

Breakout Session: Spa Design Around the World - What's on the Drawing Board?

Monday, May 21st

11:45AM – 1:00PM

Beekman Suite

Scribe: Mariana Pires

Moderator: **Anna Bjurstam**, Managing Director, Raison d'Etire, Sweden

Panelists:

Katharina Braun, General Manager, Deckelmann Wellness Hong Kong Ltd., Hong Kong

Clodagh, CEO, Clodagh Design, New York

Cary Collier, Principal, Blu Spas Inc / Collier and Collier Spas, Montana

Robert D. Henry, Principal, Robert D. Henry Architects, New York

Contributors:

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People visit spas for the ambience, professionalism and quality of the treatments being provided. Urban spa goers want immediate relaxation and tranquility when entering a spa. Hence, it is important to have an adequate design, not complicated at all, stress-free for the customer. How? By designing with a purpose according to the concept. This means we must know what type of spa we are designing.

Just like we learned with Peter Yesawich this morning, the various consumer drivers are what prompted this discussion. Some of the current design trends should match what consumers are looking for at this moment, and according to an article in the NY Times these drivers are: flow, empathy, love, goal-setting, pleasure, wellness, happiness, etc. There is an example given by Architect Robert Henry regarding a Spa residence built for someone who wanted to “live the walk”, instead of “walking the talk”. This residence has a massage pavilion in the center of the pool, and many family and social activities at the lower level. There is a master spa suite for the parents, where this more private domain is looking over a full spa and wellness program. These architects also incorporated green sensibilities, working with sun angles, allowing the sun enter in the winter time. Sustainable materials, glues, and carpets were also used. Therefore, the owners brought all these concepts together and were living it day by day.

Canyon Ranch Living in Chicago, Illinois is another example of how sixty-eight stories can be integrated in urban centers only with a full sense of integration. All the elements, from the spa, the restaurant, the healthy café, must be very well connected and integrated in terms of concept and design. You must dig deep into how to make this different and special. The restaurants: make them vivid, and energizing. The sixteenth floor has a sky lobby, for example, that is blue, where you cross a glass bridge and have water elements that gently smooth the ambience. These also increase the warmth, views, light, and by the moment you check in you have gone through a transformation. The rooms are also essential. You can't just have an experiential shower, but you must try to reshape all the idea of how rooms should be designed and make them warmer, with more involvement. Create an experience, even if it is for a short (weekend) period.

At Deckelmann Wellness Hong Kong, there is a high level of expertise in wet area design. It is important to understand the past history of spas to fully see what spas in the future will be. For this, we must remember how seventy percent of our body is water, and how this is also found in the planet's constitution. Our body, when we are young, had good skin and energy. When we grow up we use make up and we care about our wrinkles. Something is happening to our body during the journey of life.

We have to protect and keep our body. The spas of the future should try to find the fountain of youth - never done before. Could spa be the secret to this? Could it be the positive influence of our future? SPA comes from our origins, five hundred years B.C., when China, Egypt, and Greece were aware of the possibilities of water. Hypothermia was analyzed and they found the ability to increase body temperature to cause health. We could cure with fever, and this was the main base for the therapies at that time. In areas like Rome, artificial temperature was used to create health, and the thermal areas evolved to provide, teach, and communicate these benefits. It was also a community place, where people could meet for different things: there were meeting rooms, libraries, fitness areas, etc. This became a true lifestyle.

Hence, wellbeing through water is the key. Water can, nevertheless, be used in different forms: liquid, ice, steam, and not just thermal. We must strive to combine the past knowledge about how to use water and find a balance for the future, not only with design.

So the question is: do we use the knowledge from the past in spa design?

Now more technology can be used, and architects and designers can build new lifestyles through the various virtues of water. WE can implement rituals, and get to a point of true wellbeing through water. The target is therefore the human being and the secret relies on the depths of the human organism. The concepts of nowadays should find the balance of it.

Cary Collier brought us the concept of “spa spheres”, influenced by his children. Here, globes and aquariums give us the idea that the pod (bubble) transfers you into to another sphere, where you can enter another natural environment: a waterfall, a rainforest, etc. In the sphere the treatments are available, and laundry can go in and out of there, for example. These come in different shapes and sizes; and you can experience different things one you’re in the sphere.

Blu Spas is a company that helps spas increase the bottom line, and profitability. Another concept we have developed is the NOOSPHERE, where we provide technologies and solutions for RFID. We bring these solutions to the spa service, but also to other businesses: retail, cruises, ski resorts, bars, etc. RFID is a simple and it can have many applications to boost guest experience, increase efficiencies, green concepts, and guest recognition as well.

Other examples are staff management and inventory management, where the ability to scan inventory transforms time spent on these activities, as well as security and safety.

There is also a concept of using aquariums on both urban and resort environments: building under and surrounded by water. Traditional and non-traditional uses of water will give us the opportunity to evolve water, energy and waste management, reaching greener building concepts. Twenty years from now, guests will have made their own choices. Blu water house incorporates these ideas at a smaller scale, and is able to decrease upfront development, building, and set up costs. This will lead to more profitable operations as well. This concept is will be launched later this year.

Clodagh design uses inventive sustainable practices, and incorporates global influences. We deal with a lot of visual clutter these days. The dirty little secrets of spas are: that the oils go down the drain; we use a lot of water, and so we have to look at all this need for transparency in design.

Much of these elements are badly treated, and value engineering is always about decreasing employee space, for example. We must relate people and their living environment; and the use of leaves, the presence of flowers and water makes us feel dry. We must understand the properties of water and how it connects and transmits our energy. The air systems are very important, for example.

The toolbox of designers is hence far from their drawings. You must think about the green areas, maintenance issues, and how a little water is sometimes enough; so you can give “sound” to the place with it. Today we see laptops powered by solar energy; how are spas using this power? Good spas will act as life coaches, taking it home, etc. Different programs, different spas, are dealing with different part of anatomy, but also health and wellness.

Silent design is also important, and it relates to room service, with no visual clutter. You can actually have room service about sex therapy, counseling sessions in the room or at least at a more discrete setting.

Noise transference is also important. Sound battling and air conditioning can't run through those rooms: people need silence. Sleep therapy has become more important for destination spas and these treatments don't require staff. You can put two to three people in the room with a kit with instructions. These will become more current and usual in the future.

Environmental issues are becoming even more relevant now; fluorescent lights are a problem but they are the only ones that can provide you the proper shadow.

You must also provide pre-treatment areas and activities to start the relaxation process. Laughter Yoga is a good idea for this.

Ancient Egyptians were asked two questions before paradise: did you bring joy, and did you "enjoy" joy? The third question now should be: have you left the dolphins laughing?

Summarizing what was said: people should think before design. Not rushing into signing a contract and the thinking. Conceptualize and look at the therapeutic benefits.

Q&A

Regarding wet areas: should we look back to basic or get into more mimics?

Spas come from health, so you need to get a benefit out of what you're creating. You should choose things that actually have a meaning. So use the ancient ideas, but using new products in a new, and more positive and sustainable way. Explore what people will take home, etc. US want spas to bring origins from other places, and so do owners.

You should get other people involved in this process early in the process. You have to do it right the first time because you will be spending more money in the end. You should also strive to optimize energy costs.

People should bring in new ideas, more green, with healthy and recycled water, different from local water, many of the times.

Are wet areas more popular? And regarding the question of split sexes, should the northern European model prevail where co-mingling will be the future?

You should have both. US people are more prudish, but you should have areas where friends can get together and chat.

In Asia, hotel brands are international, so should we have both solutions for the different travelers?

One solution can be to have female and male coming together in a couple massage place, but also at communication and relaxation places.

It is an education process, with owners and operators, engineers and designers involved. The interpretation of drawings is key, and cost-benefits need to be worked. Analyzing and separating different revenue streams is important; for example, you should take wet area out of locker rooms and make it separate revenue producing areas; not providing it for free.

Younger generations are beginning to feel more comfortable in mixed gender places, and therefore many things are changing now. Socialization and maturity of the American markets are leading to a change in taboos. You should make people communicate and socialize also in multiple generations.

A new brand, SPATILITY was also presented at this session, where less upper tier markets are being captured. The segmentation within the spa industry is clear, and many different concepts have evolved. This one in particular, intends to position itself for busy people that want to feel good now and want immediate gratification.

Here, spa is not about general wellness, or a life change, but it is just about now. There will be complete programs, scalable and environmentally friendly. The SPATILITY brand embraces all these different aspects, not just treatments, but also food, fitness, and others. Green is the future, and this brand will have low VOC, and water-based finishes, embracing this philosophy in many aspects.

We will have signature spaces such as the “D-zone”; a decompression zone through wood, stone and water. Steam and saunas also, with value added amenities should be redefined, not square boxes anymore, but two adjacent round rooms separated by a wall of water; giving the illusion of natural light. We will increase seating and have less floor space in these areas, and people will be able to stretch out on wide long benches. We will also have a pillow program that will save laundry costs.

The treatment rooms will cost thirty percent less, and so we will increase the rate of return by one third. Focal points on top of the room form lighting will be essential as well, many times changing the environment after you have been in the room for a while.