

COMMERCIAL

Interior design

The essential guide for Middle East interior design professionals

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INSIDE AND OUT

Yasmine Mahmoudieh on architecture's link with interiors

SPA PARTNER

Setting the scene for a refreshing spa visit

LONDON CALLING

Blacksheep refurbish a major London youth hostel

Trends and technology are making lights brighter
and more environmentally friendly

LIGHTEN UP



Spa designers tune in to consumer needs.
By Selin Arkut

Spa style

Spas have become an integral part of just about every new four-and five-star resort, as people expect pampering as part of a holiday purchase, or just a one-off spa indulgence. They are also being added to existing properties, including private clubs, or commercial buildings such as hotel apartments, designed to keep them competitive and growing in market share.

The critical first step to any spa's success is to create an environment, through building structure, traffic flow and décor not only allows guests to relax and rejuvenate, but is also functional and flexible enough for expansions or changes to come at a later date. "Prac-



1. Relaxation at the Banyan Tree resort – cubic candle set representing the 5 elements.



tality and user-friendliness is a key consideration when conceptualising the design for a spa," said Dharmali Kusu-madi, vice president of design services, Banyan Tree Hotels & Resorts.

"The design for a spa must be tailored to its operations concept, and treatment menus. The design needs to be practical for operational use and effective in achieving the ideal ambience. A spa design need not always follow the conventional serene and calm style; it may be designed in a vibrant and active style to enhance the concept of the treatments offered."

Over all, the sauna and steam rooms are the most used applications. The traditions behind these forms of bathing go back 2000 years and are very established, such as the sauna in Scandinavia, Hamam in Turkey, and Banja in Russia, for example.

THEMED FASHION

Stemming from traditions thousands of years old – themed spas have been an extremely successful trend in the Middle East region.

"Speaking of themes – when the spa business started in Dubai a decade ago, an Asian theme used to be the most common. One of our recent projects, the

Amrita Spa at Raffles was created with this concept in mind," said Daniella Russell, director of Wafi Health & Leisure Group.

"Another spa design style that is growing in popularity, is the Arabian style, bringing the flavour of the region into the spa concept. Our main project, replicating Arabian style blended into a modern spa's is Cleopatra's Spa at Wafi (1998).

"However, we are now seeing clients' need for spa refurbishment where the latest trends are more futuristic and minimalist. Ecological green spas are also another interesting trend, where natural materials are the most widely used," she added.

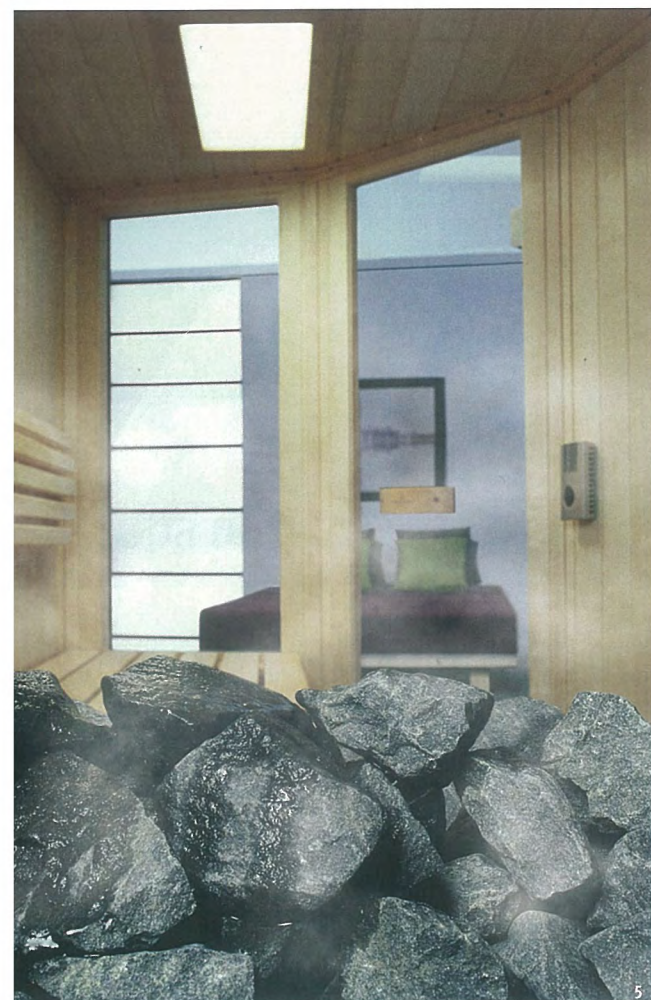
INSPIRED BY NATURE

According to Kusumadi of the Banyan Tree resorts, the latest trends in spa designs, "involve the use of natural materials to create a more dramatic effect. Modern spa design is no longer just about designing a beautiful treatment room that's typically quiet and serene, but also involves more design elements to enhance the visitors' mood through creating a stronger sense of place."

Whether it is a city or resort spa,

2. Tranquility garden at the Amara Spa, Park Hyatt.

3. Banyan Tree Al Areen resort in Bahrain, Vitality Pool.



4. Element Spa range from Dornbracht.

5. Villeroy & Boch, Wellness @ Home, Sauna Heater.

6. Luxury treatment room from Schletterer.

these mood-enhancing elements are accentuated through the choice of a variety of design materials.

“Depending on the project itself, our tiles are usually sourced from Italy, but also from Spain and France, granites come from all over the world. All other materials are sourced locally to keep transportation prices low and the area surrounding production involved in the region,” said Peter Rietveld, managing director of Barr + Wray, designers of the Shangri-La Qarat Beri project in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

“For us, most resort spas still use a lot of natural materials like stone and wood, and city spas tend to use more contemporary materials like steel, glass and man-made hard surfaces. Our

materials are sourced from locations all over the world from Asia to Europe, depending on the location of our spas. We usually try to source for materials locally to reflect a sense of place,” said Kusumadi.

“Selected materials have to be not only looking good, but also have a practical finish and serve its purpose,” said Adrian Kearton, projects manager, Spa Resources International.

“For example” she continued, “tiling is very popular for wall finishes, as they must be very cleanable, and that is what we use widely in our projects. Marble is another very popular material – it was used as the main material in Etihad First and Business Class lounge spas. Wall finishes in plastic also remain very

popular as an oil resistant material.”

Wellness and spa design firm, Schletterer also has the same ideals incorporated into its designs. “In a creative spa design solution and concept, it is important to implement natural features. By this, I mean a smart combination of different materials – wood with steel, water with fire, hot and cold,” said Gerald Huber, regional director for the GCC, Schletterer.

“Clever lighting solutions are also a must,” Huber added. “It’s very popular to work with structural or even sculptural wall and floor elements in combination with emphasising such lighting effects. The use of crystal need not only be used for light and decoration elements, but can also be applied to other surfaces - to wall papers for example, these are state of the art.”

Nowadays, spa design has become so much more sophisticated with the introduction of new options through modern technology. For example, in the past, spas tended to use candles to achieve a romantic effect. Today, designers have many lighting alternatives, such as LED lights, or coloured crystals, each able



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We know what it means to create unique well-being concepts with excellent profitability. We stand for holistic concepts which guarantee an exceptional well-being experience.



to achieve the desired colour-changing lighting effects.

"Today, spas become more and more a lifestyle expression. As a consequence trendy design elements are increasing. To avoid a short-dated facility we at Schletterer, pay strong attention to a variability in view of mood per light, multi-functionalities and choose really trendy elements more for accessories than for fittings," said Huber.

"In addition, creating contrasts to the traditional spa design conventions, arranges something that wouldn't naturally be expected, hay in a sauna, or milk for showering, for example.

"We want everybody using a Schletterer spa to enjoy a unique and fascinating relaxation experience – an unforgettable experience that enhances their mental, spiritual and physical health and beauty. We want every guest to feel totally engaged with their surroundings and to return time and time again," he added.

WELLNESS AT HOME

Spa design however, isn't just about the tiles on the walls, the palm trees' by the pool, or the Molten Brown hand wash at every sink.

Yes, the smaller details do add to the whole spa experience, but it is the

spa products that make the experience come alive.

Having set up a 'Wellness at Home' unit, offering spas, saunas and infrared cabins, besides their existing wellness products like Multi Functional Cabins and whirlpools, Villeroy & Boch allow the simple integration of spa products to the interior design of a home.

"Although public spas will always stay popular, with the pressures of busy modern lives, we see more and more homeowners creating their own wellness zone at home to optimise their wellness potential. The bathroom becomes more and more a place where

7. Tibetan Trumpet, Banyan Tree, Shanghai.

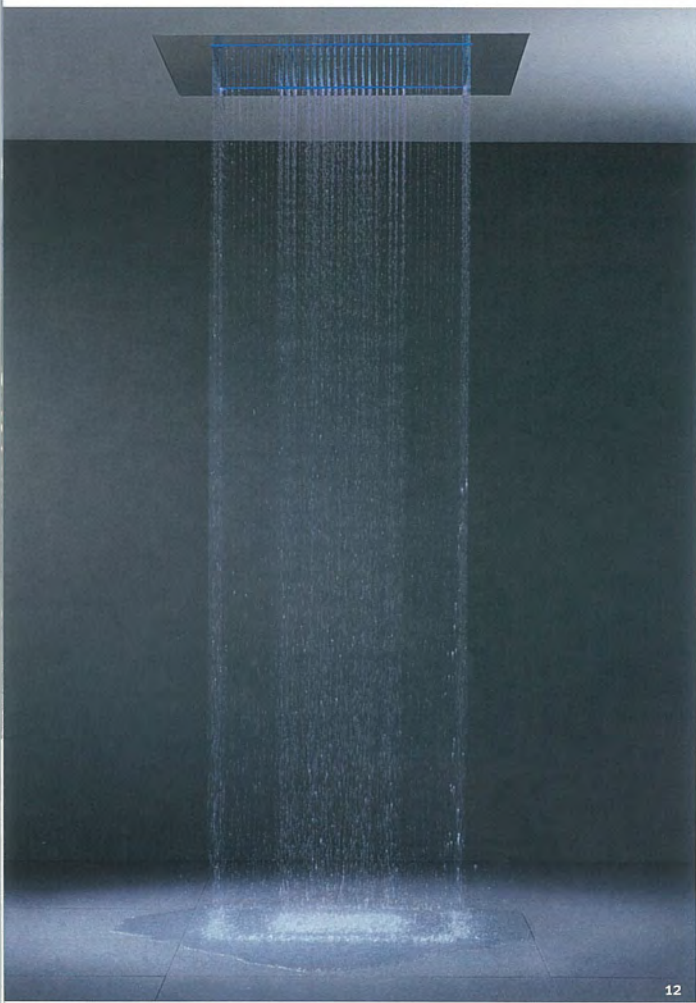
8. Elemental collection from Dornbracht.

9. Abama Hotel Resort, Barr + Wray.

10. 4 Senses Spa Zone from Schletterer.

11. Spa designs from Barr + Wray.





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12. RainSky from Dornbracht.

13. Spa Pavillion at the Banyan Tree Resort, Seychelles.

14. Outdoor pool at the Amara Spa, Park Hyatt.

we can rejuvenate mind and body after a stressful day at work,” said Dirk Peters, business segment manager, Wellness at Home division, Villeroy & Boch.

Luxury service, product and experience are the drivers within the spa industry. Why do people buy a luxury yacht? Because they can. The same applies to the spa industry, the clientele of spas expect to have a luxurious experience, and the owners of spa’s know they must provide one.

Using RainSky, rain-shower, Elemental Spa and Symetrics – all products recently launched by Dornbracht in the Middle East – these products are said to define architecture, and create space.

“The flow of water is important to the spa industry; they require a water out-



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put that is very natural with few technical gadgets and comfort options, water that is not refined, a water flow that is quiet, gentle to powerful, and relatively purist contributing to the mystery of water. The flow of water is a subtle detail yet another luxury to be enjoyed,” said Phil Payne general manager, Dornbracht Middle East.

CHALLENGING SUSTAINABILITY

Though implementing such spa design may sound simple, the biggest challenge facing designers today apart from factors of limited space - is ensuring that the environmental impacts are considered.

“We do consider sustainability aspects in our spa designs. We take into

consideration the environmental impact and practicality on top of aesthetics. For example, Banyan Tree Spa Seychelles is uniquely constructed on stilts on the slope to avoid damaging the natural landscape of the hilly slopes,” said Kusumadi.

Huber, at Schletterer added, “we always consider sustainability within our designs, ensuring that we use natural materials, while thinking about modern energy and water saving/recycling possibility as well as the usage of heat exchangers, solar energy, and filtration technologies.”

THE FUTURE

Despite differentiating views of designers, whether in a hotel, shopping centre, airport or apartment, the interior design is responsible for the look and feel of the spa. “Competition between spas’ will drive the designs and overall quality well beyond the current level, yet the spa consumer / customer will dictate spa design in terms of architecture, quality and experiences. The consumers are implementing ritual architecture in their homes and they are purchasing premium products, they will expect to experience the same, or more when visiting a spa,” Payne.

A well-designed space and the use of appropriate décor therefore, will help to create an experience that will impress clients, not only while they are in the spa, but also long after they go home. □