

Home Spas That Rival Those in Big Hotels

By Candace
Taylor

As more people consider spa treatments essential to health and well-being, private, in-home spas are becoming more common – and more luxurious – than ever before. Photo: Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal

Dec. 3, 2015 9:53 a.m. ET

Patti Wheeler loves to organize spa weekends at her 18,000-square-foot home in Snowmass, Colo. In addition to a gym and an indoor-outdoor swimming pool, her spa includes a steam shower that accommodates about 10 people, a vitamin D infusion booth, a chromotherapy tub whose water turns an array of colors, and equipment for microcurrent, microderm and oxygen facials.

During a high-school graduation party she threw for her twin sons, “we had five massage tables set up,” said Ms. Wheeler, a 59-year-old children’s book author. She estimated that she spent over \$10,000 on the chromotherapy tub and vitamin D booth alone, though she’s not sure of the total cost of the spa.

Related Reading

[Saunas and hot tubs](#) have long been fixtures in high-end homes and in the common areas of large condominiums. But as more people consider spa treatments essential to health and well-being—as well as a fun way to entertain guests—wealthy homeowners are willing to pay a large premium to access the whole menu at home. Private, in-home spas with [specialized features like massage rooms](#), pedicure chairs and hammams are becoming more common, spacious and luxurious.

Michele Pelafas heads an interior design and furniture manufacturing company that specializes in salons and spas. While most of her business is for commercial facilities, in recent years she said she’s noticed more homeowners installing specialized spa equipment, such as pedicure chairs, in their homes, especially in pricey home markets like Miami, Las Vegas and New York City. She said the cost of creating a private spa ranges from \$125 a square foot—roughly double the cost of a regular bathroom—to \$400 a square foot, depending on the quality of the equipment.

She traces the origins of the trend to high-end hotels, where [luxurious spas started appearing](#) about 15 years ago. Today, spa services have become “a must-have in hotels,” she said. After being exposed to these services while traveling, many homeowners are now aiming to recreate those experiences at home.

Advertisement

After selling their consulting business, Bob Harding, 67, and his wife Connie, 57, visited spas around the world. When they began gut-renovating their McLean, Va. home in 2011, they decided to add a couple’s massage room. “What started us was simply pointing at things and saying, ‘wouldn’t that be neat to have in the house?’” recalled Mr. Harding.

The massage room opens to a secluded sitting area—which the couple calls “the Zen area”—with a Jacuzzi and firepit. The lower level also has a gym, sauna and steam shower. Before outfitting the massage room, they visited local spas to research which equipment to buy, he said, such as two electric massage tables that move up and down, and proper stools for massage therapists to sit on. The cabinets have heaters for towels and hot stones used in massage. To give the space a cozy feel, there is a linear gas fireplace and indirect, dimmable lighting. They also stock their own massage oil and eye pillows.

“It’s designed so the massage therapist brings nothing,” Mr. Harding said. “Everything that touches you is your own.”

That idea appealed to Eric Sobel, 26, who is in contract to purchase a townhouse unit at the under-construction 11 Beach Street in Manhattan for \$9.95 million. Mr. Sobel, an investor, said he was attracted to the unit in part because it has a private sauna, steam room and indoor swimming pool. The building where he currently lives has a sauna in it, he said, but he rarely uses it because of the lack of privacy. “The idea of walking through common spaces in a robe takes away from the experience,” he said.

Hotel-Worthy Spas in Luxury Homes

Check out the steam rooms and hot tubs of these residential spas in the Hamptons and Homer Glen, Ill.

1 of 19 *fullscreen*

The spa at Patti Wheeler’s home in Snowmass, Colo. She has a chromotherapy tub and equipment for microcurrent, microderm and oxygen facials. *Douglas Elliman Real Estate*

Interior designers William Cummings and Bernt Heiberg converted a garage at their Hamptons home into a 650-square-foot spa with a wood-burning fireplace. Mr. Heiberg is originally from Norway, and Mr. Cummings spent 10 years living there, during which time he said he was charmed by Norwegian spa culture. “There are local spas where people go and ...

The spa has a kitchenette, which they use to prepare fondue for friends when they come over for spa parties. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The spa has a “cabinlike” ambience, with knotty pine walls stained a dark ebony. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The sauna. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

They surrounded the spa and swimming pool with boxwood hedges to separate the area from the rest of the property. “We wanted to create sort of an oasis,” Mr. Cummings said. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The steam room—a space they call the “Caldarium”—has two showers, one indoor and one outdoor. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The steam room. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

They purchased the Sag Harbor property in 2014 and gut-renovated the three-bedroom house as well as the garage. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

Bernt Heiberg (left) and William Cummings with their dog Flink. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

An eight-person indoor hot tub at Jeff Fagen’s Hamptons home. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

Mr. Fagen’s sauna. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The massage room. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The yoga room. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The roughly 23-acre property is now on the market for \$39 million with Dana Trotter of Sotheby’s International Realty. *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

The Homer Glen, Ill. home of Joe and Kimberly Keane, which has a gym and spa. Ms. Keane said her hockey-playing sons often use the spa before or after working out. *Bob Stefko for The Wall Street Journal*

The sauna and steam room in the Keanes' home. *Bob Stefko for The Wall Street Journal*

The family's steam room. *Bob Stefko for The Wall Street Journal*

The Manhattan townhouse of Ukrainian-born billionaire Alexander Rovt has a basement spa area inspired by Turkish baths. The walls are decorated with hand-painted designs, and a hot-tub spills into a pool. *Ben Fitchett*

The spa at Patti Wheeler's home in Snowmass, Colo. She has a chromotherapy tub and equipment for microcurrent, microderm and oxygen facials. *Douglas Elliman Real Estate*

Interior designers William Cummings and Bernt Heiberg converted a garage at their Hamptons home into a 650-square-foot spa with a wood-burning fireplace. Mr. Heiberg is originally from Norway, and Mr. Cummings spent 10 years living there, during which time he said he was charmed by Norwegian spa culture. "There are local spas where people go and spend a whole Sunday," he said. "You go with friends and relax." *Dorothy Hong for The Wall Street Journal*

At the high-end, the expense of building a home spa can rival the cost of buying an entire home. Interior designers William Cummings and Bernt Heiberg decided to convert a garage at their Hamptons home into a 650-square-foot spa with a sauna and steam room. But to turn the outbuilding into a spa, they had to run electricity and plumbing to the structure, which is about 40 feet from the main house.

The couple, who run Heiberg Cummings Design, with offices in New York and Oslo, created a spa with a "cabinlike" ambience, with a wood-burning fireplace and knotty pine walls stained a dark ebony. The steam room—a space they call the "Caldarium"—has two showers, one indoor and one outdoor, "so you can go directly outside and take a shower and cool down," then jump in the pool, Mr. Cummings said. A cabinet is specially designed to store the massage table, and the bluestone floor is heated to keep feet warm between treatments.

The spa also has a kitchenette, which they've been using to prepare fondue for their friends when they come over for spa parties.

The price for the total project? About \$300,000. And Mr. Cummings said it usually costs about \$150 to \$250 per hour for a masseuse to come to the house.

Jeff Fagen's Hamptons home has a massage room, an eight-person indoor hot tub, a sauna and steam room, as well as a gym and yoga room. When he bought the house in 2009 from a spec builder, the spa features "were a big part of the attraction," said Mr. Fagen, 46, founder of the apparel company Panda Diplomacy.

After buying the house, he and his wife Isabel made some enhancements to the spa. They put state-of-the-art equipment in the gym, added an aromatherapy feature to the steam room, and replaced the massage table with a heated one. "When you want to pamper yourself, these little amenities are fun," he said.

Mr. Fagen paid \$12.5 million for the house and surrounding 8 acres, then later added about 14 acres to the estate. The property is now on the market for \$39 million with Dana Trotter of Sotheby's International Realty.

Resort-style amenities aren't for everyone. Real-estate agents said some home buyers don't want the hassle of maintaining them. Spa features require regular cleaning and servicing, and steam rooms and hot tubs require proper ventilation to prevent damage from the humidity, said Chip Gruver of Gruver Cooley, a general contractor and home builder who did the Hardings' renovation. He said some homes have special exhaust features to ensure proper evacuation of moisture.

The Manhattan townhouse of Ukrainian-born billionaire Alexander Rovt has a basement spa area inspired by a

Turkish bath. The roughly 1,800-square-foot spa area has a separate filtration system so that the rest of the East 63rd Street house doesn't smell like chlorine, said real-estate agent Matthew Lesser of Leslie J. Garfield Real Estate, who has listed the house in the past. Inside the blue-tiled space, where the walls are adorned with hand-painted designs, a hot-tub spills into a pool. A flat-screen TV is on the wall and there is a refrigerator for refreshments. A gym looks onto the pool, and a sauna and steam shower are steps away.

The house was completed around 2011, but Mr. Rovt decided to buy a [larger townhouse on East 68th Street](#), said Mr. Lesser, who represented him in the purchase. The larger house is being renovated and will also have a Turkish bath-style spa, this one about twice the size, Mr. Rovt said. The 63rd Street house, meanwhile, has been on and off the market, most recently for \$21.5 million.

Practical considerations scaled down Joe and Kimberly Keane's plans. They had wanted to put a sunken hot tub in the spa area of their Homer Glen, Ill. home, which also has a sauna and steam room. The Keanes changed their minds after being warned by a plumber that the hot tub could be "a nightmare" if it leaked, because of the difficulty of accessing the mechanicals, Ms. Keane said.

"It's one thing for a spa to do that—it's another thing for a home," she added.

They instead use the space outside the sauna and steam room as a sitting area, with hooks for towels and robes, and put a whirlpool tub in the master bath. The house also has an outdoor hot tub near the swimming pool.

Ms. Keane said her four hockey-playing sons frequently use the sauna to warm up before workouts or to ease sore muscles, she said. Her husband, meanwhile, uses the sauna at night to help him sleep.

The Keanes recently put the house on the market for \$3.75 million, and real-estate agent Michael LaFido featured the steam room prominently in a marketing video he made for the house. "It's a very unique feature," said Mr. LaFido, of Conlon/Christie's International Real Estate.