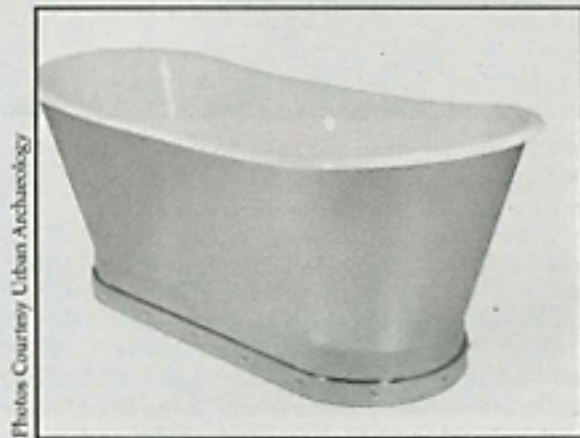


Dan's HOME Guide

Elegant Tubs and Showers for the Perfect Soak

By Karen Amster-Young

Taking the time to relax and enjoy a luxurious bath shower is, well...a luxury these days. We're all bombarded with busy schedules, which means that we rarely slow down to enjoy the ultimate bath or shower experience. There's nothing like a great shower or bath to end the day, start the day or escape reality. Of course, having the right



Mercer copper tub

"equipment" is the key to any successful endeavor. There are endless options available. And, despite the stories about the decline in home sales and home remodeling, it appears that people are still spending money on their bathrooms. It's quite simple: there has to be a place to go to truly escape all the nerve-racking economic news,

natural disasters, and hypocritical political figures. The bathroom is that place.

Timothy Kyle Blood, interior designer and this year's design director for the 2008 Hamptons Cottages and Gardens Idea House, explained to me that the green movement has infiltrated our bathroom designs and choices. "Many of my clients are building smaller homes that are environmentally-friendly," says Blood. "The huge spas and master baths of a few years ago are being replaced by smaller but still luxurious bathrooms. It's simply a waste of water to have a huge tub built for two people – people just don't use them." According to Blood this trend is not about economic realities, but rather an increased environmental awareness. Fancy body-jets and other water-wasters are on the decline – people are building elegant baths with smaller tubs and larger decks around the tub to fill the space in a more practical way. Forget about those big rain heads in showers, according to Blood, and buy water sensors instead. "The building industry is ahead of the design industry in terms of eco-friendly materials, but bathroom fixture manufacturers are quickly catching up. Of course, homeowners with 20,000 square foot homes are still installing elaborate bathrooms, but some are considering the ultimate luxury instead – at-home massage rooms. Go green but don't forget about relaxing and personal choice. Sounds right.

Gil Shapiro, owner of Urban Archaeology in Bridgehampton, is very passionate about his company and the bathroom options available at his



Mercer nickel polished tub

store. "Very few people do what we do in terms of design and materials," he said. "We also manufacture everything we sell." When I asked him what was new in terms of tubs and showers, he told me about Urban Archaeology's product line, and used phrases such as "Zen-like," "big" and "solid, soaking tubs." At first, Shapiro's statements seemed to counter Blood's take on trends, but when I looked further into Urban Archaeology's incredible product line, it all started coming together. Urban's Mercer Tub takes its inspiration from the freestanding tubs of the last century. The skirt or jacket is made of solid brass that will never rust; it is left unlaquered to patina naturally over time. The tub insert is a porcelain enameled cast-iron insert that is then wrapped in nickel, stainless

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steel or copper – Urban Archaeology's pride and joy. "Our marble tubs have been a continuous big seller for us," added Shapiro. "We sell three marble tubs a month." Austin Handler, an interior designer in Water Mill, does most of his business on the East End where he runs his company, Mabley Handler Interior Design, with his wife and partner, Jennifer Mabley. "It's all about relaxing out here," says Handler, "The soft colors I use are the most reflective of my client's desire to create a warm and soothing environment in their East End homes. The bathrooms I design are very Zen, very minimalist – all intended to elicit relax-

ation." When I asked Handler specifically about the best products on the market, he told me about Kohler WaterTiles, which provide the same functionality of side-jets for a spa-like shower but are built into the tiles. "Aesthetically they are pleasing to the eye since they don't stick out like traditional jets and bodysprays," explained Handler. According to Kohler, luxury showers with multiple spray angles are more popular than jetted tubs these days. Kohler's WaterTiles are brass 5" x 5" showerheads designed to blend in with the rest of the tiles. The company also recently introduced the WaterTile Rain ceiling panel, which

provides an overhead "downpour" experience.

Blackman in Southampton is another great place for a wide range of shower and bath fixtures. Showroom manager Joseph LaBua discussed the increasing popularity of Air tubs over whirlpools (Jacuzzis). "Air tubs give you a better, therapeutic bath that lasts longer," he explained. "There is more maintenance with whirlpools," he added. Luxury showering is big right now. Thermostatic showers (versus pressure-balanced showers) provide a luxury shower experience if you want maximum flow and volume control. They are also the environmentally correct choice according to the experts. LaBua is noticing many fiberglass and minimalist design choices. "European, stark white, chrome – that's what I am seeing right now," he added.

With the demand for better products, the options for luxury showering and bathing seem endless.