



So near, so spa

The designers:



Simon Butland,
director, Pittville,
Cheltenham



Jane Ive,
director, Bathroom
Design Studio,
Harrogate



Ros Wilson,
director, Roselind
Wilson Design,
London



Caroline Whittaker,
sales and marketing
director, Designer
Bathroom Concepts,
Doncaster



Kirsten Wain,
senior designer,
West One
Bathrooms, London



According to Carron, its O-Lenda Whirlpool system is the most technologically advanced on the market. It features a unique jet system, said to ensure the most comfortable bathing experience. It's shown here with the Heiku bath.



1. Kaldewei's Cayonoplan shower tray occupies the same footprint as a standard-sized bath and thanks to the waste outlet's position, no complicated shifting of the bathroom waste pipe is required

2. A wet-room design by Jane Ive, Bathroom Design Studio, Harrogate



kbreview brings together the expertise of five top bathroom designers from around the country, to help take some of the stress out of installing a wellness or spa bathroom. **Francesca Seden** soaks it all in...

For some homeowners, having a luxurious bathroom where they can retreat from the stresses of the day, relax and recuperate, is the ultimate dream. They may desire a luxury rain drench shower, complete with massaging body jets in a beautiful wet room, or perhaps a steam cabin with a whirlpool bath.

The challenges that a designer or retailer must face can be great and it takes great skill and knowledge to deliver the perfect spa bathroom. As a designer, you must know the room inside out, you must be an expert in all of the products you have at your disposal, and you must have a highly-skilled team behind you.

The designer must also have some sort of practical experience to ensure that the room is laid out correctly. For example, Simon Butland, director at Pitville in

Cheltenham, notes that he's seen, on a number of occasions, wet rooms that have been incorrectly laid out. You need to have the wet areas furthest from the door and contained, and the loo should also be hidden away if possible, he says. And while some of these things might seem obvious to most retailers, their importance can't be overstated.

There's also been growth in the popularity of spa bathrooms, and consumers are taking bathroom design much more seriously. This has been fuelled by both technology driving prices down and the influence of luxury hotels and the media. When it comes to the spa bathrooms' defining products, all of the designers we spoke to agreed that it's the luxury, indulgent showering experience that makes it.

Sustainable

Technology, too, is increasingly making bathroom products more sustainable while also promising the same luxury experience.

Methven is just one of the brands that has made developing luxury, water-saving products its mission. Jane Ive, director of Bathroom Design Studio in Harrogate, is a fan.

"Methven are going that bit further with their technology so that the water droplet explodes before it hits you, giving a greater coverage of water", Ive says: "I've had some feedback from my customers and they don't necessarily have the pressure to allow for drench shower heads, which require lots of water, so it's good that you have these different technologies to create that experience, but using less water. And, of course, steam can be very luxurious, but uses a very small amount of water."

Ros Wilson, director at Roselind Wilson Design, believes that her customers are more mindful of environmental issues and says that while they won't specify an 'eco-build', they might use a composite sustainable surface material in several places around the house. She says they might also think about ways they can save water without compromising the experience.

Caroline Whittaker, sales and marketing director at Designer Bathroom Concepts, has had a very different experience. She says: "It's always going to mean indulgence in all aspects. How do you achieve a luxurious showering experience while being economical with water? It's a very difficult one. To be honest, I can't remember the last time a client stipulated that something was eco-friendly."

She admits, however, that much of this issue revolves around designers and retailers educating themselves on the latest water-saving technology.

Meticulous

Next, in terms of the key things that retailers and designers should consider, ventilation, pressure, lighting, and having a competent and confident installer all top the list. The bathroom designer must know the room inside out. "You need to know the composition and depth of the floor and walls," Whittaker says. "It needs to be meticulously planned out so you know exactly what can go where to achieve optimum performance and efficiency."

Wilson adds: "You have to look at the layout and what is happening behind ▶



1. This bathroom design, by Ros Wilson, features luxurious finishes, a large freestanding bath and spacious shower

2. The ShowerHeaven 1200, from Axor, promises the 'wow' factor with its three spray patterns - Rain, Mono and PowderRain. A 300mm version is also available

3. Toto's Flotation bath has been designed to replicate the weightlessness that astronauts feel in space and has been proven to help relieve chronic fatigue, Toto says. It also features massaging water jets, which come out of an ergonomically shaped pillow around the bather's neck



the scenes in the bathroom. You need to work out the drainage situation and find out about the water pressure." She goes on to say that there is little point having a luxury rain-drench shower unless you have the pressure for it to work as it should.

The primary considerations are ventilation and water pressure, as these, along with lighting, will be the first elements that are installed. Ventilation is particularly important in basement bathrooms, which are unlikely to have a window, when an extractor will be necessary. And if the water pressure is poor, a pump may be required to boost it.

As well as water pressure, water consumption is also something to bear in mind. Whittaker says: "You need to work out how much water is available to the property. You have to make sure the valve and the shower head are compatible. We look at how the valve and shower head work together to achieve the best possible performance."

Next, on to lighting, which is still very often overlooked, according to our experts. Yet it is crucial for setting the tone and mood. Lighting should be soft and a variety of sources should be specified where possible. So, for example, you could have lights in the shower, as well as ones in, or surrounding, the mirror, plus a few under the vanity unit.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, retailers must ensure that the chosen installer really knows what they're doing and is confident and capable. Pittville's Butland also believes that it's vital to ensure that your chosen installers are educated about the products they're working with.

He adds that even though retailers might not see it as the very best use of their time, they must take time to sit down and engage with their reps to find out about the latest products on offer. In this way, they can ensure that their customers are getting the best possible bathroom for their money.

Definitive

The definitive product in the spa, or wellness bathroom, must be the sophisticated luxury shower. Rain-head showers with powerful sprays, mist and steam showers, as well as steam cabins and luxury wet rooms, all top the list. Some brands mentioned include Helo for its steam shower, Gessi, Dornbracht, Hansgrohe and Bossini, for its flush-to-ceiling shower heads.

West One Bathrooms senior designer Kirsten Wain says there are few as

luxurious as the traditional Turkish hammam-inspired, yet cutting-edge design of the Topkapi steam enclosure displayed in its Mayfair showroom.

"This is becoming increasingly popular with those who want more from their bathroom and are looking for quality, different finishes and above all else, the everyday practicality they seek."

Adding a music system, such as those offered by Sonos, will give that extra element of luxury.

Flush-to-floor trays or shower surfaces, such as those offered by Kaldewei or Italian brand Acqualabel, can also make an excellent alternative to tiles. Wain adds: "When using one floor covering throughout a space, it can feel larger and more open. With added luxuries like underfloor heating below the tiles [or surface], and in the wet area too, the space is also functional, reducing water residue and water marks after use. Consideration needs to be given to whether glass is required to prevent splash, and if so, does it need to be fully enclosed or simply a walk-in panel?"

Wall-mounted body jet panels are also making a comeback, according to Whittaker, and they're an easy install, she says. "They used to look bulky and ugly, but they're now sleek and contemporary," she adds.

Finally, for love at Bathroom Design Studio, it's all about flexibility. She says: "Remember that it's got to perform at all different times of the day for everyone that uses it."

She says that she's done a few steam enclosures and projects "that you might class as a classic spa experience more specifically", but that ultimately when installing a bathroom, it needs to be flexible enough to deliver for everyone at any time of day.

"Digital showers are popular with our clients, as they offer a more personal experience," I've says. The new Q Edition [by Aquilella] has movement sensors, so it can tell when you're near it. It's got lots of different jets and sprays, so can offer a different experience depending on what the client wants."

So, to summarise, a spa bathroom must be luxurious, but it must also be a multifunctional space. As the price of spa-like products comes down and peoples' lives become increasingly hectic, retailers may find that their customers are asking for these sorts of bathrooms more often.

So, if, as a bathroom retailer, you're not an expert in spa bathrooms already, now might be a good time to start learning.

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