

The Zen Bathroom

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Consider the sound of flowing water, a babbling brook or lively fountain. There is a tactile effect from the cool or warming sensations on the skin. Think about the visual appeal of water as a shaft of sunlight filters through a window and glistens on the surface, or the personal benefits of a spa, where the daily ritual of cleansing becomes a literal and symbolic act of regeneration. The wisdom of this approach to bath design has been common in Eastern cultures, and is readily achieved in what is called the Zen bathroom. The bathroom is the place to explore sensuality.

Water is the vital element in the bath and primary component in cleansing, and in many ways the life-giver of the earth. It is only necessary to live through a single morning without it to appreciate the wonder of hot and cold running water. It represents space and freedom, think of the lake or the ocean and the effect it has on you. Water is usually moving, contained only by the shape it adopts. Its sensory qualities—its sound, effect on light and temperature—are all accounted for in the Zen bathroom.

Light, be it natural sunlight or achieved through dimmable fixtures or candles and utilized as a soft backdrop to a relaxing bath play an important role in creating an atmosphere of tranquility. Task lighting, in the form of vanity sconces flanking the mirror are thoughtfully positioned to provide an even distribution of illumination without shadows.

When light meets water, we are drawn in. When light and water come together it touches our human spirit, and we have a glimpse of paradise.

The Zen way is one in which the natural elements of light and water are brought together in harmony with organic materials like wood, tile, stone and cotton. Zen attaches immense significance to our relationship with nature and cleanliness. This approach to design maximizes the possibilities for interaction between these natural elements and us.

Let us define the term Zen simply as living every day with mindfulness. Awareness can be found in daily routine acts, as well as meditation. With the circadian practice of washing, brushing teeth, shaving and applying make-up, we can glean calming spiri-



Ideas for renovation

tual sustenance with each deliberate movement. We stay in the present moment and with clear attention to the task, we respond with all of our senses in a tranquil place.

The Zen bathroom has a preference for textural surfaces and fixtures that are valued for their purpose well before their individual decorative quality. No one component is expected to stand out. The final soothing aesthetic is achieved in the balance and harmony of all the elements in their totality.

One of those elements, wood, in particular, is experiencing a comeback in popularity, and for good reason. Once rejected as a suspect for harboring

germs, water resistant wood such as teak, ipe, cumaru, mahogany and cypress with its distinctive scent, has now proven to be just the opposite. Research has indicated that water resistant woods contain oils (melaleuca) and other chemical properties that either retard bacterial growth or kill it entirely. The psychological effect of wood, utilized in a bathroom, is perhaps more warming, comforting and sound abating than the hard surfaces that tile and stone present.

Western style bathtubs of porcelain, steel or fiberglass have seen a decline in popularity, and are used far less frequently by adults than they were just twenty years ago. Kids remain the primary users of tubs as a nightly ritual before bedtime. In Japan, it is customary to shower first, and then enter a wooden soaking tub thoroughly washed. It would seem strange to the Japanese that we cleanse in the same water, with soap and the residual dirt that we bathe in.

Space is freedom. But many bathrooms, especially in older homes, lack available space. Through the use of creative and thoughtful redesign, the Zen bath can be made to feel both spacious and harmonious. The size and dimension of fixtures should fit the scale of the space. This may seem obvious, but what is not always considered are the walls that delineate and interrupt space.

In Zen bathrooms, shower walls of glass or tile to contain the spray of water are typically eliminated. The bathroom and the shower area are one. The flow of water is designed to be directed to a specific location where the floor is gently sloped to an infinity drain and in the opposite direction of the vanity and toilet areas, where the floor remains relatively dry.

The Zen bathroom is a place to enjoy freedom, not to be confused with privacy. We human beings need space to be happy. We stop and temporarily leave our stress at the door in order to offer space to ourselves, inside and outside, to achieve the calming effect we so desire. We need to let go of our work related issues, preoccupations, worries and regrets of the day and create space around us. The Zen bathroom is freedom.