

The Return of Luxury Bathtubs

Despite technological advancements in shower system, it hasn't become a replacement of bathtubs, yet! In fact, bathtub has been able to carve a niche for itself. The old bathtubs, however, have given way to the newer fancy bathtubs which takes the bathing experience to the realm of a home spa system.

By Mrinmoy Dey

Focus

In the Indian context, there are two clear visible patterns as far as design of washrooms are concerned. First, in urban areas bathrooms are getting smaller due to space crunch and therefore the components and fittings are also being selected to make it compact with as less compromise as possible in terms of functionality. Secondly, in luxury projects like villas, bungalows, penthouses and more such high end properties bathrooms are getting larger and larger. The bathroom here acts as a showpiece, stepping into the realms of spa system.

Bathtub has long been associated with luxury. However, these two factors are defining the use of bathtubs and the selection of tubs or to do away with it completely. Elaborating on this, Behzad Kharas, CMD, The BNK Group says, "In urban space, only in the luxury/premium projects bathtubs are getting used prominently. For example, in a 4-BHK apartment, out of the 5 bathrooms maybe one will have a bathtub. In projects, where space constraint is the issue, we normally go for a bathtub which is fitted within masonry and not a free-standing bathtub which is more exquisite. However, in villas, the bathrooms are getting luxurious and they are becoming a space to showcase. In such high-end projects the trend of having those standalone fancy bathtubs is catching on. But there also, it is not applicable to all the bathrooms but one or maybe two of the bathrooms."

Showers – the challenger

The shower, though, is challenging the reign of the tub. The luxury walk-in showers have gained considerable popularity and are the go to option in projects with space constraints. New tech shower panels and shower cubicles are gradually replacing bathtubs and have now made possible the division of the wet and dry areas of bathrooms.

While cascade showers give a waterfall experience, rain

Photo Courtesy: Villeroy & Boch



Photo Courtesy: Chiraag Kapoor Architects

showerheads give the complete experience of rains. High tech showers today include steam jets, aromatherapy jets and have digital interface panels handing over the control of water, light, sound and steam to the users. Some also include accessories like towels on bar and massage functions while some are built for two people to have a shower at a time. Electric showers provide instant hot water independent of the central heating system, cutting down on costs.

LED lighting ceiling showers utilise a combination of chromotherapy and hydrotherapy – and the water sprinkles down from the lighting nozzles. Hand showers today come in various jet types which can be switched between, at the click of a button.

There are many things going in favour of the shower system like freeing up space, more varieties in

designs, accessories and functionalities, a lot quicker than bathtub when it comes to bathing and off course saving water.

Are bathtubs losing their charm?

Naturally it will occur that bathtubs are losing its charm in the face of technological advancements in the shower system. However, that is not the case. In fact, shower systems and bathtub have different purpose and cater to different needs.

Kharas opines, "The purpose of bathtubs cannot be fulfilled by showers. The feel of soaking in a bathtub is different from the feel of standing under the showers. Those people who like to have the feel of sitting and soaking in the warm water and relax, are the people who will be going for a bathtub. Kids love bathtubs with body jets fitted

inside the tub. So, there is a market for these types of products and advancements in shower technologies are not going make these products obsolete."

Rajesh Mehra, Director and Promoter of bath-fittings major Jaquar Group says, "Bathtubs are great for relaxing sore muscles, ideal for bathing small children and are available with plenty of special features such as air jets, whirlpool versions, etc. Today's bathtubs and showers are much more than functional; they can make a strong design statement. Whether you go with a freestanding tub, standalone shower or tub-and-shower combination, one has many options as far as style, colour and tile are concerned."

Agrees Nazario Menezes, Country Manager of Villeroy & Boch India, "Although we see a growing interest in luxury shower solutions, the bathtub still remains the showstopper of any luxury bathroom as it stands for pure wellness and relaxation."

"A bathtub and shower combination is a luxurious one, marrying the cleansing and convenient experience of a shower with the immersive, rejuvenating experience of a bathtub," opines Mark Bickerstaffe, Director - New Product Development, Kohler Kitchen & Bath EMEA and Asia



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Chiraag Kapoor
Founder & Principal Architect,
Chiraag Kapoor Architects



Rajesh Mehra
Director & Promoter,
Jaquar Group

Trends in bathtubs

Bathtubs are a wonderful way to relax and restore

equilibrium. The most trending are whirlpools, freestanding tubs, and Japanese soaking tub. Whirlpool is a self-contained, jetted tub that massages one's tired muscles and makes life easy and comfort by providing extreme relaxation.

Bathtubs these days are less likely to be placed in a corner where they fit into square footage. A freestanding tub goes well with any décor be it rustic or contemporary. One can choose desired shapes – rectangular, oval or something artistic. Customising freestanding bathtub with a faucet that reflects one's style is

a pretty good option. If space constraint is an issue, placing a freestanding tub within a shower is a worthy decision.

Japanese soaking tub is another trending bathtub nowadays. Japanese soaking tub is the main element of the space, wherein the tub is surrounded by glass-panelled doors. Also, one can opt for striking and artistic stone tubs to add elegance to the luxurious bathroom. With today's ever-changing bathtub styles, forget about that tub hidden behind a shower curtain and indulge in creating something creative and out of the box.

Pacific. Separating the shower from the bathtub can make a big difference in the way the bathing space comes to reality. Chiraag Kapoor, Founder and Principal Architect of Chennai-based Chiraag Kapoor Architects, says, "Having a bathtub is luxury. It's an epitome of relaxation. It helps one unwind after a day of hard work. The bathtub is for more than the act of mere bathing which is a regular routine activity for which you have the showers."

Advancements in bathtubs

Plain rectangular bathtubs have taken a backseat and the new trend is of whirlpool tubs with massage jets in various colours, shapes and sizes. 'Soaking tubs' which incorporate water agitation for massaging and aromatherapy helps in relieving stress through scents. Jacuzzis have become smarter in their looks. Some of the models offer a pressure control feature to adjust the angle and volume of water jet flow.

Even the bathtubs are getting technologically advanced, you have heated wall bathtubs, whirlpool bathtubs, the Jacuzzi which is like a spa system and then there are

two user tubs, 4 user tubs in addition to single user tubs, opines Kharas. He further adds, "Depending upon what aesthetics one wants, there are mosaic tubs, shoe shaped tub. There are lot of designs and varieties available in the market. So, it really depends upon what the client wants. If they want a very catchy style statement, then the standalone tubs are the way to go. If comfort and relaxation is what they are looking for then they opt for a tub with spa system."

From treatments like 'effervescence' that delivers tiny, champagne-like bubbles that envelop in a warm, sensory embrace or Whirlpools that deliver

powerful, directed massage to soothe sore muscles and help the body relax, there is a spectrum of experiences to choose from. Combining sound vibrations or chromotherapy treatments is a brand new way of getting a sensory experience, shares Bickerstaffe.

One can choose one or more hydrotherapy options that use air or sound to massage, soothe, invigorate or relax your body and your mind – all controlled at the touch of button. Add a heated back to keep you warm even longer. Technology allows one to turn what was just a bath into time focused on personal wellbeing.

Menezes shares, "We see a trend



“Advancements in shower technologies are not going make bathtubs obsolete”

Behzad Kharas
CMD, BNK Group



Photo Courtesy: Kohler India

for delicate shapes and freestanding bathtubs, especially in the premium range. Our new free-standing Quarryl bath Finion is a good example of this. In spite of the compact dimensions of 170 x 75 cm, it still has a generous internal surface, which is comparable to a traditional bath measuring 180 x 80 cm, and provides the best bathing experience."

He further adds that in terms of functionality bathtubs are getting smart. "We offer an array of optional light, colour and whirlpool solutions, as well as the bluetooth sound system 'ViSound' for most of our offerings."

Kapoor adds, "In bathtubs also there are so many things that have come up like you have a built-in music system, a TV. Then you have Jacuzzi with mood lighting which itself is based on colourtherapy. So,

bathtubs have also advanced quite a lot in terms of technologies and functionalities – from being a normal tank kind of thing to something which is more interactive. So, you have those functionalities like body jets,

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massages which are actually going towards a spa system.”

Today's bathing experiences run the gamut from extra-deep soaking tubs to air baths, which allow one to fully immerse in gently massaging bubbles. In fact, many of the bathing technologies, from whirlpool jets to chromatherapy, have made their way from destination spas into the home bath. Experiences such as the Kohler VibrAcoustic bath, which sends ambient, sound-wave vibrations through the water, offer what may be the ultimate in deep relaxation.

The use of whirlpools, which typically use powerful water jets to deeply penetrate one's shoulders, back, or neck where directed are increasing especially in the luxury washrooms. The new addition is the 'airbath' systems that a number of manufacturers are offering. In these, air channels deliver a steady flow of warm air bubbles that gently circulate to coax strain and stress from tired muscles. The effect is closer to an effervescent hot spring than the sometimes jarring effect of a jetted whirlpool.

Since the air blowers can be located in a space away from the tub, the systems are quieter, as well. The trends to watch out for The freestanding tub has become emblematic of the luxury

bathroom. For a long time the bathtub was up against a wall and boxed in, but having the bath freestanding makes it the sculptural element in the room and the tub's organic form softens the room's hard edges.

Talking about the trends in terms of shapes and sizes, Kapoor shares, "You have these built-in bathtubs, standalone bathtub; then you have the completely vintage looking ones. The selection of a particular type of bathtub in a project depends upon the space available. We have done a Jacuzzi even inside a 6x5 ft toilet and we also have done huge sink-in bathtub in 200 sq ft toilets." But whether to have a bathtub and how to use it is completely the occupant's call. "In one of our 200 sq ft project we have installed a standalone bathtub with a red lounge chaise beside it. Luxury is having a hot water Jacuzzi. True luxury is having a red lounge chaise to relax while the water gets warm."

On the trends to look out for, Kharas says, "Now you are getting round bathtubs, then we have bathtubs in the shape of women's shoe where the water flows from the heel and also have the shower system. Then there are outdoor tubs. The trend will be for smart bathtubs, which preset the temperature of the water and automatically fill the water in a tub at a certain time and temperature.

It will have some of the functionalities that are there in advanced shower systems by adding gadgets and gizmos."

Deep, free-standing soaking tubs are the go-to amenity for luxury

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washrooms for the wannabe spa washrooms. Although you can certainly soak in a bathtub, a soaking tub stands apart because it's not connected to a shower or even a wall. It's typically a luxury, free-standing vessel and it's designed to pamper. For a family with kids, a traditional tub with a shower makes sense. But for the master bathroom a freestanding soaking tub gives a design

statement as well as provide with the ultimate relaxation.

Tub materials range from high-density acrylic and fiberglass to volcanic limestone and resin, porcelain, concrete, enamelled cast iron, copper, stainless steel, marble, stone and more — with proportions of height, width and depth limited only by available square footage and budget.

It's no surprise today's luxury tubs take centre stage in luxury washroom projects. It's an indication of the importance of relaxation in our lives. While small bathrooms certainly make it difficult, there are special drop-in and freestanding tubs in the market designed for smaller bathrooms. In average sized bathrooms, one can increase the physical space and the perception of space with the right choice of products. Consider replacing old tub with a corner-walled model to help open up sightlines and make the bathroom look more expansive.

What's more, the bathtubs are also being used in outdoor and even bedrooms. A beautiful bath tub can also become a part of an open bedroom today with flowers and candles that create a relaxing environment. Increasingly the bedroom is also becoming a part of the spa systems with sauna, tubs etc. This is an international concept which is also catching on in India.



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Mark Bickerstaffe
Director - New Product Development,
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