



HOME
ARTICLES
ADS



Consumers opt for customized tubs for relaxation

By MOLLY MILLETT, Knight Ridder Newspapers

Consumers today want loads of bubbles.

Not just in their champagne. In their bathtubs, too.

The gentle bubbling option is a trendy alternative to the traditionally powerful, invigorating whirlpool jets.

"They are slightly effervescent," says Gary Uhl, director of design for the plumbing company American Standard. "The feeling is more relaxing."

Those "champagne" bubbles are part of the trend toward customized bathtubs.

"Over the past 10 years, it's become more common to have a whirlpool. People are not as wowed by that anymore," says Jacqueline Marquardt, Kohler Co.'s senior product manager for whirlpools and tubs. "They want to see something different and unique."

But still soothing.

"People, especially women, tend to view the bath as a relaxing, soothing experience," says Marquardt. "They want different experiences that address that need to relax. ... Just as you add on features to the base model of a car, people are demanding that same customization in every sector of their lives, including the bath."

The "soaking tub" is an especially hot custom option.

"I'd say the trend is steering toward soaking tubs," says Tim Purcell Jr. of Purcell, a Stillwater, Minn.-based remodeling firm. "There's more 'leisure room' and the drain fills higher for more water coverage. It's a very deep, deep tub."

Kohler, for example, offers the "sok" tub that submerges the bather from shoulders to toes in the 66-inch-by-34.5 inch basin. The bather is further relaxed by tiny, effervescent bubbles from the 11 air jets as well as the sound of cascading water dropping off the rim's horizon into the tub's recirculating channel. But expect to pay for such luxurious bathing privileges: pricing starts at about \$6,000.

For about \$1,200, the bather also could add "chromatherapy" to this experience: eight hues, from stimulating to soothing, are sequentially transmitted via four light ports positioned within the inner walls of the bath. A touch of a button starts the color sequence, and each color is displayed about eight seconds.

"We know that light and color affect our bodies and mood," says Marquardt. "This is an added option of turning down the lights in the room and turning on the lights of the bathtub ... each color gently washes into another, and if you feel that green would soothe you, you could press a button and it will stay on that one color."

Tubs in unique materials are also popular, such as aluminum and copper wraps.

"We can't keep the copper tubs in stock," says Matt Butler, co-owner of Clawfoot Supply, a Kentucky-based business that sells tubs over the Internet. Their copper model costs \$3,695.

Longer bathtubs, six feet or more, are also in demand, as are deeper and wider tubs that will fit two comfortably. The modern bathtub also has lumbar support and molded-in armrests. Tubs come in more interesting designs, too, including models that have inclined backs, giving the feeling of a chaise lounge, or the "draped bathtub" by Porcher, in which the design looks like casually draped fabric. Or American Standard's Enfield Suite bathing tub, which resembles a piece of Shaker furniture: The tub is embraced in a structural base of natural wood and accompanied by straight, functional Shaker-styled wooden legs that hold the tub above the floor surface like a piece of furniture. Both these tubs fit in with the idea of the bathroom as a living space.

The retro look also is big in both the kitchen and the bathroom, especially clawfoot tubs.

"The clawfoot tub harks back to a more romantic era," says Marquardt.

But this old look has been updated for modern times, such as Clawfoot Supply's models that offer "champagne massage" whirlpool action with as many as 110 jets (priced from \$2,380).

Kris and Derek Olson wanted the vintage look of a clawfoot when they remodeled their 1876 Stillwater home to include a master bedroom and bathroom with the help of Purcell's remodeling firm. They chose a clawfoot that offered old styling but modern touches -- it is double-sized and 5 feet, 8 inches long for extra stretching room.

"A Jacuzzi would have been nice, but I liked the idea of paying tribute to the vintage part of our home," says Kris Olson. "And I like how a clawfoot tub feels in a room -- it harks to the past, and it is beautiful and relaxing to look at, almost like a piece of art."

And does she actually use the bathtub often? Yes.

"It's just relaxing at the end of the day, to take a glass of wine upstairs, run the water and get away to my own 'bed and breakfast,' " says this stay-at-home mom of two small children.