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What's
new in
bathroom
design
and décor

REVAMPING the Bathroom

By Brenda Fehr

Upgrading your bathrooms can be a very costly investment requiring careful consideration, but if in alignment with what your customer base expects and will pay for, it is an investment that can pay off in spades.

Jeremy Roncoroni, general manager of the Metropolitan Hotel Vancouver, says all aspects of a hotel's services and features add up to a customer's overall experience, and bathrooms are an important component of that experience.

"I think more and more customers want to have that spa experience at the hotel," says Roncoroni. "A beautiful bathroom is a selling feature. You want to give the guest an experience they wouldn't get at home."

Guests want to look their best, whether they're preparing for a business meeting or a night on the town, and they appreciate a luxurious bathroom, says Roncoroni.

The Metropolitan's elegant guest bathrooms feature separate soaker tubs, as well as shower stalls complete with rain head showers, which provide a rain-like water spray. Each bathroom also features a makeup mirror and comfortable chair. As well, guests can pamper themselves with Molten Brown products, plush towels and comfy bathrobes. Every detail has been considered, including the provision of elegant amenity holders and high-end Kohler bath fixtures. There are even some luxury suites with 24-karat-gold plated fixtures, says Roncoroni.

Guests don't have to worry about missing a call or the latest news, either, as each bathroom features a telephone, as well as a sound system which allows guests to listen to the TV.

Creating an elegant bathroom requires both time and budget com-

mitments. Roncoroni says the cost of a four-piece bathroom set comprised of toilet, sink, bathroom and shower was \$15,000 to \$20,000 per bathroom. Planning is also key. Roncoroni says it's important to meet and establish good communication with the tradespeople involved in bathroom installation in order to determine what types of work must be done and at what stage of the process. For example, it must be determined if tiling is to be done before painting, and to plan accordingly so that bathrooms are fully complete and rooms are freed up for guests to enjoy as soon as possible. Such renovations are best done during a quieter time of year.

Once the beautiful bathroom is created, it's important to keep it that way. In addition to regular housekeeping, a maintenance plan should be established, which should include everything from polishing counters to resealing caulking, says Roncoroni. "Good hotels should have a maintenance program."

Markham Ray, director of marketing for the Away From Home line at Kruger Products (formerly Scott Paper) points out that the presentation of a hotel's bathrooms, whether they are the guest room bathrooms or the larger-sized bathrooms used by restaurant patrons and convention visitors, is very important.

Kruger Products carries a wide variety of towel and tissue products for the bathroom, as well as soaps, hand sanitizers and a range of dispensers. New packaging reflects the travel experience and is designed to enhance a range of bathroom décor. The packaging was created in consultation with the hotel industry and was designed to fit in with today's contemporary bathrooms.

Ray says these days, hotel guests are very environmentally-conscious and more and more of them want to know that the products they use during their hotel stay are environmentally-friendly.

"Probably the biggest trend is concern for the environment," says Ray.

Kruger Products recognizes this concern and offers products which carry the EcoLogo symbol. In order to bear the symbol, a product or service must be made or offered in a way that improves energy efficiency, reduces hazardous byproducts, uses recycled materials, is reusable or provides some other environmental benefit.

Ray says another trend is a customer expectation for quality products. The appearance of the bathrooms and the products in them reflects the overall standards of the hotel and also reflects its image, he points out.

Hygiene is very important and one trend that is gaining in popularity is the "touchless" washroom, says Ray. Items such as Kruger's Autoflow towel systems feature hand towelling that is dispensed without guests actually having to touch the dispenser.

A newer development in the hand care category is foam hand soap, which offers effi-

ciency and cost-effectiveness for bathrooms that see high traffic. Kruger now offers luxury foam soap in a dispenser that holds enough foam soap for 2,000 hand washes per cartridge. Half as much of the product is needed for each hand wash, as compared to regular hand soap.

Ken Cretney, general manager of the Vancouver Marriott Pinnacle, says the bathroom is a very important component of any guest room.

Guest bathrooms at the Marriott Pinnacle feature separate glass enclosed showers, as well as separate baths. Granite counter tops add a nice element of luxury, as do luxurious towels and elegant Bath & Body Works amenities.

Jessica Harcombe, marketing and media relations co-ordinator for Bellstar Hotels and Resorts, says there is a huge movement towards "spa-like" bathrooms that utilize indulgent fixtures such as body jets in showers, extra-large sized tubs and showers, marble or granite, heated tile floors and river rock floors or showers. The trend includes curved shower curtain rods and extra plush towels, as well as a shift towards creative bathroom amenities such as single-use oxygen canisters as well as specialty bath salts, skin creams and

aromatherapy products. Harcombe says all Bellstar Resorts feature Aveda amenities and notes there is a brand awareness with this eco-conscious company, known for its high quality and environmental standards.

According to Michael Wong, a Vancouver-based designer who has designed and worked on several Bellstar Resorts, some other current trends in bathrooms include the use of glass tiles, as well as counter-top sinks and vessels. Stand alone pedestal/cabinets, designed as furniture, rather than typical bathroom cabinets are also seen in new bathroom design.

Bellstar is incorporating many of the new design trends into several of its new resorts, including the Stand Lakeside Resort in Vernon, B.C. and the Bighorn Mountain Lodge, a five-star private residence in Canmore, Alberta, which are both slated to open this spring. Bathrooms featuring designs by Michael Wong will also be part of the Blackstone Mountain Lodge, another Bellstar property slated to open in September.

Wise hoteliers are those who successfully blend the latest trends and equipment innovations with customer needs and preferences and who are likely in turn to see that reflected in a more successful operation.

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