

# Spa mantra™

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Make room for  
perfection

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THE DESIGN ISSUE

# MAKE ROOM FOR PERFECTION

Spa Mantra tells you the quintessential design elements of a spa treatment room and areas around it

Words | **Bindu Gopal Rao**







A spa is devoted to enhancing and relaxing the overall wellbeing of a consumer, through a variety of professional services and treatment that encourage renewal of the mind, body and spirit. It is, then, natural that the overall design of the spa should reflect a theme, must be in harmony with the environment and provide the desired levels of comfort, serenity and tranquility that it promises its guests.

#### GLOBAL NORMS

As per the global standards, therapy rooms should be spacious with an in-built shower room. Therapy rooms are generally furnished with wooden accents and anti-slip tiles. "All treatment rooms should be as sound proof as possible. The provision of a separate music system, muted lighting, and lockable storage, hot towel warmer

and natural elements play a pivotal role in designing a therapy room. A well-equipped therapy room gives the luxury of personal space and timelessness to indulge your senses, soothe your body and revitalize your spirit," opines **Joseph Skaria Director of Spa Shangri-La Eros, New Delhi**. With the growing trend of spas, those located within the heart of the city are trying to re-create spaces in sync with nature by adding more landscaped areas, water bodies and creating natural ventilation, which are fast becoming a standard while designing the space with respect to aesthetics. "So is the use of energy-saving lights, efficient water system and installation of better star rating air conditioning etc. Functionality is also becoming a standard, keeping in mind the operational cost. Indirect lighting, acoustically-treated walls and speakers for music are always part of the list as

are attached bath with steam, properly allotted storage spaces; hand wash etc. Combined together, these form a well-equipped therapy room. Since there are no norms defining the global standards, the end result is usually carved out based on the budget/time period in hand," says **Bharat Kumar, Head - Design, Coffee Day Hotels & Resorts**.

A spa's design is about creating a sense of belonging. It is about bringing people closer to nature so they can rejuvenate. At the same time, the spa should remain rooted in its location, culture, and custom. "Our spa promotes a sense of well-being and transforms the self with a more vitalized persona. Not only is the body rejuvenated, but also the soul," says **Priti Chand, VP Corporate Communication & PR, Zuri Group Global**. For an opulent spa a minimalistic designed therapy room



is where the experience of a therapy depends on making it an integral part of the profitable business. Hence, various parameters are ensured while designing therapy rooms. A well-designed treatment room lends to the experience of the therapy making it holistic. One of the most challenging tasks is the treatment room where the spa-goer spends the maximum time. "Space is an important factor here, which definitely makes one feel more relaxed rather than in closed, confined small areas. The rooms must exude a feeling of warmth. Keeping that in mind, therapy rooms at the Mandara

Spa, Alibaug have been designed in a very minimalistic and tasteful manner teamed with comfortable massage beds, vanity areas, wooden flooring, earthy and muted wall shades with coordinated furnishings and linen, bath tubs / Jacuzzi in a couple therapy room, harbouring the perfect ambiance with soothing music and aroma oil diffusers and so on. Creating the right space for the therapist is equally crucial where products like oil scrubs, packs, equipment are easily accessible," says **Santanu Guha Roy, General Manager Radisson Blu Resort & Spa Alibaug**. Use lever-type hardware for

door knobs as therapists have oil on their hands. Sinks and cabinets should be in a corner and the sinks should have hot and cold water. Washable wall paper or paint is advisable. Also doors need lettering or numbering and an "in use" sign or light. As for electrical considerations like providing wall outlets at the base and sides of table and an outlet for an essential oil diffuser are advisable. Spa design is about creating a sense of place, one that can be other worldly but also rooted in the location, culture and customs and promote a sense of well-being. "Our belief is that



people come to the spa to change their outlook; so the spa must promote a sense of well-being and calm so that guests leave feeling better than when they arrived. One's goal should be to create a long-lasting design and décor that's also highly functional and flexible, thereby complimenting and heightening the treatments offered and the guest experience," says **Arjun Bagri, Partner, Thai Refresh Spa.**

#### SIZE MATTERS

The size of the room is directly proportionate to the category of the spa or the brand of hotel/resort it is associated with. However, the minimum room size would be approximately 10 feet x 12 feet or 120 sq ft. with an additional bath/steam area of approximately 50-75 sq. ft. attached to same. This will give about 4 feet space on each side of the table for the therapist to execute the therapy without

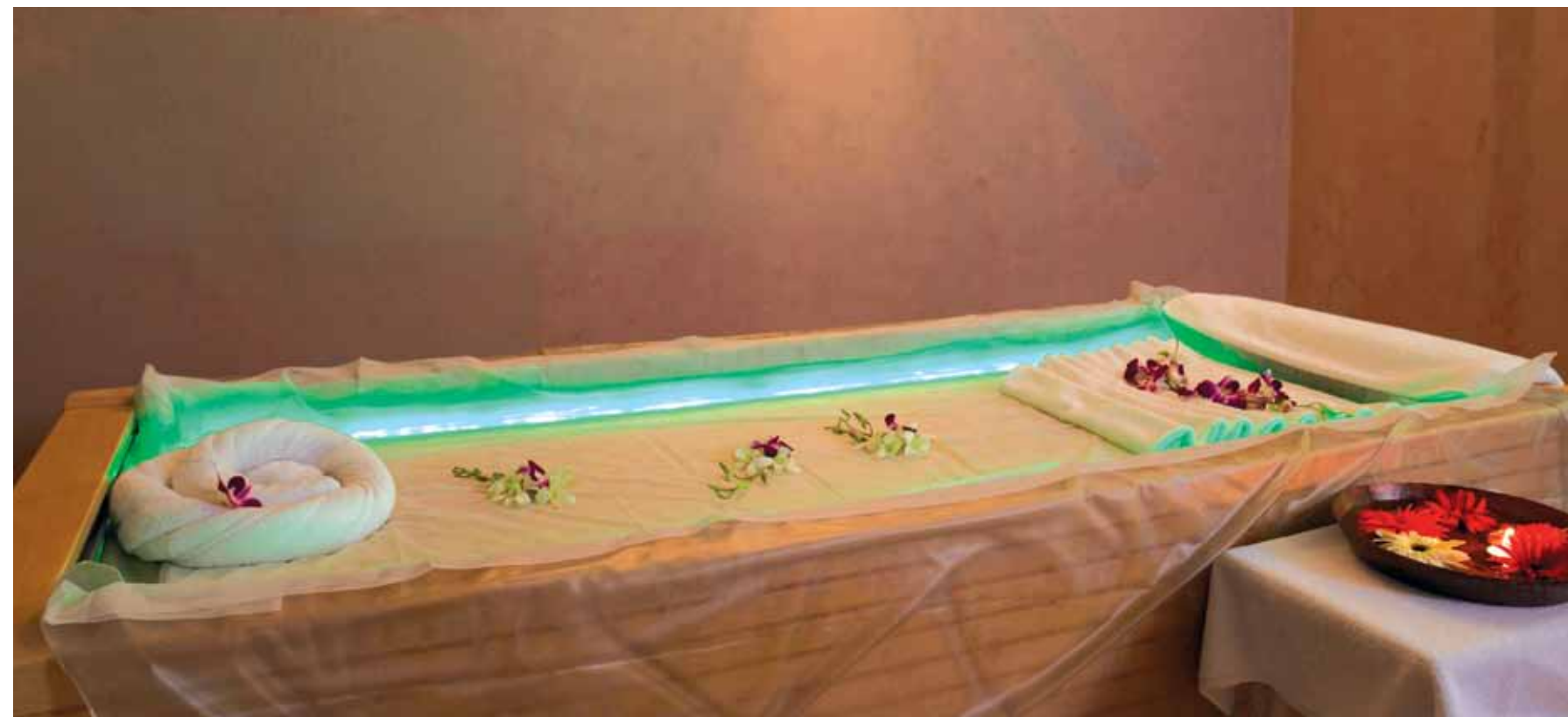
any space constraint. As far as the global standard for therapy rooms is 120-140 sq. ft. is ideal, room variations include: 9'x12', 19'x12', 10'x14', and 12'x12'. The minimum size of the therapy room is 320 sq ft for a single treatment room and 600 sq ft for a couple treatment room.

Massage rooms should have a small sink and a linen cabinet. Rooms need to be sound proofed. The massage table should be 72'x30' (deep tissue tables should be 39' wide). "The massage tables should also have built-in shelves and an adjustable face cradle attached to the end of table - adding another 12' to the end of table. The sink and cabinet should be located in the corner of the room. Smaller 9'x12' rooms need to have the sink and cabinets placed at an angle. Sinks should have hot and cold running water. The massage table upholstery should be made of Naugahyde and

should have a smooth surface with medium firm padding," says Chand. The rooms should avoid tile, marble or granite. It can be vinyl tile, wood, or a cushioned recreational surface. The room should also be fitted with indirect lighting, which can either be an electrical light source on the walls, or overhead (not directly above the massage table) window lighting, preferably with vertical, horizontal or Roman blinds. An integral part of the massage room is the background music. Therapy rooms should have one centrally-located sound system, with speakers in each room, along with an individual volume control knob.

#### DESIGN THOUGHTS

The desirable design elements should reflect the local culture. The décor can incorporate rich textured wallpapers and earthy timbers. The essence of a



spa could directly be extracted from the four elements of nature that combine to symbolize life in its purest form – air, earth, water and fire. "And the simplest way to connect with it is by throwing in the four elements together – in such a case, one could incorporate a courtyard or skylight within the spa lobby, which can bring in natural light and fresh air, or by attaching a small outdoor garden to the therapy room and a water body to complement the same. The idea here is to rejuvenate our body and mind, amidst peace and calm and the same could be amplified by retaining the architecture and interiors in minimalistic forms with the right mix of artwork, artifacts and selective lighting. To this a well thought background score playing through the PA system could magnify the overall feel both of body and soul," explains Kumar.

The use of natural and native materials (instead of all polished stone), fragrant and aromatic woods, and Japanese tubs made out of treated wood, is ideal. Slate floors and a wall of indigenous stone with small candle ledges will

also help create a peaceful ambience. "In addition, silver-leaved ceilings and millwork in figured sycamore to surround the guest with a soft, soothing palette is desirable. As crucial as aesthetics are in creating the spa, we also incorporate many aspects into the design to make the spa attendants comfortable and effective in performing their task. The treatment rooms have been designed to accommodate the type of massage being offered, whether it is Ayurveda, Oriental or Western massages. We have also attempted to make their work spaces as ergonomic as possible. Cushioned and heated floors (tile, stone, laminate and engineered wood floors), and radiant heating are more common, as a lower temperature can be maintained. This makes it comfortable for both the therapists and guests, who walk around in robes and slippers," says Chand. All of these elements help the spa attendants provide better service, which ultimately enhances the guest experience.

Spaciousness is crucial to the design

of a spa, with ample natural lighting, earthy colors, natural construction material like stone, wood, water bodies for a green experience, warm rich wood gives the feeling of warmth and comfort, diffused ambient lighting and dimmers, water bodies for its trickling sound which has a comforting effect. "Right from a well-designed lobby, retail counters, consultation rooms, gallery, treatment rooms, hydrotherapy area, changing lounge, steam, shower areas to relaxation enclosures must all mandate the signature design elements," says Roy.

#### AVOIDING PITFALLS

Since there are a lot of new spas mushrooming in India, a lot of elements are forgotten to keep up the profit margin and rising competition. Most of the spas compromise on the space element especially in bigger cities due to the exorbitant realty rates. Sometimes a lot of minute details are missed out on with maximum focus only on marketing and promotional activities. In spite of the design considerations listed, there are several





elements that are commonly missing in spa rooms.

“The use of hydrotherapy is a crucial element that is missing in therapy rooms these days. The term encompasses a broad range of approaches and therapeutic methods that take advantage of the physical properties of water, such as temperature and pressure to stimulate blood circulation,” says Skaria. Proper air circulation is a very important factor generally ignored or rather a subject not understood in most cases due to the use of the air conditioning. This is particularly important since there are different kinds of aromas that pervade a spa environment. Likewise, the isolation and absorption of sound although accounted for is generally not up to the mark. “If one may note, the quieter the place is, the calmer and more relaxed one feels resulting in an effective therapy. Also apt lighting plays a vital role in the overall appearance of a spa hence the right planning of the same is essential in the form of dim/indirect lighting causing no hindrance during the therapies. Harsh/direct lights should be avoided, use of dimmer controls could come in very handy in places like this,” elucidates Kumar.

Designated storage spaces for operational utilities like linen, equipments and toiletries are also things that need to be kept in mind. Some of the elements that are missing are usually a sink and shower cubicle within a spa room. Such factors are important to provide a holistic experience to customers.

## TREND ALERT

Far from remaining as a static entity, a spa must constantly evolve like a sensual kaleidoscope of color, shape, texture, material, smell and treatments. While spa treatments may go in and out of fashion, and spa ingredients are often seasonal in nature, the core design and decor tends to remain the same.

The hottest trends in spa therapy room designs include the rise of Hammam

baths (an ancient ritual of cleansing and purification), private dining rooms and the couple treatment relaxation rooms. Spa design has become immensely popular to create a feeling of great space. Themes are used to define the spa positioning, while dramatic sculptures, chandeliers, large spaces and water bodies are used to intensify the belongingness to the space. Natural and native materials in the construction process are used to create the desired ambience.

“Spas are focusing on enthralling all the senses of the guest right from usage of aromatic oils, an aesthetically appealing ambience, controlled lighting, right temperature and so on for a complete sensory experience. New treatments, innovations, packages are being used for a total wellness experience. Most of the premium spas are incorporating hydrotherapy machines which is a capsule shaped equipment with Vichy shower. Various self-operating modes allowing one to select a variety of options, with strategically placed water jets to create customized pressure and temperature along with color therapy (different colours of light are emitted each with a distinctive healing property). Hydrotherapy can be coupled with rest of the treatments to heighten the spa experience, making it more effective,” opines Roy. Spas are adding features borrowed from the healing and wellness traditions of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, demonstrating that they take the healing aspect of the spa seriously. One of the new trends is of Salt therapy Rooms. “The concept here comes straight from alternative health practitioners, who’ve long known that breathing salt-infused air opens up the airways, improve breathing for those with asthma and lung disease. But of course the new research on oxygen therapy has shown us that better breathing is healthier for all of us. It’s also great for your skin, particularly for acne and eczema or other skin irritations. Basking in naturally occurring salt caves is a centuries-old Eastern European health tradition

known as Speleotherapy, but today’s salt rooms are anything but dank caves. They’re actually quite high-tech, infusing pure salt and negative ions into the air in carefully calibrated doses,” says Bagri.

Get set to relax and rejuvenate – the spa way! ●

