

WEB EXCLUSIVE: Bath Finishes Create Wow Factor, Blissful Retreat

July 5, 2017 | Corris Little

NATIONAL REPORT—It takes 30,000 hammer strikes to create one sink, and well over 300,000 hammer strikes to create an artisanal, single-walled copper tub, explained Naomi Neilson Howard, founder and CEO of Native Trails. “It’s a very intense and laborious process that takes years and years to perfect the technique. Each hammer strike goes right where they aim it,” she said, speaking about the makers who produce the company’s line of bath fixtures.

At once a finishing touch and a work of art, distinctive finishes in the bath comprise a variety of textures and materials—crystal clear glass, natural jute fibers, polished cement or hammered copper—and take on chameleon-like characteristics, ranging from a soothing oasis to offering that quintessential wow factor designers crave when imagining a space.



Bath finishes can be a finishing touch or work of art

For many, the centerpiece of a bathroom's design is a freestanding tub, a symbol of luxury and a relaxing, blissful retreat. *Hotel Business Design* spoke with manufacturers who are taking finishes in the realm of tubs to a new level to discover what’s new and trending, as well as learn the stories behind the creations.

At Native Trails in San Luis Obispo, CA, the company’s philosophy is all about bridging cultures. Howard seeks to forge a connection between the makers, the designers and consumers through the use of materials and techniques that highlight the natural attributes of the tub and the artisans’ time-honed process.

“Everything has its natural, inherent imperfections, and that's what makes it beautiful. A lot of what we make is about the materials and we really focus on warm, natural materials and, most importantly, sustainability,” said Howard. “Everything we make is out of sustainable materials, such as the recycled copper for our sinks and bathtubs. Our concrete is cement combined with jute fiber, a really innovative and wonderful material. It reduces the weight by about 40% and it’s easier to work with, install and transport. It also reduces the amount of cement used and the jute is a sustainable plant fiber that reinforces it, so it doesn’t crack. The use of warm, natural and sustainable materials is big.”

Choice is the name of the game, and Hastings Tile & Bath’s mission statement reflects two directions: "Color is Everywhere" and "Design Flexibility." The Artisan Tub Collection offers the ability to select multiple exterior designs, ranging from rainbow stripes to a quilted look, while the Chelsea tub strives to evoke a sense of calm due to the silky composite material.



“We know that our customers—contract, hospitality designers and residential—are interested in having products that can create the wow factor or a serene and spa-like room,” said Bob Gifford, director of bath products, Hastings Tile & Bath, based in Ronkonkoma, NY, with a showroom in Manhattan. “So, we offer tubs that provide either.”

When a hotel design team wants to create a statement bath suite, the design typically starts around a freestanding tub, noted Michael Cahill, design and marketing director for Stone Forest, based in Santa Fe, NM. “Our tubs are designed and crafted from solid marble, sandstone, granite, limestone or travertine. The scale of the material and simplicity of the design creates a presence in and of itself,” said Cahill. “People are drawn to tubs made from natural materials for the tactile feeling of immersing yourself in something made from stone. Our tubs are also designed to envelope the bather in the most soothing way.”

The pursuit of perfection—and possibly, an obsession—in terms of quality and authenticity propels the business at Drummonds, according to James Lentaigne, director of sales & marketing for the manufacturer and distributor of bathroom products, with offices in New York and London.

“The decision to manufacture our complete range of bathroom products, ranging from cast iron tubs to brassware and chinaware, wasn’t made lightly. The desire to keep artisanal practices alive that were being lost through mass production drove this,” said Lentaigne. “We hand-make our full range to achieve this perfection. Our tubs are hand-poured, allowing for stunning, robust designs, which last a lifetime.”

Explaining the manufacturing process, Lentaigne said the tubs are prepared, shot blasted and then re-fired to allow the enamel to be sprinkled onto the iron and fused into the tub. “This essentially creates one layer of iron and enamel, which has natural undulations but also is extremely robust. The final process is the finishing on the exterior, from a raw finish to primed and ready for painting or painted by us,” he said. “The more unique finishes are the hand-polishing and lacquering of the exterior of the iron, a laborious process which needs skill and patience—roughly 14 hours. We can also hammer copper, wrapping around the exterior, another bespoke choice for our clients.”

For these manufacturers, traditions and honored, effective techniques are combined with contemporary designs and natural elements for an end result that serves as the exclamation point in a bathroom’s design.

“It’s the raw beauty of nature. You go back to that. It’s pretty amazing what nature provides us, and our artisans are incredible, working with these materials for generations,” said Howard. “They have it in their blood the ability to do what they do.”

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