

SPRING 2021

DEPARTURES

HOME + DESIGN





A bathroom in Manhattan Beach, California, by KAA Design Group, with a Japanese soaking tub by Bartok Design Co.

More Than a Pretty Faucet

No longer limited to conventional design ideas, the bathroom has become the most considered room in the house.

by Chris Pomorski

IT IS A TESTAMENT to the growing cachet of the once-humble bathroom that some of the best views in Lower Manhattan these days are available to certain inhabitants of the Woolworth Tower Residences while they're soaking in the tub. The upper 30 floors

of the historic, terracotta-sheathed building have been developed into luxury condos, where a penthouse is currently on the market for \$79 million. In Manhattan, where even the toniest Park Avenue co-ops often banish bathrooms to the structural interior, depriving them

of light and air, the decision to provide every primary bathroom with generous fenestration is arguably among the most striking design choices. In select Woolworth apartments, Porcelanosa soaking tubs stand before huge windows, affording owners kingly bubble-bath vistas. For interludes of peace, contemplation, and self-congratulation, the experience has few rivals. Woolworth's luxurious bathrooms are part of a growing trend of turning the his-and-her bath into a sleek spa.

"People spend a lot of time there," said Samantha Sax of the luxury developer Pontiac Land Group. "It's a bit of a sanctuary—an escape from everyday life." Allison Babcock, a designer who works primarily in the Hamptons, concurred. "They want a retreat, not just a place where they go to take a shower," she said. "It's about creating an environment where you can relax and feel like you are having a little mini spa day."

Both designers and clients are looking to some of their favorite hotels for inspiration for the bath. Since visiting the Aman in Tokyo a few years ago, the New York-based designer David Scott said he has tried to incorporate "the reverence for the bathroom space that has always been in Japanese design" into his own work. "We have always done very luxurious bathrooms," he said. But in recent years, they've gotten bigger. "Most of our showers are large enough for two people. They often have steam showers. We're adding dry saunas more."

For a home in Bridgehampton, Scott created a spa-reminiscent suite on the lower level: a sauna connected to a gym outfitted with a Japanese-style steam shower that features an elevated floor made from slatted teak. The suite opens directly onto the rear lawn. "There was a desire to have that indoor-outdoor connection," he said. Upstairs, the designer enlarged a patio off the bathroom and added an outdoor shower. Inside, a chaise longue occupies newly found extra space.



This bathroom at New York's 53 West 53, with furnishings by Thierry Despont and decor by Rebecca Robertson, has a soaking tub by Lefroy Brooks, a steam shower, and views of Central Park.

Scott recently furnished another bathroom, in Greenwich, Connecticut, with not only a chaise but a fireplace. "It's this element of wanting to spend more time in these spaces," he said, echoing Sax's sentiment.

For those with homes in warmer climates, said Steve Straughan, the design coordinator for the Los Angeles-based KAA Design Group, the possibilities are

greater still. At one house now under construction, KAA's design for the bathroom has gone through several iterations. "Every time the owners go somewhere, they end up with another idea—New York, Australia." Encased in three walls of glass, the bathroom itself will cantilever over a hillside high above Los Angeles. A number of its most alluring features are outdoors: a hot tub and a cold plunge pool

in what Straughan calls a "master wet zone." Above the pool will be a personalized James Turrell Skyspace.

Set in the Hollywood Hills, the KAA home is naturally well hidden from prying eyes. For city dwellers, ensuring the privacy of extravagant bathrooms often involves more problem solving. Elizabeth Sesser, a designer with Ike, Kligerman, Barkley, described a recent project at a Manhattan property whose owners no longer wished to leave home for certain activities. A wing of the apartment was dedicated to them: a two-story gym, attached to a full-sized bath with a walk-in steam shower. A hemlock sauna with two tiers of seating stands nearby. To keep trainers and masseurs from traipsing through the home's living space, the wing was given a separate entrance.

"People have less time, so they're looking to have the things they want in their home," Sesser said. Out in public, "there are so many people accessing the same things that maybe there's a wait, or a time limit for using amenities. These can be incorporated into residential design. They're requesting them now, because they realize they can."



A rendering of a bathroom at a residence inside the Aman New York that opens directly to a walk-in closet.