

# TREND SETTERS



▲ Samas at the Park, Kenmare. The Park Hotel recently opened The Retreats homes on the grounds of the hotel.

## Spa expert AOIBHEANN GALLEN looks at the new trends emerging in the international wellbeing business

**S**pas are places of serenity and meant to put you in another mental state. In terms of style and design, many spas in the past were designed from a female point of view, but statistically many spa-goers now are male, so a more unisex appeal is important... ie nothing too girly.

It is important to keep the spa experience relevant to location. Before you decide which style your spa should be, the hotel's design and ambience should be taken into consideration, so as to marry the two facilities together. The outside surrounding area is also a great guideline for the interior design of a spa. For example a spa situated in the countryside with beautiful panoramic views, would ideally bring the 'outside in', with perhaps a wooden and stone theme throughout. Emphasising the natural element, bringing in browns, greys and softer hues of blue and blending that with stone helps replicate nature.

In the broad range it is easier to see the transformation into a unisex style, or increased use of local materials. This is an offshoot from the green/sustainable movement and growth in international travel. There is a backlash to the globalisation of design in some quarters, particularly in branded hotels where at times it can be difficult to tell whether you are staying in London, New York or Milan.

People are starting to get nostalgic and lament the loss of locality. They still want the safety of a recognised hotel brand, but they want it less sanitised and would like to engage in the diversity of the world

around them.

I believe this is the way trends are taking us within the spa world and certainly this is the way for Irish spas to go. Here, our spas need to feature a more authentic style, to capture the wonderful Irish flora and fauna, which is one of the main reasons many visitors travel to Ireland each year. Like any hospitality product, spas need to differentiate themselves from their competitors and Irish spas need to have their own identity, allowing us to offer a unique and authentic experience.

## What trends can we expect in the year ahead?

There are lots of new and exciting design trends for coming down the line in 2008. Tino Ensenbach's of Aqua Design came up with 'Cocooning - the desire for warmth and wellbeing'. Designed by Aqua Design, this is a new treatment room which meets those desires and is called the 'Cocoon Meditation Room'. By going into a dark blue room the guest sinks into the soft floor while looking into the light column in the middle of the room, which enables them to feel like they are going into another world. This special feature will be one of the highlights of the peaceful Merrion Hall and Blake's Spa, Ballbridge, Dublin. With rooms like this, spas not only have an eye catcher, but this treatment area also has very high flexible use. It is the perfect surroundings for soft meditation and relaxation as well as deep meditation treatments lead by a therapist. 'You don't have to win a design award for your spa, you have to win the enthusiasm of your guests during their stay,' cautions Ensenbach.

Another trend emerging is medical wellness integrated into luxury wellbeing surroundings, such as in a boutique concept. The term 'Medical Wellness' primarily covers services concerning health promotion and prevention of illness, including alternative medicine. Guests increasingly ask for authentic and trustworthy services that show real results improving their health. These services should also provide special health benefits which are, in the best case, celebrated as events in a luxurious personal atmosphere.

Spa real estate is another growing trend which was first noted by Spafinder in 2004. The number of residential communities with a spa/healthy living component has grown from a handful to more than 250. With spas adding residences, developers adding spas and hotels/resorts with spas adding condo units, Spafinder predicts that the number of mixed-use developments with a strong spa focus will grow to roughly 300 before the end of 2008. It started with the Canyon Ranch Florida and premier spas in Europe such as Grayshott in Surrey and in Ireland the Park Hotel, Kenmare has recently launched The Retreats.

'Spa homes first came to prominence in Palm Springs in the '60s,' explains John Brennan of the Park Hotel. They are very different from a typical home offering the owners a blissful blend of residential tranquility set in the grounds of a luxurious spa. They are not holiday homes but second homes where owners escape for extended periods of time to relax and enjoy the unique setting. We were lucky to have



▲ Clay, New York

the land available to create The Retreats on the grounds of our hotel.'

There will also be a stronger focus on combining health and fitness with wellness in 2008, so we can't forget about the gym. Look out for the 'Feng Shui'd gym where gym bunnies can kiss goodbye mirrored walls and fluorescent lighting and say hello waterfalls, fine art and, more generally, the kind of soul-stirring design and ambience for which spas have become famous.

For the past 30 years gyms have looked pretty much the same all over the globe - until now. Led by ambitious gym design projects at spas like Gwinganna in Australia, Clay in New York and Italy's forward thinking Technogym company (with its handsome Kinesis system), spa gyms and fitness studios are being reconceived as places to not only tone the body, but also elevate the mind and spirit. More generally, look for fitness spaces to take on a more important role in the spa setting, partially due to the growing emphasis on wellness.

And finally, watch the growing trend in designer spas. Something of a 'spa war' has started in Japan, which is drawing some surprising names into the industry, including the new Giorgio Armani Spa in Ginza Tokyo. It appears that Armani is looking to add a new dimension to its brand, moving beyond style to evoke a more all-encompassing lifestyle. The spa is situated in the new dedicated Tokyo shopping tower he opened and the treatments are based around his cosmetics 'Crema Nera', which is created with a natural element Obsidian, which was found in abundance in the folds of lava on the Italian island of Pantelleria where Armani has a holiday home.

With more and more international fashion designers being brought on board to help design and influence hotels it is only a matter of time before they make a significant impact in the lifestyle spa sector.

Watch this space. ◆

AOIBHEANN GALLEN, founder of Irelandspas, is Ireland's leading independent spa consultant. To find out more about Aoibheann and the services she offers to the industry log on to [www.irelandspas.com](http://www.irelandspas.com) or email her at [agallen@irelandspas.com](mailto:agallen@irelandspas.com).

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