

WHAT'S HOT IN SPAS?

Spa Trends, Tips, and Other Information from WaterColors, LLC, *spa and pool experts of Georgia*

Introduction...

Sitting in bubbling hot water offers total relaxation for spa owners. Using a spa provides relief for tired muscles, enhances blood circulation, and permits a temporary escape from the rigors of the daily grind. Since spas got their start in the 1960s as wooden barrels – of sorts – pool and spa companies such as WaterColors LLC, have brought about technical and design options that allow homeowners a menu of choices in style and practicality. WaterColors owner, Ken Whitlow, shares the latest on what's hot in spas and how to plan and maintain the perfect spa haven at home.

Tips for choosing a spa...

- Space requirements are an important consideration. Always think about how much room you have to work with in your yard or around your deck area. This will determine all of the other options for building your spa. Determine accurate dimensions of availability for an intended spa and its decking. The space you have available will also play a role in depth options.
- Usage... (Who, How many?) Recreational spa users and families with small children will have different needs. If you're planning on using your spa to entertain guests, you'll want enough room for them to enjoy themselves. Plan for ample seating for between six and 10 people, or more. Round spas and any free form spas with curved radiuses seat more people than square spas with right angles. This is because round-shaped spas permit their users to fully utilize all of their interior space.
- Aesthetics / Materials Used / Shapes... If you're looking for a visual masterpiece, there are any number of color and shape options to consider, and several hot new trends. Natural stone in varied earth tones are popular for spa edging and decks. The most common spa type is gunite or concrete because these spas provide the highest level of design flexibility since the form can be customized. The options for shape and style are limitless. Fiberglass spas are also well-liked choices, but these spas are pre-made in several fabricated, more typical, shapes.
- Custom hydraulic and heat jets can be designed and built into a spa to align with a user's neck, feet, back, etc. The jets can also be incorporated so they are individually adjustable in power and volume.

Current spa trends and styles...What's hot in spas?

- Small spas, influenced by home building trends...as lots get smaller, homes get bigger... small wading pools and spas are common. A smaller pool or spa can make a yard appear larger and should always be made to appear as though its inclusion is natural.
- Large spas: influenced by personal use and preference. Spas are larger today and offer more options due to latest technologies. Homeowners are selecting larger spas as home entertainment is on the rise. BBQs and swimming parties are popular as well as spa relaxation with intimate friends, etc.
- Swim spas. These spas, sometimes referred to as jet pools, are larger than the common spa and allow for a compact alternative to a lap pool. They have adjustable “Badu” jets that create a strong current that has high volume, perfect for in-place swimming – sort of like jogging in place. These spas also can include massage jets for those wanting to simply sit and relax and, meanwhile, they use less space than lap pools and regular pools for the landscape with size constraints.
- Types. Attached and unattached spas, both being popular depending upon the setting. Homeowners may elect to have a spa attached to an existing pool or create a stand-alone when a pool is not desired or where space constraints are an issue. Both can be built to include computerized temperature controls and ultra-high pressure jets that are adjustable in power and range.
- Seating options aplenty. Today’s spas can include multiple seating options from curving built-in “beds” to meet the exact contour of the owner’s body to varying height seats for the comfort of adults as well as children. The fiberglass spas offer more seating options because of the material’s flexibility. It is also important to pre-determine seating heights so the water level results at a comfortable place on the spa owners. Shorter people will want higher seats, and longer backed folks might like lower seats.
- Spillover spas with pools – where a spa is on a higher elevation than the pool, is attached, and literally spills over into the pool. These spas share a heating and circulation system, which is cost effective. Whitlow often installs individual controls in owners’ homes so the spa may be heated even when the pool is not.
- Above- / under-ground spa... Both are popular today, but above-ground spas allow for built-in surround seating and dry-safe places for placing drinks and towels – as opposed to in-ground spas where the water can splash onto the surrounding area.
- Natural hardscapes with stone edging, tile coping – marble, stone, slate, and smooth pebble textures are all trendy this year and are used as functional aspects of a spas, yet these materials – by homeowner choice – personalize the surrounds.

- Tile of any color – with varying blues and touches of lighter earth tones being most trendy – add a decorative element to a spa. A trendy move today is to have the spa built with small 1 to 2-inch tiles laid in semi-circular arcs on the bottom or as edging bands on steps. Custom decorative or mosaic patterns are available and create a sense of personalization. A spa expert like WaterColors can create any number of patterns to suit. Tile is a great material because it is easy to clean, durable, and doesn't fade. WaterColors is finding that one of the newest trends is the use of tile for the entire spa interior, rather than just along the edges and on steps.
- A “body tube,” a narrow and deep space off to the side of a spa's interior is a fun way to enjoy the water jets from neck to toe – while standing upright. This is a popular trend Whitlow has offered to his spa clients this year.
- Spas with fountains adjacent to the seating areas are very popular as they equate to the peaceful sounds of water movement.
- Wet decks – where the seating areas are just inches below the water's surface in some places – while other built-in seats are deeper to accommodate multifaceted preferences.
- Lighting – color-changing lights, fiber optics, and traditional white light are popular spa trends to date. Lighting keeps the pool safe and enhances the design.
- Colors – Neutrals, tans, earth tones, gray and white family, slate, with trim and accents in blues, and other cool tones that are clear and bright. Pastels are no longer the most popular color selections.
- “Water color” – when referring to spas and pools – is the combination of a pool's interior and the reflection of the sky. A dark pool interior makes the pool appear very dark – sometimes black, and a white finish makes the pool look light blue. Whitlow recommends that the owner make a simple decision right from the onset; which is preferred for the interior, pale blue or dark shades of blue and black? Plaster, paint, and other materials affect the color view during the day and night depending upon the sun and moon light, and these aspects of the spa should be chosen to achieve preferred tones or shades of green, gray, light blue, dark blue, and tan.

What to know about renovation of an existing spa...

- If you're old spa needs an update, resurfacing, replacement of waterline tile, new coping, equipment updates, deck repairs or refinishing, it is possible to utilize the professional services of an expert pool and spa company like WaterColors, LLC to make it look new again.

- Acid-resistant grout is an option for spa renovation, given the new and advanced types of grout available today. When replacing tile, using this type of grout will lead to less staining and break-down of the grout. Body oils, spilled drinks, and other soiled fluids can wreak havoc on regular grout.

What to know about installation of a new spa...

- After determining the size and type of desired spa, it is important to organize a schedule of planning and building activities with the spa and pool company. Ken Whitlow, Owner of WaterColors LLC, suggests the following planning tips:
 - Ask your spa builder what kind of jets the new spa will have to direct the water streams / air.
 - Ensure the planned jets, filter, blower, plumbing, p.s.i., and horsepower are compatible and appropriate for the size of spa to which decisions are being made. Have the spa company explain the compatibility of the spa's working parts. The result will be a spa that does not under- or over-perform.
 - Discuss lighting in advance to be certain there is ample light for night time use. Lighting in and around the spa should be consistent in style and design.
 - Ask for photos of other spas designed and / or built by the spa company.

What to know about maintenance of a spa...

- Spa technology has increased with solar powered heaters, automated cleaners, built-in sanitizers, and chlorine dosing systems. It is important to update a spa – especially a heavily-used one – with the latest technologies. Just like a car, a spa operates best when it is well maintained. Whitlow recommends having a spa company provide a consultation as you consider seasonal maintenance of an older spa that may be in need of updating.
- Folding safety covers are suggested for spas that are widely exposed to the elements. These covers help keep spas clean and the temperature regulated to a reasonable degree, which equates to energy costs savings.
- Whitlow reminds a simple rule of thumb; “Keep debris out of the spa everyday and chemicals in and adjusted accordingly.” Usually, a chemical test once a week is recommended. It is also important to maintain pressure in the “green.” When a start-up pressure increases five or six pounds over time, it typically means a filter adjustment is in need; i.e. – When a start-up pressure that is 10 p.s.i. raises to 15 or 16 p.s.i.

Readers' Resource...

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