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KIM KILLGORE

Home Spas and the Wellness Trend

THE UBIQUITY OF wellness in our culture is staggering. A quick foray with Google and you'll find dimensions of wellness – wellness tourism, wellness coaching and the increasingly popular corporate wellness programs offered by nearly two thirds of U.S. employers.

Within the dimensions of wellness, there are intellectual, occupational, social and emotional wellness disciplines. In fact, the subject is so wide ranging that seemingly anything can be plugged into a “wellness” category. While not everything in the wellness industrial complex is to be trusted, the pursuit of wellness is sketched on our DNA.

“Being able to take the experience, emotion and benefit of the spa outing and moving it into the master suite is surely the definition of a daily action toward wellness.”

The pursuit of wellness is nothing new; our ancestors spent millennia seeking elemental wellness in myriad ways:

- The Egyptians built solariums with gem rooms to cast individual colors. Each room could affect a different set of ailments, both physical and emotional. In the 8th century, Buddhist texts formalized the Chakras, which corresponded to different colors and their effects – terms that we still use today.
- Aromatherapy was used in ancient China, India, Rome and Greece. In the 12th century, the Persians perfected the distillation of essential oils that were used to treat physical ailments as well as mood disorders. Today, we find essential oils in use for nearly everything that ails us: lavender for sleep, eucalyptus for respiratory issues, citrus for a pick-me-up or to get you going in the morning – the list is endless.
- In ancient Chinese texts, massage therapy was noted for paralysis, circulatory issues and depression. In the 5th century, the original Greek School of Medicine called for massage therapy for the same. Today, we use massage therapy for PTSD, to speed healing in sport

injury, to lower blood pressure and to relieve stress.

- Heat therapy has been found in virtually every culture worldwide to promote healing as well as general relaxation and wellbeing. The ancient Egyptians used heated sand. Many others used dry heated rooms, and the Greeks and Romans used the concept of heated baths. Perhaps this is the most foundational wellness category – the personal, private and elemental wellness that can be achieved with and within water.

SPECIFYING WELLNESS

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines wellness as: the quality or state of being in good health, especially as an actively sought goal. Given that it appears conscious action is needed to achieve wellness, perhaps the best starting place is the category of Physical Wellness. In fact, physical wellness through fitness and its associated segments is the most prolific use of “wellness” that you will find. However, I suggest these benefits are really best realized when we start with a physical foundation of wellness that begins at home.

What if I told you that we are actually in the unique position of being able to specify wellness? We fundamentally know that we are rejuvenated by water. After all, 70% of our bodies are made up of water. We are drawn to the water. The river, the lake, the ocean, the spa...that place where we go to pamper ourselves. The special outing, the luxury, the act of taking some time for ourselves to unwind and let go of the stress and chaos of our everyday lives.

The spa is not new. More than 2,000 years ago, the Greeks invented the first showers, piping hot water into overhead delivery systems. Just after, the Romans built entire complexes to serve thousands, centered on the benefits of water. Beautifully decorated, with benches for relaxing and warm and cold baths for different health benefits, these were

places that were designed for relaxation and rejuvenation.

In fact, we still speak their language today. Thousands of years ago people were going to the SPA – or should I say they were finding SPA. That is Sanus Per Aquam, translated to “health through water.” Who said Latin is dead?

Some will argue the historical accuracy of the acronym, but few, if any, will argue that the “Spa Bathroom” has become the pinnacle of the master suite. Being able to take the experience, emotion and benefit of the spa outing and moving it into the master suite is surely the definition of a daily action toward wellness.

Today, we are still designing these spaces for relaxation and rejuvenation, but now we can do so in the privacy of our own home.

Creating an in-home spa starts with the bath. Perhaps the most encompassing of all of the therapies available is the air system tub. Developed more than 40 years ago by Henry Brunelle of BainUltra, the air system tub simulates a full-body massage. Every aspect is designed to be therapeutic and the benefits are many, from detoxifying the skin to aiding circulation, reducing stress and improving sleep.

Most brands of air system tubs also offer chromatherapy lights to engulf the bather in their light of choice or need. In addition, aromatherapy is easily utilized in the activity of the water, enabling the bather to inhale as well as have these essential oils absorbed by the skin. Air tubs are available in every configuration, including thin-wall freestanding. A bathtub takes up its fair share of space in the bathroom. Shouldn't it be more than a pretty design or a bowl full of water? Shouldn't it be a space for wellness?

WELLNESS IN THE SHOWER

The shower is the other main area for wellness therapies in the bathroom. Water delivery has really upped its game in the last decade. Once upon a time, the rain head was the *ooh* and the *ahh* of the upscale shower. No more. A typical multifunction shower system has gone to new levels: champagne, pulsating, massaging, misting, firm spray, combinations – all with water-saving compatibility. And that is all out of just one unit. Not only is all of that available in a wall-mounted head, but the same configurations and functionality can be found in a handshower on a sliding rail, making it an easy decision for every master shower.

How about a waterfall? This functionality is now available wall mounted as well as ceiling

mounted. Who wouldn't like to step into their very own Maui vacation every morning? Just turn on the water and close your eyes and you are there. For true water savings, misters are ideal for keeping you warm while performing some grooming tasks.

Another therapy easily integrated into the shower is chromatherapy. Several companies offer chromatherapy built into showerheads, offering a seamless integration. In a steam-filled space, the room will literally glow with the healing color.

Speaking of steam filled spaces – residential steam is an underutilized therapy that can fit into an existing shower space. The benefits are incredibly wide ranging – from detoxification, respiratory and circulatory health to muscle soreness recovery, sleep aid and many more – all while using about a gallon of water. This is great in conjunction with those misters. Add in a Kniep tube and your Lapland excursion is complete. Heat up with the steam and then quick cool down with the ice-cold water. Invigorating!

While once upon a time the goal of the shower was a way to quickly get clean and on with your day, it is now a wellness ritual designed for relaxing and spending time. Don't forget the seat!

Although the concept of modern wellness has been around for decades, it was really the global recession that brought it to the masses. When our world was full of worry and stress, we subconsciously knew that taking action to minimize those effects was in our best interest.

When the rest of the world economy was in a downward spiral, the wellness category was just getting started – and it hasn't slowed down since.

According to some studies, every dollar spent on corporate wellness returns at a buck and a half. A spa bathroom is also great for resale – but the best return that wellness achieves is by taking the action of using it every day.

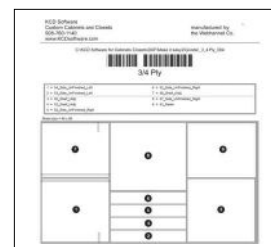
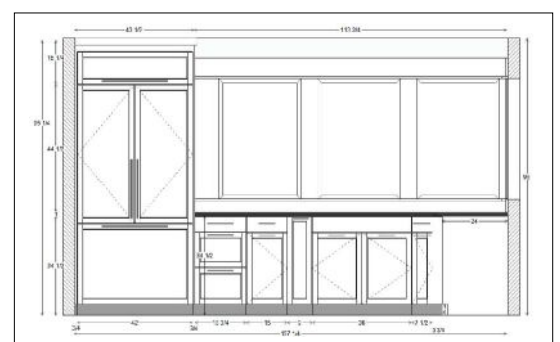
We are in the unique and wonderful position of being able to specify wellness. Just make sure you specify it for yourself as well. ■

Kim Killgore is a principal of the Rain Company, a representative agency serving the Pacific Northwest. She is also a member of the Decorative Hardware & Plumbing Association Board of Directors and the Co-Chair of the DPHA Conference and Showcase Committee.

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