

RESIDENTIAL BUILDING

AUGUST 2013

PRODUCTS

AND TECHNOLOGY

**INSIDE
TRENDS**
GLASS WALLS

NEWS
WINDOWS, DOORS
SEE STRONG
GROWTH

**PROJECT
OF THE MONTH**
AN AUSTIN HOUSE
INSPIRED BY HILL
COUNTRY

PRODUCT REVIEW
HAVE ELECTRONIC
FAUCETS ARRIVED?



WINDOW & DOOR ISSUE

Super Soakers

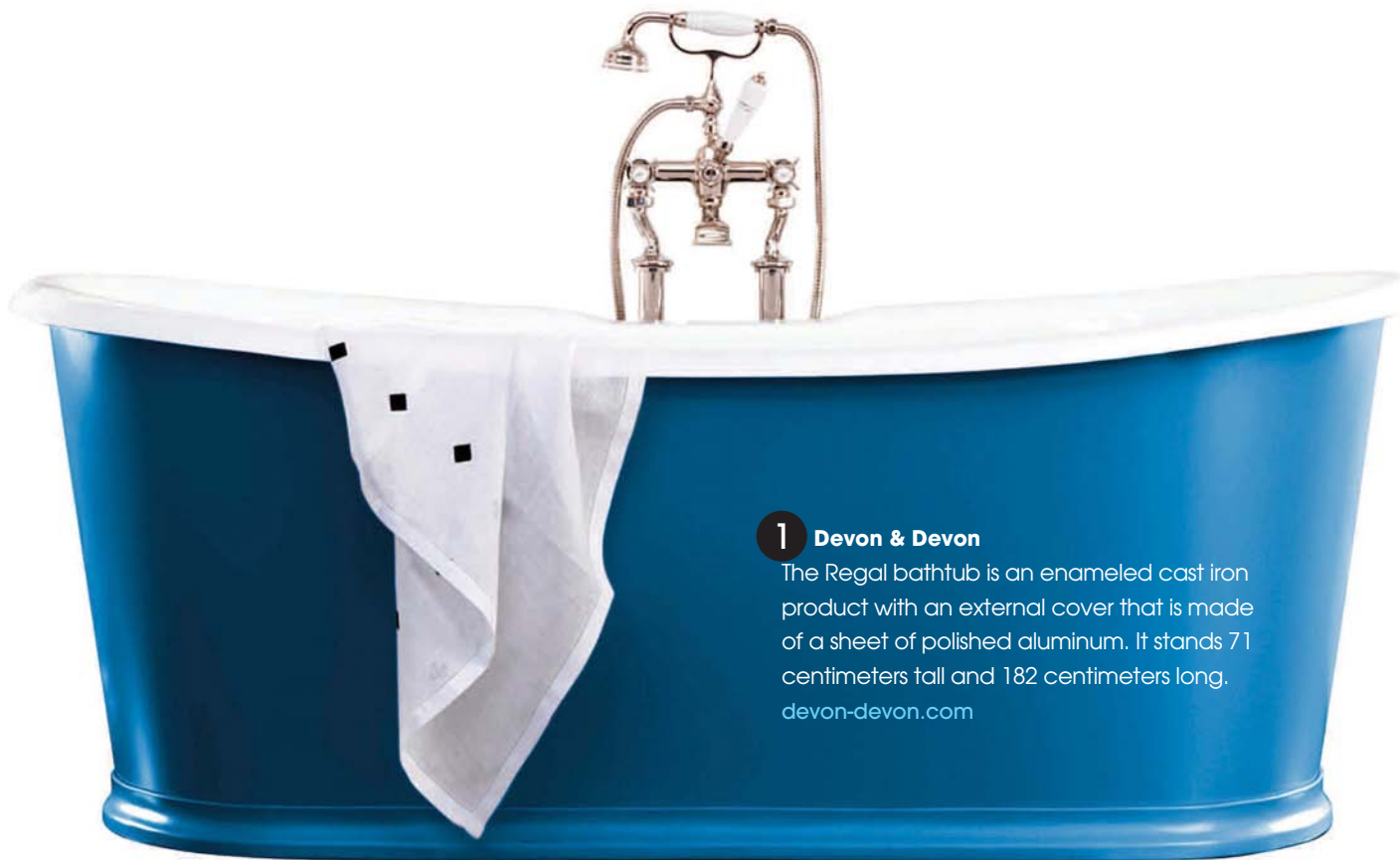
The coolest tub of the moment stands alone.

Nigel F. Maynard

When Janice Ryan-Arnold and her husband, Theo, renovated their Lanham, Md., house in 2004, they were enthusiastic about a whirlpool tub. Images of lounging in invigorating bubbles danced in their heads. They had planned to use it frequently. Fast-forward to 2013: The tub hasn't been touched in years.

Once upon a time, a whirlpool tub was the bath item du jour. It was among the features that sellers thought they had to have, and one that made home buyers excited. But these days the freestanding soaking tub is hot; the whirlpool is not.

"We've seen a growth in consumer interest in freestanding baths recently," said Rebecca Seiler, bathing product manager for Kohler, Wis.-based Kohler (kohler.com). "Homeowners are building or remodeling bathrooms to be more of a retreat and really like the idea of having a centerpiece to tie the entire space together. A stand-alone bath is perfect for just that."



1 Devon & Devon

The Regal bathtub is an enameled cast iron product with an external cover that is made of a sheet of polished aluminum. It stands 71 centimeters tall and 182 centimeters long. devon-devon.com

In the 2010 National Kitchen & Bath Association (nkba.org) trend report, 52% of designers said they had specified jetted tubs in their projects; in 2013 the number had fallen to 31%. By contrast, 51% of respondents said they specified freestanding soaking tubs in their projects.

"Freestanding tubs could be considered almost the norm, creating a focal point of near sculptural quality," the Hackettstown, N.J.-based NKBA said. "Rounded, rectangular and angled tubs are specified as an artistic accent that also provides a soothing soak. Whether situated on stones, wood flooring or a low stage of sorts, the freestanding soaking tub is an integral part of many master or main bathrooms."

Because soaking tubs don't have to be tethered to the wall, the products can assume more sculptural shapes and be located anywhere in the bath. They come in all manner of materials — copper, stainless steel, stone — and in a variety of sizes, so there are products to suit any taste.

"No longer overshadowed by showers or constrained by bulky tile surrounds, the freestanding bath steps up to be the sculptural focal point of the bath," said United Kingdom-based bath products manufacturer Victoria + Albert (vandabaths.com). "Soakers are enjoying a renewed popularity as homeowners and designers rediscover this classic bathroom mainstay and the value it brings to a home."

Designer Leslie Fine is a huge fan of the product. She likes it because it "is a low-tech, high quality-of-life amenity that can be used on a daily basis," said the president of

Boston-based Leslie Fine Interiors (lesliefineinteriors.com).

Fine, who uses her own soaking tub "every evening," said soaking tubs are generally less expensive than jetted tubs and require less labor to install. In addition, "a jetted tub requires an accessible place for the motor, and not all bathrooms are set up to accommodate this," she explained.

Jetted tubs come with built-in issues — they can be pricey and require monthly cleaning to help prevent bacterial buildup. A freestanding tub has mainly one, but it is an important one.

"The only design constraint is based on the footprint of the bathroom space," Fine said. "Since a soaking tub tends to be deeper than a regular tub, it's usually not functional to combine a tub and shower. Therefore, there needs to be adequate space in the bathroom for both a tub and a shower."

There are many options on the market and from manufacturers, such as Kohler (kohler.com), Devon & Devon (devon-devon.com), Stone Forest (stoneforest.com), WetStyle (wetstyle.ca), Duravit (duravit.us), Laufen (us.laufen.com), Diamond Spas (diamondspas.com) and many others.

2 Diamond Spas

The company offers custom made Japanese soaking tubs from stainless steel or copper and in five styles. Products may also be modified to suit consumers' tastes.

diamondspas.com

“
The only design constraint is based on the footprint of the bathroom space.”

Designer Leslie Fine

So what should you and your clients remember when looking for a soaking tub? Perhaps the first consideration is whether or not your bathroom is big enough. Other things to look for: Will the tub be freestanding or mounted in a deck? Will it accommodate one or two people? What material should you choose? You should also think about comfort. "Get in the tub in a showroom and make sure that it is comfortable for your body," Fine recommended.

And if you're concerned that the soaking tub will become passe, Fine said this: "People have been bathing in one way or another since the beginning of time, so I definitely do not see a soaking tub as a passing fad."

CONTINUED



3. Kohler

Designed for the modernist, the Stargaze is an acrylic tub that is priced for budget-conscious homeowners. It comes in two sizes (66 ins. by 36 ins. and 72 ins. by 36 ins.) and two colors, white and biscuit. kohler.com

4. Duravit USA

Deigned by Philippe Starck, the Starck X soaking bathtub is made from 1/8-in. acrylic and features chrome trim. It measures almost 92 ins. long and 24 ins. deep. It comes in white. duravit.us

5. Victoria + Albert

Made from a volcanic limestone composite called ENGLISHCAST, the Drayton tub looks like an old timey soaking tub from the Victorian era, but it has updated ergonomics for comfort. It measures almost 67 ins. long. vandabaths.com

6. Villeroy & Boch

The rectangular-shaped freestanding La Belle bath is the perfect place to pause and let go of everyday life, the company said. Made from a 60% quartz resin that is highly slip resistant, it measures almost 71 ins. long and 31½ ins. wide. villeroy-boch.com

