

Chicago Life

MAGAZINE



**MIDWEST GETAWAYS • TREATING INSOMNIA
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Upscale Baths

According to the most recent research from the International Spa Association, the number of spa locations in the United States rose from an estimated 4,140 in 1999 to 20,180 in 2013.



Bathroom by Kohler

The modern-day residential bathroom has evolved from its utilitarian beginnings to a haven for relaxation and well-being. It soothes us from the din of daily life and gently renews us to go back for more. If we are not so fortunate as to have such a space of our own, we must create one.

“People want to get the spa experience at home in their master bath,” says Melissa Curtis, who manages the Kohler Signature Store in Burr Ridge. The store is a showroom of Kohler-family bath products, fixtures and room vignettes, which range in price from moderate to aspirational. Not-so-coincidentally, the store is located next door to a Kohler Waters Spa. It’s not uncommon for the spa’s clients, clad in fluffy white robes and slippers, to be seen browsing the store’s wares.

Spa treatments have become an integral element of many wellness regimens. Little wonder the industry has grown exponentially over the years. According to the most recent research from the

BY PAMELA DITTMER MCKUEN

international Spa Association, the number of spa locations in the United States rose from an estimated 4,140 in 1999 to 20,180 in 2013. They also are increasingly accessible—whether close to home, a far-flung destination or a stop along the way. Terminal Gateway Spa is a full-service spa with three locations at

O’Hare International Airport and one each in Charlotte and Orlando. The menu accommodates short and long layovers, from quickie polish changes to full-body massages.

Kohler’s collaboration between product and wellness has allowed the company to pioneer innovations in home spa hydrotherapy:

- The BubbleMassage tub transcends the traditional whirlpool by enveloping the bather with tiny bubbles, which can be zoned to specific areas of the body and controlled for intensity. An optional chromatherapy feature radiates a palette of soothing hues throughout the water.
- The multi-sensory DTV+ digital showering system integrates water, steam, sound and light with touch-screens controls. A variety of rain heads, shower heads, body sprays, and hand-helds can be configured/outfitted for optimal personalization.
- The outrageously sophisticated Numi toilet looks like a white box. Beyond the sleek exterior, it features touch-screen remote control; motion-activated, hands-free opening and closing; bidet functionality with adjustable water spray and air dryer; built-in speakers and wireless Bluetooth sync capability; heated seat and foot warmer; and ambient colored lighting.



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The American Club resort in Kohler, Wisconsin, marries the arts of travel, home design and hydrotherapy. Visitors can explore the latest Kohler technology at the onsite Design Center as well as in their luxurious guest rooms and at the spa. Design consultations and services are complimentary.

As people travel, the environments and pleasures they encounter often are translated into their homes when the journey is over, says Chicago-based architect Jackie Koo, whose hospitality portfolio includes the splashy Wit boutique hotel on State Street.

"Everyone has a more sophisticated eye for design today, and so much of that has been influenced by hospitality," she says.

In hotel design, a notable trend in guest rooms is the open floor

plan. Sleeping and bathing have become integrated, perhaps loosely defined with half-walls, tile formations or glass block. A free-standing tub is likely to anchor the room while showers may or may not be fully enclosed.

"There is a lot of transparency between the two spaces," says Koo. "Sometimes people are walking through portions of the bathroom to get to the sleeping area."

Another bath trend is the incorporation of natural elements such as reclaimed wood, stone, tile, living walls and even windows. "People want windows in their bathrooms now," says Koo. "That's something we have not seen previously."

At the Kohler store, which offers project and design services, Curtis sees oversized showers and deep soaking tubs as popular choices. The urban aesthetic is a neutral palette of whites, beiges and grays, sometimes accented with aqueous hues of blue and green.

Bath and kitchen design Deb Bayless at Design for Keeps in Glen Ellyn makes a few additions to the list of favorites: Floating vanities that don't touch the floor, gold-tone and silver-tone metals mixed together, dual-flush toilets, heated floors, storage compartments, display niches, and electrical outlets hidden within the cabinetry.

After the essentials have been covered, bring on the bling, she says. "People often want something breath-taking and interesting in their bathrooms because they are in there every day," she says.

The glam factor can be introduced in many ways. A large piece of artwork. Uniquely shaped faucets and spigots that gleam like fine jewelry. A bold-colored vanity in lime green or sapphire blue. Wallpaper in a fanciful print. Tile not only remains hot, it's bigger and bolder than ever. The choices are bedazzling.

Think naturally aged terra from terra cotta reclaimed from centuries-old European villas or traditional subway rectangles or tiny light-catching glass mosaics. Fashion tile to make your statement. A small amount, maybe an artistic feature wall in the shower or a horizontal banner circling the room, lends interest. A lot of tile, layered upon multiple surfaces and in a mélange of colors and textures and patterns, creates drama.

Decorative light fixtures also can be a wow. Many master bathrooms are so spacious that traditional task lighting alone isn't enough. But beware of one installation seen in the slick design magazines: a chandelier over the bathtub.

"Put it in the middle of the room," she says. "You'll get the feeling, but it's a safer alternative." □