

Bathroom bliss

After kitchens, ensuite retreat is next biggest trend

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POSTMEDIA NEWS

The tiny private water closet first designed by Britain's John Harington in the 16th century has morphed into a sunny, communal affair that includes huge showers, body sprays, steam, curvaceous tubs, heated tiles and the occasional fireplace.

The emergence of the private home spa may cut into business at popular retreats, says designer Nathan Kyle of Astro Design Centre in Ottawa.

But get ready to pay for the luxury, with limestone tubs hitting \$5,400 and premium, oversized steam showers costing \$11,000.

The ensuite, that bathroom retreat attached to the master bedroom, has become the next hot design button after the kitchen, says Ernst Hupel, co-owner of 2H Interior Design in Ottawa, who designed a wonderfully decadent bathroom for a couple and their four young children.

"It's all about healthy living," he says.

The ensuite features a curved, free-standing tub set into an alcove surrounded by windows, and a delicate shell-encrusted chandelier that Hupel found in Texas.

There is an oversized shower, and the wall-mounted toilet is tucked into a separate water closet. John Harington would most certainly approve.

The design, says Hupel, is about creating a quiet living space, a room where you can gather your thoughts



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Designed as a contemporary spin on a spa-like retreat, this ensuite is anchored by a Victoria + Albert Ravello soaker tub.

between brushing teeth and showering and before heading off into the busy fray of the day.

Hupel also recently renovated the ensuite in his Victorian heritage home in downtown Ottawa. Because space was tight, he opted for an oversized shower with multiple heads; there's still a tub in his daughters' bathroom.

"I love going in there, and there is a moment before preparing lunches that I just gather my thoughts, and then I can open the door and get ready for the chaos beyond."

It's not always women demanding the tubs, says Chuck Mills, owner of Chuck Mills Residential Design & Development in Ottawa.

He says free-standing tubs are taking over from corner tubs, yet many clients rarely use them, buying them for the resale value. And he's seeing an increase in the percentage of clients completely dropping the tub from the ensuite, instead dedicating the space to an oversized shower.

"Sixty per cent of the ensuite I design do not have tubs, yet it's also a question of space. If you have the space, there is a tub."

Julie and Denis Staples both got their perfect ensuite after building a new home on the site of his childhood home in Ottawa.

He loves the shower, turning on the rain head and two extra jets, while she has a fast bath in the morning.