

LIFE REFINED

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BATHING BEAUTY

The Endless Luxury of In-Home Spas
By John Bray

Being in a spa should be one of the most relaxing experiences of the day. Unfortunately, having to leave home and travel to the spa—from getting ready to driving, to being in someone else's space surrounded by other people—often ruins your chance at relaxation before it has even begun. In-home spas eliminate this extra stress by allowing you to be completely at ease in the most relaxed, private place possible: your home.

When at home, “spa” can mean whatever you want. Or, as Lynda Murray, principal designer and founder of Los Angeles-based Lynda Murray Interior Design, says, “It really is the sky's the limit.” A traditional spa treatment room can seamlessly be paired with a home gym, a swimming pool, a garden and myriad other options for relaxation and rejuvenation. A fabulous in-home spa might just give you one less reason to leave the house. And bringing the spa home is easier than it may seem.

UNLIMITED SPACE, UNLIMITED LUXURY

Murray, whose 18 years of business in Los Angeles and beyond have found her working with clients such as Michael Bay and James Cameron, understands the appeal of an in-home spa in an entirely different way than many people. In addition to relaxation and convenience, many of her clients value privacy, and in-home spas help them preserve that while still relishing in all of the spoils a spa has to offer. And to deliver the ultimate experience, Murray leaves no hot stone unturned. “You have to have your finger on the pulse of what is the latest and greatest,” she says of what clients expect. “They want you to come up with something that doesn't exist.”

Some current trends include chromotherapy and infrared lighting, which can help with relaxation, blood flow and wrinkles; biophilia, or the use of nature in and around the spa, which can support healing and concentration; and steam rooms—both wet and dry—that help to relieve sore muscles and joints while also

aiding in post-workout recovery. However, the overall design itself ultimately defines the experience.

For some, that experience may purely be relaxation in the way of massage tables, hair salons and hydrotherapy in a bath that envelops you in tiny air bubbles, an experience resembling effervescence more than traditional tub jets, like a next-generation hot tub. For others, these spaces extend into the world of fitness and therapy to strengthen, rejuvenate and relax both the mind and body. Wet or dry steam rooms are wonderful after a long day or after the gym, while igloo rooms add a unique, therapeutic final step. “You step into the igloo room for only 60 seconds and it drops snow on you,” says Murray. Like other forms of cryotherapy—the therapeutic use of contrasting temperatures—an igloo room can help increase circulation; Murray compares the overall experience to a wet plunge. In addition, medical treatment rooms (for things such as Botox) are becoming popular additions to a complete home spa. It's the ultimate way to stay discreet.

As designers are constantly challenged to come up with unique, never-before-seen features, the design challenge ultimately rests in differentiating these spaces from the norm. “New, innovative things are coming up,” says Murray of what she's actively pursuing for her clients. “Things like infrared lighting and the Waff.” If you've never heard of the Waff, you're not alone, but you should add it to your spa wish list because 10-20 minutes on one of these therapeutic body cushions can transform your entire day. By decreasing muscle tension, positively impacting cardiopulmonary rhythm and soothing nervous tension, Murray notes, the Waff might just be the next big thing for luxury home spas and the perfect way to unwind.

When the experience is more important than the budget, anything is possible. Oftentimes if a client has seen something in a luxury spa it can be replicated at home. Similarly, if a client dreams up something unique, a talented designer working with some of the



Photo by Jim Bartsch

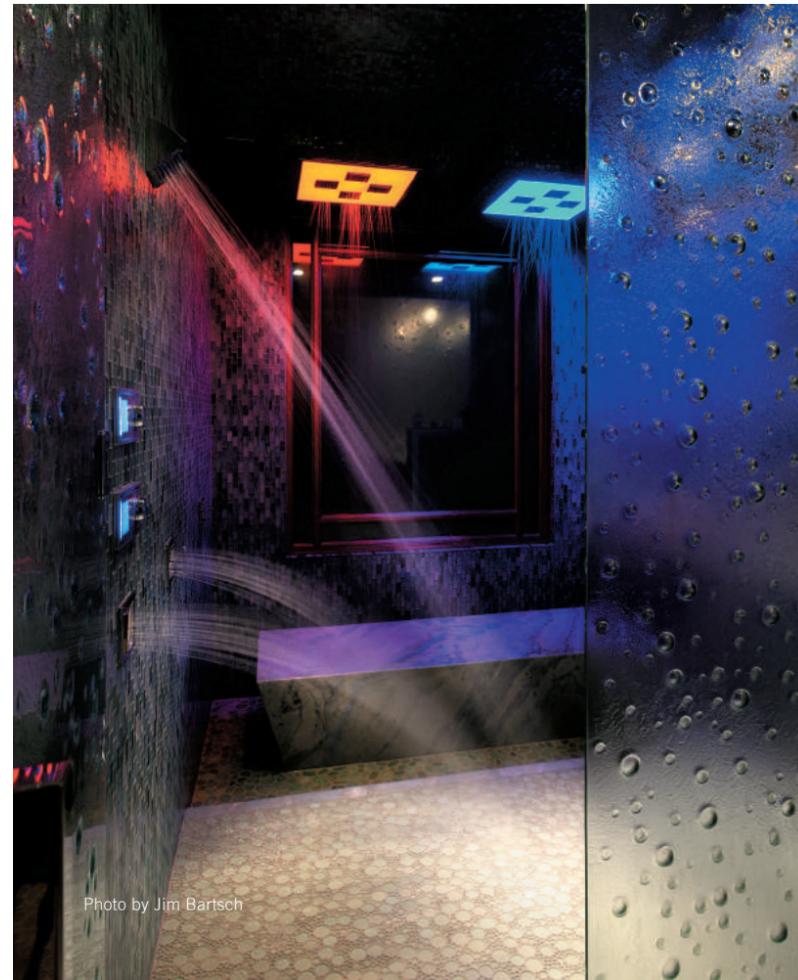


Photo by Jim Bartsch



Waff Zone, Spa Sophia Antipolis



This Spread: Eric Cohler Design

best interior architects, lighting experts, contractors and brands in the industry can make those dreams a reality. And when an in-home spa is at its finest, there should be nothing left to do but dream.

SMALL SPACES, SIGNIFICANT DETAILS

Even the smallest bathroom spaces, if paired with the right design sense and a clear understanding of what you'd like to accomplish, can embrace spalike elements. One option for making the most of the space you have is to create a wet room. "The entire space becomes the shower," says Eric Cohler, principal designer and founder of Eric Cohler Design in New York. "There's a drain in the floor, and the whole room can get wet if you want it to." This allows the room to flow more naturally by blending the spaces together. For those who live in warmer climates, there's the option of also blurring the line between interior and exterior spaces to expand the spa experience. A wall-to-wall door opening to the private patio, for example, can provide easy access to an outdoor massage table—it's an easy way to incorporate nature. However, the details in these rooms matter as much as the overall layout.

"You want to make sure that you pack as much in as possible without crowding yourself," says Cohler. It's important to keep color in mind to create the illusion of greater space, and white offers the most significant flexibility. "[That] can be as simple as adding white towels and all white bathroom accessories," notes Cohler, adding that high-gloss, white subway (or extra large) tile can also help create a soothing sense of space. Seemingly simple touches such as luxurious linens and essential oils also make a tremendous difference. But larger renovations, including radiant-heat flooring, also transform the room from the moment you walk in, and elements like a warming drawer and heated towel rack further the spa experience. Small details can make a big impact regardless of the size of the space. "I think that every detail is important. From the towels that I use to the products that I put in [the rooms]," Murray says. Of course, when space is nearly unlimited, and the budget is limited only by the imagination, an in-home spa can become a world all its own. 

