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Loo with A view

Sexy Bathrooms; This trend is more about voyeurism than spa qualities

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Forget about the spa influence on bathroom design. The latest ideas are more turn on than tune out.

"I consider my bathroom cool -- and sexy," says real estate agent Kathy Monahan of her newly designed space. "And it's not that fully romantic, bubble bath, rose petals and candles thing that I mean, either. There's a real tactile appeal to the materials and colours." Ms. Monahan is a client of Toronto-based interior designer Shelley Kirsch.

"A tone-on-tone approach to a bathroom makes it sexy," says Ms. Kirsch. "Colours should relate tonally without high contrast. Materials should have some difference in their finishes. If everything is too matte, for example, the room will feel heavy." And heavy is definitely not sexy.

Let's stray from the practical for a moment, and look at it from a pleasure point of view. In popular culture, film has long been a champion of the WC as a place for a sexy plot twist. From Brando's controversial bathtub scene in *Last Tango in Paris*, to a half-dressed Matt Damon slowly snipping Franka Potente's locks in *The Bourne Identity* as a prelude to a tryst, to *Casino Royale*, where we spy Eva Green -- fully dressed -- with a tuxedoed Daniel Craig in a shower built for two while water streams down its see-through walls. OK, so Ms. Green's character was having a meltdown after watching Bond do his dirty work in the name of Queen and country, but there was just something so voyeuristic about it all. Sexy? Absolutely.

Employing a certain amount of exposure adds to the seductive nature. "I think people like the idea of seeing the space around them versus being cloistered behind a shower curtain," says Ms. Kirsch. "Having a glass-walled shower, with a privacy lock on your entry door, gives you the best of both worlds."

Jessika Helps, vice-president at Carey Mudford Interior Design in Toronto, agrees. "You can put a shower next to a window -- it sounds crazy -- but as the shower steams, the window fogs up, creating an opaque barrier from the outside world," she says. "Or use textured glass to create semi transparent divides in the space."

Paolo Palamara, co-president of Diamante Development, is one of the designing minds behind the Florian condominium project in Toronto's Yorkville district. Mr. Palamara and his wife, Laura Rocca, take me for a tour.

"In the master ensuite, the two-person tub becomes the focal point," he says. "It's centred in the room, but also centred to the entrance, so it is clearly visible from the bedroom, as is the glass shower enclosure behind it." The tub is soaker deep and softly rounded at both ends to envelope bathers -- a balance of sensual curves and clean lines.

"It's a mysterious appeal of knowing what's going on," says Ms. Helps, "but not being able to see the whole picture."

Ms. Rocca equates it to Italian sex symbols like Sophia Loren or Monica Bellucci. "It's not an in-your-face sexuality. There's something left to be desired; there's a discreteness, something hidden and waiting to be revealed," she says.

The toilet and bidet space in the Florian model is also surrounded by glass, but it's sandblasted with alternating wide, vertically etched opaque stripes and sheer pinstripes. Private, yet at the same time, creating an element of intrigue.

"Bathrooms are sexy in general because that's where you are naked," says Ms. Helps. "No one talks about it, but everyone knows it."

As for discrete, Quebec-based Julien Home Refinements recently introduced the BenchToilet, designed by Troy Adams, where the bowl is hidden inside bench seating. Slide back the wood-panel top for the reveal.

But it's about servicing all the senses that help make the bath the sexiest room in the house. Materials definitely add to the sensory experience, says Ms. Helps. "Because your body touches a lot of the hard finishes, it's important that they appeal to our tactile senses as well as our visual ones. Textured tiles, polished marbles, ergonomic lever handles, all add to the experience."

A clutter-free space is another element of attraction. "Having enough room for everything to have a place is very sexy," says Ms. Kirsch.

Mr. Palamara, Ms. Kirsch and Ms. Helps all cite lacquer cabinetry as hot and functional. "The high-gloss finish adds a real sensual quality to the cabinetry by having that wet look," notes Ms. Helps. Faucets and fixtures are high-shine and sleek, not clunky and distracting. Dark-toned hard woods, that also have texture and add richness, says Mr. Palamara. And textured wallpaper lends a tailored feeling, like a sexy couture suit.

Aha. Perhaps that's what's truly sexy: having this room designed to fit how we, individually, enjoy our bathrooms. "We're not bath people, but shower people, so we got rid of the tub, and this bathroom is now tailored to how we live," says Ms. Monahan. For the strategically placed multiple showerheads, Ms. Kirsch had her clients stand in the enclosure before the plumbing was completed and measured where the jets should go. "And the bathroom floor is heated -- we have it on all the time."

At the Florian, the use of tile jets vertically mounted on the shower wall can be programmed for water temperature preferences and provide angled water massage. And don't forget the mood lighting. The tiles also feature programmable LEDs in colours for a private light show, as well as an MP3 player for the soundtrack to your bathing rituals.

"The clients who let me go all the way with their bathrooms are usually a stylish, adventurous, outgoing breed - - or the bachelors," admits Ms. Helps. "Having a hot bathroom is like having a hot car --it's luxury."

LOVE IN THE PRIVY

Designer Jessika Helps's Top 10 to a sexy bathroom:

-Lacquered cabinetry

-Wall-mounted faucets

-Wall-mounted, tankless toilet such as the Starck toilet

-Floating vanities

-Mood lighting: puck lights under vanities, fibre optic lighting in showers "for a real sexy music video look"

-Mirror placement

-Vibrant paint colours

-Slick, continuous designs (for example, tub deck material that doubles as a shower bench, all in one full slab of material at the same height)

-Maximum amount of glass in the shower

-Daring artwork

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