

Simplicity is Key for DPH Market, by Linda Jennings

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We all want to surround ourselves with beautiful things, but we don’t want to stress about them. Today’s movement in home design is very much one of balance. As a product of our economic times, we are seeing a shift away from the luxury-centered design that has dominated our industry in the past. Instead, we are rediscovering the appealing beauty of simplicity. The “must-have mentality” that drove consumers to crave the latest gadgets is being replaced by a desire for timeless products that are built to last. The lines are classic and flowing, the colors soft and subdued – particularly in the decorative plumbing and hardware arena.

Never was this design trend toward more evident than at the Architectural Digest Home Design Show held recently in New York City. More than 350 of the most distinguished brands in home design unveiled products that celebrated sophistication and understated elegance. There was an emphasis on transparent and ethereal surfaces like glass, along with shimmering finishes that reflect light and have interesting textures. Clean lines and gentle classic curves were celebrated, along with soft, iridescent colors and a vision of creating a personal wellness center to counterbalance the hectic lifestyles we all seem to live.

Bath Fixtures Go Classic

Tubs and showers, while becoming more streamlined and intimate, are still the undeniable focal points of the bathroom. Classic, one-piece freestanding tubs are favored over more complicated designs. Karen Edwards, noted author and designer, is a particular fan of the sculptural quality of stand-alone tubs, calling them “the hallmarks of an elegantly designed bath.”

As an accomplished design journalist and founder of her own design studio, Edwards has a keen appreciation of the pivotal importance of tub placement. She advises clients to make decisions carefully, such as positioning a tub in front of a window for architectural emphasis or arranging two tubs side-by-side.

“I recommend installations where the tub is framed within views of the bedroom, so that even when you don’t have the time for a long soak, its very presence at the end of your sightline is calming,” she said.

The trend of the bathroom as a sanctuary away from the pressures of the outside world continues to gain momentum. Even boutique hotels are challenging traditional layouts by including tubs in the bedroom or on the outdoor terrace, stated Fran Aukland, communications manager for London-based Victoria + Albert.

“Current economic conditions have meant that consumers are not just looking for a ‘now’ bath, but they are looking for a bath to last them a lifetime,” she said. When it comes to showers, Edwards has noticed a trend in clients wanting to scale down their oversized showers that feel “too locker room” into a more personal space. Even more modestly sized walk-in showers can still create a sense of retreat with the use of beautiful stone or recycled tile, rainfall showerheads and shower systems with multiple or hand-held sprayers.

Warm Satiny Finishes

Color trends are all about subtlety as understated and muted hues take center stage. Experts are predicting peaceful neutrals and soft pastels will be strong in the coming year. According to Laurie Pressman, Pantone v.p. of fashion, home and interiors, all shades of white will be a “core staple shade for 2013.” She also predicts a strong demand for “sheen” materials that have a worn, eroded or rusted look.

“The trend for custom finishes in hardware is like any other – it always inspires a counter-trend. I really like the shine of old-fashioned chrome,” Edwards said. “It has so much more to do with the simplified shape of faucets today. Rounded or squared, it’s as if we’re trying to take even the most traditional forms back to the pipe.”

Wellness Market Grows

As consumers look for quality kitchen and bath products, the face of showroom selling is dramatically changing. Leading showrooms are creating environments where customers can truly experience the products they are considering to buy. And why not? They are making an investment in their future.

Richmond Tile & Bath offers its customers a hands-on shopping experience, especially when it comes to wellness-themed products such as deep soaking tubs and steam showers. The firm has gone so far as to create private rooms where customers can “test drive” a massage air bath or the Vedana therapeutic care center.

Owner Tony Vanario believes the wellness trend will continue to grow and leaders in the industry need to foster and encourage emerging trends. “The health and wellness market is going to get much bigger,” he predicts. “The more people are exposed to it, the more likely they are to adopt it. Introducing the benefits of nurturing one’s mind, body and spirit by simply enhancing the capacity of their own bathroom is irresistible to the consumer. I am convinced that sharing awareness and knowledge will put the customer in a better position to make better choices.”

Theatrical Moves

A return to simplicity in design should never translate into boring design. Creating impact can mean using classic elements in unexpected ways. The best designers know how to utilize space, color and proportion to create a room with a sensational ‘wow’ factor. A great example is Italian art designer Alex Turco whose waterproof floor-to-ceiling art panels offer a whole new concept of art applied to interior design. His mixed-media panels add texture and color to any space without regard for temperature or humidity, from a kitchen backsplash to a shower wall.

BainUltra offers a new perspective on the tub – literally – with a dramatic new installation option known as Theatre Stage. The tub is elevated from its humble position on the floor to a dramatic platform that enhances its architectural beauty and focuses attention on the wellness benefits of therapeutic bathing. The concept is definitely generating some buzz with its fashion-forward spin on space planning.

Well-made products with classic lines never go out of style. Design teams from across the bath industry are re-discovering their roots creating new product lines blending the best of traditional and modern design. Consumers seem to appreciate this new approach and are eagerly responding to these trends that celebrate the art of living in simple, stress-free and beautiful surroundings.

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