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# Homes

## A long winter's bath: Many new ways to soak yourself

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Frank Wells' mahogany soaking tub can be set inside or out.

By Gretchen McKay, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

There's nothing like a hot bath to wash away the day's worries and restore both body and soul. And nobody does the bath better than the Japanese. Meant for soaking rather than cleaning, the Japanese soaking tub, or ofuro, allows bathers to sit neck-deep in very hot water and be at one with their surroundings.

These luxury tubs, some inspired by the ofuro, aim to deliver the ultimate bathing experience. It just depends on the look you're going for and how deep you want to go into your pocket.

It took contractor Frank Wells of the North Side more than a month to handcraft a gorgeous cockleshell soaking tub from Honduran mahogany. Its two curved backs are set at about the same angle as an Adirondack chair, and a heavy marine varnish means you can set the 69 1/2-inch-long tub inside or out. The price is \$11,500, and Wells will custom-make tubs with different designs or woods. Information: Frank Wells, 412-321-8085/8909 or fwells3@hotmail.com.



A granite soaking tub from Stone Forest comes in blue-gray, beige and black.

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Sometimes it's a tub's materials that give it an Asian feel. The spa-quality stainless steel tub from Hammacher Schlemmer (\$9,996) comes wrapped in imported bamboo. An added advantage: It measures just 4 feet across, so it takes up minimal floor space. Information: www.hammacher.com, 1-800-892-1063.

The granite soaking tub from Stone Forest (\$12,000 and up) comes in several colors, including blue-gray, beige and black. If you're willing to pay more, you can order it in Italian marble.

But be forewarned. This tub -- which can be ordered at Tile & Designs on Spahr Street in Shadyside -- weighs in at a whopping 1 ton and requires delivery by crane. As such, it's most often used in new construction. Information: www.stoneforest.com, 1-888-682-2987.

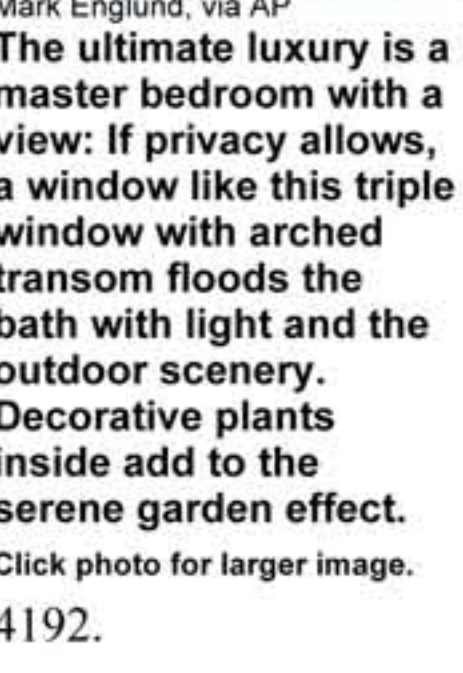


Wrapped in a zebra print, Nottingham Brass deep slipper tub celebrates the wild life.

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With a price tag of \$67,000, you'd probably be hard-pressed to find a more expensive soaking tub than the Medicis copper bathtub from Herbeau Creations. Large enough for two, this 19th-century reproduction is made from weathered copper and plated with satin nickel inside. Information: www.herbeau.com, 1-239-417-5368.

If your taste runs more to the contemporary, the solid-surface Capri soaking tub from Victoria & Albert (\$2,895) is a nice option. The sleek design includes an integrated full-length towel bar and ergonomically designed lumbar supports. The high-gloss finish is also extremely easy to clean. It's available to the trade only at Seymour's Bath & Decorative Hardware in the Strip District. Information: www.englishtubs.com.



The ultimate luxury is a master bedroom with a view: If privacy allows, a window like this triple window with arched transom floods the bath with light and the outdoor scenery. Decorative plants inside add to the serene garden effect.

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With a water capacity of 85 gallons, the extra-deep acrylic slipper tub from Nottingham Brass (\$4,995) will keep you covered head-to-toe in water. It's the natural zebra hide skirt and attached mane, however, that are most striking -- You'll feel like you're bathing in a watering hole while on safari. Information: Clawfoot Supply, www.clawfootsupply.com, 1-877-682-4192.

What if you've already got a pretty great tub and are simply looking for something to enhance the bathing experience? You can't miss with a fragrant bubble bath or soothing bath soaks, such as Bath & Body Works' cinnamon or sweet orange Powder Sugar Bath Soak (\$21), or a comfy bath pillow, such as the \$16 polka-dotted terrycloth Spa Sister bath pillow from eBubbles, www.ebubbles.com, 1-888-403-8701.

A little more high-tech is a Lifewise Massaging Bath Pillow from RadioShack (www.radioshack.com, 1-800-843-7422). This battery-operated pillow (\$9.95) aims to vibrate away neck or shoulder pain as you soak.

If your favorite bather is a reader, a lacquered bathtub book holder from Mac the Antique Plumber (www.antiquestplumber.com; 1-800-916-BATH) will keep even the thickest tome dry. Available in a chrome-plated or lacquered brass finish, it attaches to the tub shelf and costs \$73. A rustic teak tub caddy from Comforthouse.com (www.comforthouse.com; 1-800-359-7701) also features a book tray, along with wine glass, candle holders and slatted trays for gels and sponges. Cost: \$38.95.

Or maybe you're looking for something to help keep her warm after she finally pulls herself out of the water. Lavender or Cranberry Heatable Booties from The Body Shop (www.bodyshop.com, 1-800-263-9746) come lined with fleece and removable scented packs meant to relax and calm. Pop the foot warmers in the microwave for one minute and slip them on. Cost: \$20-\$25.



Herbeau's Medicis is a luxurious copper and nickel tub for two.

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