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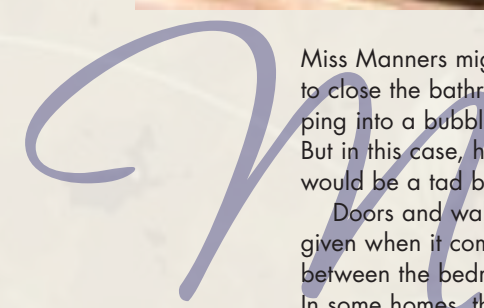
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By Michelle Taute, CTW Features

# HOME

DÉCOR / DESIGN / REDO

## SPA BATHS Bathrooms Without Borders



Miss Manners might tell you it's rude not to close the bathroom door before slipping into a bubble bath for a long soak. But in this case, her well-meaning advice would be a tad behind the times.

Doors and walls are no longer a given when it comes to the dividing line between the bedroom and bathroom. In some homes, these two spaces are merging to create the perfect spot to unwind after a long day at work. The

new master suite brings spa features home – and right into the bedroom.

So let's get back to that hot bath. After adjusting to the water, you could have a conversation with your spouse as he or she watches TV in bed. No shouting required. Don't feel like talking? Just tune into your favorite show on the TV near the tub.

If this sounds like a vacation at an upscale resort, there's good reason.



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First page: 'It's kind of like a car wash': A master suite may feature a shower with enough room for two and enough showerheads for six. Photo by Moen. Above: Beyond bed and bath: Inspired by the hospitality industry, master suites are becoming one open space with luxurious amenities like heated floors in the bathroom and a TV by the tub. Photograph by Peter Rymwid; designed by Holly Rickert.

"The hospitality industry is having a huge influence on what people want in their personal bathrooms," says Alan Hilsabeck Jr., a designer at Premier Kitchens & Baths. "People will say, 'I just got back from the W Hotel and I want my master suite to mimic what I saw.'"

This means waving goodbye to the lonely showerhead and featureless tub. While amenities vary as widely as tastes and budgets, a typical master suite includes an oversized shower, fancy tub, and his and hers vanities. Add-ons range from morning kitchens and workout rooms to seating areas with upholstered furniture.

Often, the shower is big enough for two, and there's a wide range of choices for water delivery, including dual showerheads, hand showers, overhead rainfall heads or a full-body spray. "There might be six nozzles shooting out at you from different heights," says Lori Carroll, an interior designer at Lori Carroll and Associates. "It's kind of

like a car wash."

When it comes to tubs, there's a trend toward bubbler models over whirlpool versions. The former can be more relaxing with warm air bubbles that rise from the bottom of the tub, creating a more calming experience than powerful jets. For the visually inclined, there are chromatherapy tubs with soothing, colorful lights built-in to brighten up the water. Bathers can choose their favorite hue or let the tub automatically cycle through a rainbow of choices.

While spa and luxury features are one of the strongest trends in bathrooms, there's more of a mixed response to open floor plans. Hilsabeck says homeowners who fully embrace the concept might use the tub or vanities as the transition between bedroom and bath. The shower typically offers partial privacy while the toilet resides behind a partition or in its own small room. "I would definitely say there's less modesty for the society

as a whole," he says. "Look at the entertainment industry. What used to be R is PG-13." In some cases, however, there's still a need for seclusion. Designer Holly Rickert says one factor is a couple's age. Families with young children, for example, may want to stick with a door in order to create much-needed private space.

Where you live also may influence whether you want to start tearing down doors and walls. "We don't see as much of the open plan in the Midwest," says Lynn Schrage, a designer and marketing manager at The Kohler Store in Chicago. "Part of the reason is the climate. It's hard to stay warm six months out of the year when you're showering."

Luckily, it's not an all or nothing proposition. In some cases, there's simply an open passageway between the bedroom and bathroom. Other homeowners opt for half-walls or even French doors with frosted glass. "Visually you're





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disconnected, but there's still light transfer," Rickert says about the latter option.

But open or closed, bathrooms are growing in size and now feature almost every perk imaginable. One of Rickert's clients opted for a large waterfall within the shower for ambiance rather than bathing. Water runs down a copper face, into a trough and then re-circulates. It provides a focal point while showering or pleasant background noise while standing at the sink.

Other upgrades include heated floors, flat-screen TVs and sound systems. To increase the comfort level even more, some homeowners choose to add sofas, chairs or benches in the bathroom. Carroll

usually opts for vinyl fabric to stand up against water.

Then there are more specialized touches. Schrage has seen homeowners add meditation or relaxation rooms, separate makeup areas and even enclosed showers that double as steam rooms. For the fitness minded, a small workout room with a maximum of three or four pieces of equipment can be incorporated. Those who want sustenance without trekking across the house add morning kitchens, with coffee makers, small refrigerators and sometimes even another small sink.

Think you may need an upgrade of your own? Before you start buying fixtures, Hilsabeck says it's

important to make sure your house can handle the water needs of those new products. A plumber or designer can make sure you've got the pipes and water pressure necessary to handle special tub and shower features.

His other advice: Choose a design professional who specializes in bathrooms. They'll have a better handle on what's available and know how to solve any bathroom-specific challenges. He also recommends heading to your designer's office with pictures from your favorite home-design magazines in hand. They'll give the designer a good feel for your style and preferences – and you'll be happier with the finished product. ✨