

# HOME SPA...

## Just Add Water

By SUE-ELLA MUELLER

**T**he bathroom. You get in, you get out. It's not a room most of us want to spend a whole lot of time in. Well, that's about to change. With everything from air tubs to automated toilets, from hidden televisions to champagne spray showerheads, the bathroom is now being designed to be our greatest indulgence. In fact, be prepared in the near future to carve out at least two hours a day of good, quality bathroom time.

"The master bath is now developing into more of a spa type atmosphere," says David Hooge, manager of the Austin division of Morrison Supply Company. "It is packed with features. People are adding coffee bars, butler's pantries, attaching home gyms and laundry rooms. It is not just for bathing anymore. It has evolved into an elaborate dressing area."

The bathtub remains a focal point of the bathroom. However, homeowners now have more choices than ever. The air bath tub comes with more than a dozen individual air jets scattered across the bottom and near the outer edge of the tub. At a touch of a button, heated air shoots up from the holes creating a hydrotherapy experience like no other. This is not your mother's Jacuzzi tub, though. These air baths are designed to conserve water and are more hygienic than their predecessors.

"The air bath actually uses injected, heated air as opposed to running heated water through the pipes. In that regard, it is more hygienic," says Allen & Allen Company's Decorative Showroom Coordinator and Certified Bathroom Designer, Roland Franco. "What could happen eventually with a piping system is that if the water is allowed to stagnate, it can generate mold in the pipes. With the air bath, air comes through the valve, causing the water to agitate. Once the air flow stops, the one-way valve shuts down and water cannot get through. There's just not the potential there for mold growth."

In addition to the air bath, many tubs now feature "chromatherapy." Based on the belief that colors can enhance mood, bathtub designers are installing soothing lights that give



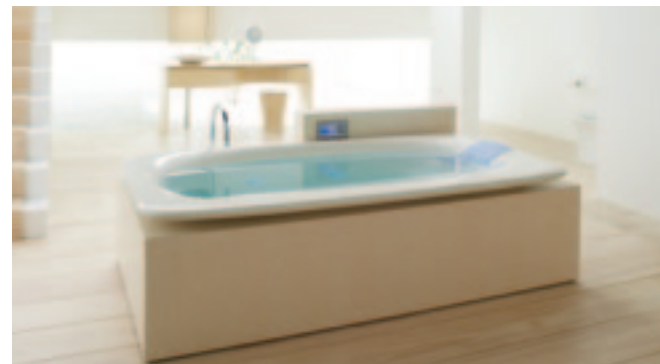
Photos courtesy of MORRISON SUPPLY COMPANY

the water a glow in the bather's choice of hues. As Franco puts it, "If changing colors in the dining room can enhance your appetite at meal time, why wouldn't changing the colors in the bathing process alter your mood as well?"

Music, too, has made its way into the bathing process. There is at least one tub manufacturer offering speakers on the outer walls of the tub so that music can be piped in and the vibrations can travel through the water.

As if all this isn't enough to consider when choosing your new tub, you will also have to decide if you want a freestanding or decked tub, oval-shaped, hourglass-shaped or something a bit more contemporarily-shaped. And, don't forget to take into consideration the material of your tub.

"Traditionally, tubs were made from plastic. Now, you can choose cast iron, enamel, concrete, marble, granite or other material," says Hooge. "The latest material is from a UK based company who is manufacturing a volcanic limestone tub. This tub retains the heat just like a cast iron one, but is just a fraction of the weight, making it easier for contractors to install."



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Bathtubs aren't the only thing in the bathroom being revamped. Think there's not a lot you can change about your toilet? Think again. One manufacturer, featured by Allen & Allen Company, has come out with the Mercedes-Benz of toilets.

"These toilets have a motion sensor that, upon approach to the toilet, enables the lid to lift automatically. Press the remote control button and the seat will lift too. Once you walk away, the toilet will automatically flush and close both the seat and the lid," says Franco.

Some have jokingly called this toilet a marriage saver, but looking at everything else this toilet can do, it may not be far from the truth. The toilets also feature a built-in air purifier, a motion sensor integrated night light, a heated seat, a sound experience module and a self-cleaning, retractable, temperature controlled, water cleansing spray nozzle (think bidet) and heated dryer.

"Not only does this toilet offer a comfortable experience, but it also is water conservation sensitive. It uses less water per gallon to flush than most toilets. And, if you think about it, if you don't have to use toilet paper, you are helping our environment there, too," says Franco. "With the automated lid system, this may seem like a fun gadget, but it is a matter of hygiene. If I don't have to touch a toilet seat or a handle, so much the better."

Franco says that wall-mounted toilets, which save about 9" of space and allow for more convenient cleaning under and around the base of the toilet, are also being sold with greater frequency.

"The tank is inside the wall and is pressure-tested to ensure a leak-free installation. There's also no tank seams or threaded supply connections beneath the water line," Franco says. "In the unlikely case that the fill or flush valve should develop a leak, water will drain into the toilet bowl and overflow into the waste connection, ensuring its owners' safety and peace of mind."

For those not ready to make the switch to the "marriage saver" or the wall hung toilet, homeowners can enjoy a few of these amenities without a major bathroom renovation. The Washlet seat, complete with the temperature controlled, self-cleaning, retractable washing wand and heated seat can be easily installed on almost any standard toilet.

Even with the remote control toilet, washing your hands in the bathroom is inevitable. Why not, "wash them in moonlight," as one manufacturer of the sink says. The latest in bathroom sinks are translucent bowls with soft, LED lighting. The white glow from beneath the sink gives you an almost ethereal hand washing experience. New sinks are also available with a touch sensor automation flow. A few even come with knobs that will reflect changing colors as the temperature increases or decreases; glowing blue for cold, red for hot and varying hues for in between temperatures.

The greatest change, though, for our environment as far as the bathroom is concerned, comes in the showerhead. While many love their multiple showerheads or, as Franco calls them, "car

wash" showers, they use a great deal of water. With the latest in showerhead engineering, consumers don't have to give up their car wash to help conserve water. A plumbing manufacturer in Germany, featured by Morrison Supply Company, has developed Eco Air technology. Eco Air showerheads inject air into the water patterns, allowing for the same vigorous sprays, but with 35% less water usage.

"Manufacturers realize that we still want our hard jet sprays, that phenomenal shower experience, but we also want to use less energy and water to get that," says Hooge.

While the Eco Air system is proprietary, other showerhead manufacturers are taking steps to conserve water, too. Among those efforts is the shower thermostat, ensuring that the water comes out almost instantaneously at the preset temperature. These thermostats can be fitted to almost any existing showerhead.

Now that you've showered, bathed and played with your new toilet, it's time to get down to the business of getting ready. Looking in the mirror is a daily ritual for most; to be sure, some of us spend a good deal of time in front of that glass. With Jenkins Custom Home Builders custom designed mirror with a hidden television, you can now compare your reflection side-by-side to that of Matt Lauer's or Meredith Vieira's.

"We use two-way glass to hide a flat panel television. The important thing with these types of TVs is to provide enough ventilation so that the TV doesn't overheat," says Shan Jenkins, owner of Jenkins Custom Home Builders. "Remote speakers work best and can be mounted in the wall or the ceiling."

Jenkins is also one of the few builders who is working with a new type of bathroom window glass. The glass is clear, until an electrical current, that runs undetected through the glass, is turned on. The glass then goes to an opaque, frosted appearance for privacy purposes.

"We recently put this glass in for a homeowner whose bathroom looks out over the hills," says Jenkins. "Now the homeowner can flip the current for the glass while they get undressed. Then, once they are afforded some modesty from the bathtub walls, they can let the glass go clear and enjoy their view while relaxing in the tub."

Everything about these new bathroom products screams relaxation. A bathroom like this would become your own private haven, a sanctuary from today's stressful living. ❖

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