasional striking black and red colors, but they are still exceptional and rare choices. We believe the color palette is changing, but more in the choice of flooring and countertops with accented paints and wallpapers. Large fixtures in obscure colors are pronounced in appearance in a bathroom and the muted colors and white blend easily with a palette enriched in the floor and walls."

The master bath is still the room in which spas are most often installed, manufacturers agree. Some see a growing demand for a hydrotherapy bath in the guest bath, especially in very high-end homes.

Do super showers take away from the whirlpool market? It really depends on who you ask.

"In the past, if people didn't like bathtubs, they were taking showers, but now people that really love showers have the chance to customize them," says Truchon. However, she doesn't see it as an either/or proposition, but rather the opportunity to put one of each in different places.

22 | Whirlpools in the Savannah line from Eljer, Inc. are offered in oval or standard shapes, and coordinate with the company's Savannah toilet. The whirlpools are available with six or eight jets, and can be customized to feature a spiral action flow. A specialized Soft Air Bubbler System, which consists of 16 air jets at the bottom of the tub, can also be included.
Circle No. 136 on Product Card

23 | The Saphyr tub by Neptune sports massaging hydrotherapy jets and a deep-immersion design. All three rectangular-shaped and the one freestanding model are available with ergonomically designed optional head and back rests.
Circle No. 137 on Product Card

24 | Diamond Spas, Inc. offers The Shenandoah, a furniture-inspired knotty hickory and copper soaking bath. The hickory has been distressed, and the copper bathing well has been left raw to patina naturally over time.
Circle No. 138 on Product Card

25 | Acrylic Walk-in Safety Tubs from Safety Tubs LLC feature a walk-in tub door, low entry, 17" chair-height seat, built-in handrail and slip-resistant tub floor. Whirlpool and tub options include: soaking tub, Hydro Massage Jet System, Air Bubble System and Dual Massage System.
Circle No. 139 on Product Card

26 | The Victoria & Albert 02 collection of tubs features air massage using gently warmed clean air for an airspa experience. Six tub styles, including the Marlborough O^2, are offered, and feature personalized therapy, near invisible air outlets, waterproof remote control and whisper quiet operation.
Circle No. 140 on Product Card

27 | With Amerec's K60 digital steam bath control, the user can adjust temperature and time duration settings for a personalized steambath experience. Dual controls mounted inside and outside the steam room provide convenient operation.
Circle No. 141 on Product Card

28 | This traditional Finnish Sauna from Finnleo Sauna and Steam features an integral water bowl/sink and spigot, as well as a Saunatonttu heater.
Circle No. 142 on Product Card

29 | Sanicor International has developed the Hammet Bed, a patented lift bed, patented soft bed and sanitation system. The unit features a whirlpool tub, lift bed and soft bed and is suited for the elderly, injured and disabled, among others.
Circle No. 143 on Product Card

Tennant, on the other hand, says, "Often when faced with a limited budget, we see a number of consumers opting for the large shower and cutting out a system bath. This is difficult for us as our business is system baths. Sadly, we do not have a large enough voice in the market to remind people that you don't stand up when you get a massage and need to relax the skeletal structure to enjoy the benefit of massage!"

BATHED IN HEAT

People don't need to be immersed in water to reap the benefits of heat therapy. Saunas – both infrared and traditional hot rocks – and steam baths provide appealing options that are both restful and therapeutic. "We think there's a lot of acceptance in the U.S. marketplace for these products and people understand that they really can become an integral part of their wellness program," says Keith Raisanen, president of Saunatec, Inc. in Cokato, MN.

Saunas have come a long way in recent years, with upgrades becoming the norm rather than the exception. "I hardly even think about what used to be a standard 5'x7' rectangular box with a light fixture on the wall. That's less and less common," says Raisanen. "Five years ago, an upgrade was probably adding a side light window. Nowadays we do some very deluxe, absolutely gorgeous furniture-quality interior upgrades." These upgrades include special sauna woods; lots of glass; an emphasis on special lighting systems, and an increasing interest in an in-sauna entertainment center featuring such amenities as a TV, DVD player, CD player or stereo. "The system is designed to tolerate the high heat of the sauna – allowing bathers to catch their favorite program or 'the big game' while they are enjoying a sauna," says Raisanen.

As far as performance goes, Raisanen remarks that the trend is clearly toward "digital controls" with 24-hour or seven-day programmability; specialty heaters that are always on, and sauna heater designs that maximize the amount of heated rocks to fulfill the bathers' desires for a "lower temperature, higher humidity" sauna environment. In the infrared market, a new carbon fiber heating technology is being well received, as it gives off an even, enveloping heat.

While traditional hot rocks saunas continue to lead the market, Mitch Altman, CEO of ThermaSol in Simi Valley, CA, says that interest in infrared technology climbs every year. Raisanen agrees, adding that the infrared sauna attracts a different segment of the market – typically younger, less affluent consumers, who may be more active and thus desire the different kind of therapy an infrared sauna offers.

Altman sees lighter woods used most often in sauna design, with spruce gaining in popularity. Raisanen says that, for traditional Finnish Saunas, it's a pretty even mix between Western Red Cedar, European Alder and Nordic Whitewoods. For infrared saunas, it's Canadian Hemlock.

On the steam side, Altman says that the trends pushing the market forward are fast-start technology, which gives users steam in seconds rather than five to eight minutes, and proportional heating – an exact temperature maintenance in the room.

Most steam baths are custom-installed and lined with ceramic tile, stone or glass, says Raisanen. An integral tiled bench is considered a must. And just as with spas, chromatherapy, aromatherapy, music and iPod integration systems are desired features in steam systems. "[People] want to be able to relax in the steam bath, and have those items that help them to relax at their fingertips," says Altman.

Of these heat bathing products, steam baths are the biggest seller, says Raisanen. "The number one reason there is more steam than saunas sold is because you don't need any additional floor space. It can be very easily and beautifully incorporated into a shower space in the bathroom, and that's where the bulk of them go."

"Since the average person spends the equivalent of four years of his or her life in the bathroom," says Henaire, "it's no surprise that [designers are] progressively transforming this room into an ultra-chic retreat, a union of comfort and relaxation and design and functionality." A jetted tub, sauna or steam bath installed in the bathroom only aids in that transformation. **KBDN**

30 | The Heirloom from Clarke Products Inc. comes with eight adjustable hydro jets and four mini massage jets or 65 channel-fed air jets. A model featuring a combination of jets is also available.
Circle No. 144 on Product Card

31 | Toto USA, Inc.'s Guinevere Airbath has 16 air jets that undergo a one-minute drying cycle 20 minutes after the bath is used.
Circle No. 145 on Product Card

32 | The Madison tub from Americh comes with the company's whirlpool system, which includes several air and water mix jets.
Circle No. 146 on Product Card

33 | The Starburst Sauna Interior from Helo Sauna and Steam is an interior upgrade for the firm's line of saunas that measure 5'x5' or larger.
Circle No. 147 on Product Card