



changing rooms

part 1

Three renowned designers start our new series exploring changing room design. **European Spa** asks them to reveal their 'wow' design tips, future trends and how to create the right ambience to ensure a luxurious start to the spa journey...

One of the golden rules of innovative spa design has to be: 'don't underestimate the importance of your changing rooms'. Today, experienced spa designers and operators repeat this mantra time and time again, recognising this area as one of the most important spaces within the spa environment. Yet, all too often, the very space set aside for guests to get changed before their spa experience is the least considered. In fact, if you say 'before the experience' you've already missed the point. Your changing rooms not only set the whole tone of the experience, they are very much part of the experience.

Much is now made of the spa journey. If that journey starts in an area that is dull, utilitarian and even too small for the number of guests using it, then the rest of the journey needs to work so much harder to save the total experience from harbouring some disappointment. Think theatrical – you need to make an emotional connection with your guests right from the start. These spaces should be exquisite powder rooms – luxurious dressing rooms with a special backstage aura that makes everyone who enters feel like the star of the show. Spa changing rooms should also make your guests want to linger,

relax and anticipate the journey ahead. Equally, after their spa time, your customers should enjoy returning to this space where they can take time to complete their journey in style.

There is much to be learned from other key service experiences. Today the very best hotel bathrooms, for example, have become the focus for design innovation and creativity and are often statements of real quality. Who's going to talk about a plain bathroom arrangement that barely beats the one at home? The bar has been raised with high-end showers, hydrobaths and an array of domestic steam rooms and saunas. Nothing less than a multi-experience wetroom will now do now when it comes to premier accommodation.

Whether they are dedicated spa suites or simply the best bedrooms, hotels now recognise that these are emotional spaces where customers spend very intimate time.

As each of our designers demonstrates, all the elements within changing rooms can be developed into different themes with unique attributes that, above all, reflect the total look and style of the spa. We hope you enjoy a few words of wisdom from Ian Sherman, Jean-Paul Blissett and Peter Maierhofer as they discuss the principles of good changing room design.

profile

Ian Sherman

Ian Sherman heads a team of designers and architects at **Douglas Wallace**, the architecture, design and project management practice established in Ireland in 1982 and now with studios in Dublin, London, Belfast and Galway. A specialist in leisure environments among several other sectors, Sherman has applied the company's core principles of people-focused, life-enhancing design to several leading spas throughout Europe

Words of wisdom

"Current concepts for changing rooms are a hangover from the health and beauty industry's relationship to the fitness clubs of the 1990s. Unfortunately many of the products, design principles, materials and layouts of spa changing rooms have been directly influenced by the design of health club changing rooms. Now is the time to create a different experience for the spa market. As designers, we need to bring a new approach to these important spaces.

Core to the spa offer is the concept of relaxation. Most spas find that the provision of relaxation requires the provision of dedicated areas – such as poolside relaxation, deep relaxation rooms and so on. We believe that the space that we would like to call the 'dressing area' should also be seen as part of the relaxation facilities. Dressing areas can be softer, more comfortable, quieter and have within them the opportunity for rest and contemplation.

Once we start to think of these spaces as relaxed areas, our approach from a design viewpoint changes completely. If we identify the elements that make up a changing space, we can then explore ways they can be designed to create a different and special look. The changing spaces, the dressing rooms, should be part of the total design. They should reflect and support the spa's image and feel. It is by exploring the elements that make up the complete facility that we will be able to ensure that the changing room becomes a statement, not a disappointment."



The challenge

"Our project at the Kohler Waters Spa involved the refurbishment and extension of an existing spa to allow it to offer a more comprehensive and complete service, as well as to support some 600 fitness members. It was the combination of the fitness and spa elements that required these spaces to provide the large number of lockers and related spaces for both members and guests.

We looked to create areas in which the different functions take place – such as the vanity areas – and to give a high level of comfort and interest, with individual seating and special floor designs that use pebbles. The lighting is also designed to create and enhance each area of interest as you use it.

The Amida Spas, meanwhile, required a set of changing areas that looked to provide a level of luxury and space that reflected the quality of each spa. The lockers are all full height to allow full hanging and storage, while special seating units allow guests to relax and take their time. The wet area was a statement of quality, with oversized showers that had both drench heads and hand-body showers.

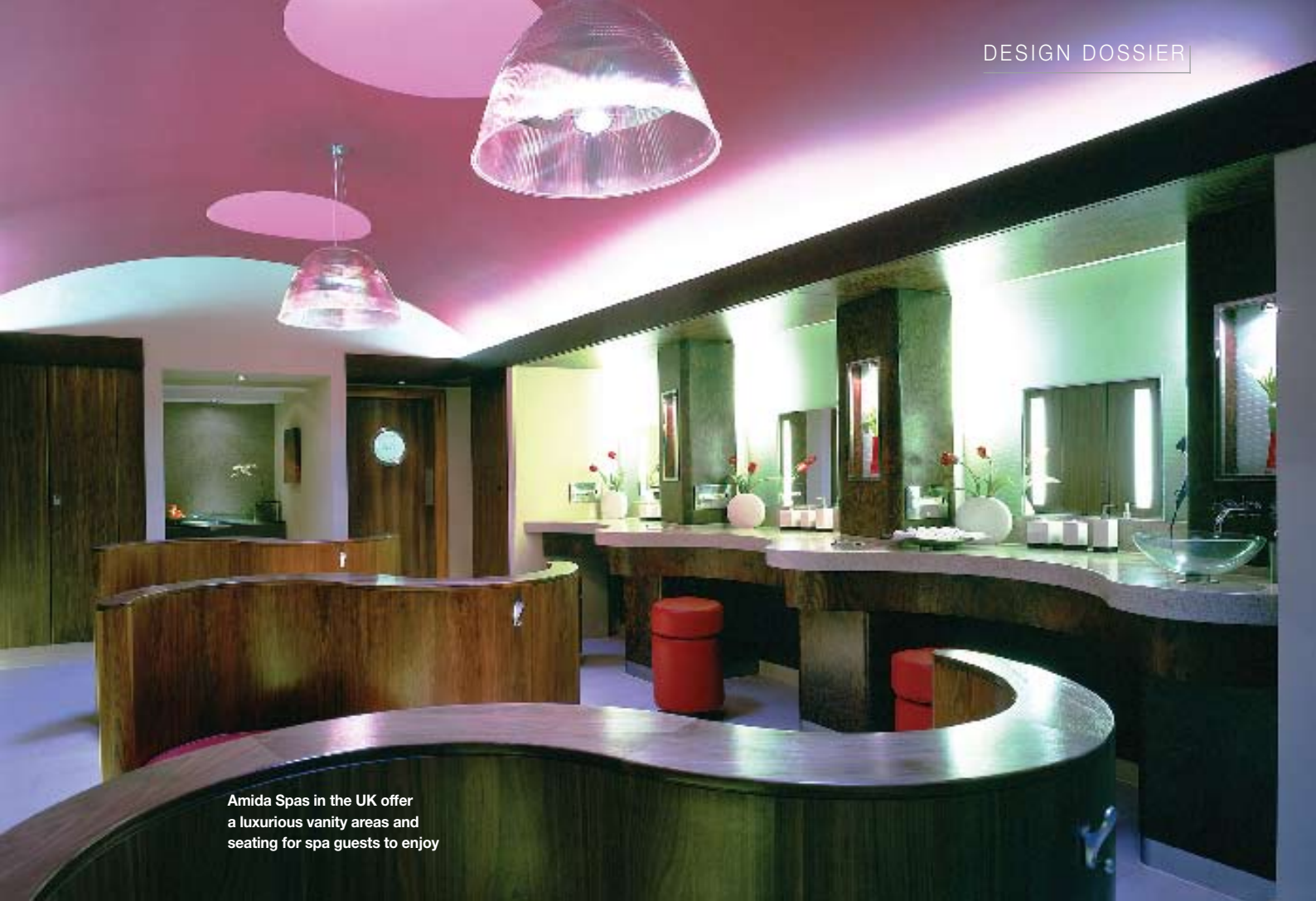
The vanity areas are large and divided into semi-private areas, and in general the design, materials and colours all reflect the spa design."

Spa clients

Kohler Waters Spa at the Old Course Hotel; the Amida spas at Beckenham, Hampton and Chelsea Harbour; Karma Spa at the Grosvenor Pulford Hotel; and the spas at The g Hotel, Headlam Hall, Armathwaite Hall, the Shelbourne Hotel, Bedruthen Steps Hotel, Ridding Park and Sofitel St James.

"Once we start to think of these spaces as relaxation areas, our approach from a design viewpoint changes completely. If we identify the elements that make up a changing space, we can explore ways they can be designed for a special look"





Amida Spas in the UK offer a luxurious vanity areas and seating for spa guests to enjoy



The changing rooms at Kohlar Waters Spa in St Andrews in Scotland, meet the challenge of supporting both spa guests and fitness members

“Look to create areas in which different functions can take place – such as vanity areas – to create a high level of comfort and interest for your spa guests”



Contacts

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profile

Peter Maierhofer

Peter Maierhofer is an experienced spa designer at **Schletterer Wellness & Spa Design**, where he has contributed to many international professional assignments. He describes himself as always driven by finding the best way to make the clients enthusiastic, creating designs that he hopes are characterised by being both sensitive and exciting

Words of wisdom

Everything has to start with a clear market positioning strategy; from that flows the relevant spa concept. Of course, the impression and the essential mood of the spa needs to be reflected in the changing room area too. Optimal functional provisions, material durability and maintenance are also key aspects which should be considered to guarantee the best functionality and design realisation.

The changing room area is one of the first points of contact between the guest and the spa, and that means the relaxation process needs to start here. Clients expect comfort not only in the treatment room but in the changing room too.

For us the holistic approach is crucial when it comes to designing a spa. It's the only way a spa can be run profitably and successfully. The stimulation of the impulses that ultimately lead to greater self-awareness, relaxation and wellbeing has to start in a creative, but functional, changing room area. It should also reflect the strategic direction of the whole spa, as well as the unique implementation of spa trends in design.

The challenge

"The Elements is the name of one of the most outstanding spas in Dubai. It stands for a recreational facility which combines spa, sports and healthy food, commissioned by a Sheikh who is driven by establishing spectacular projects in the region.

Before we talk about changing rooms consider exactly why it's worth getting changed for if you're a guest. With an overall area of 12,000sqm and spread over three floors, The Elements offers a superb gym, a 50m sports pool (placed on the roof) and the whole range of exciting spa facilities including beauty treatments. The entire building is covered by an Arabian-style canvas, which is not just an eye-catcher but also serves to provide much-appreciated shade. At night the



canvas fascinates the eye with amazing lighting effects.

In such a place you can be sure that even the changing room design and concept differs from others. What is different? This project's concept is based on a total of only 200 members, maximum. That's not many, and would normally suggest a small and possibly crowded changing room area. But here it's 2,000sqm... for 200 people. That's a lot of space. And it's there for a reason. Each member has his own, private changing room, never used by anybody else for the duration of his membership.

The guests reach their changing rooms by a total of six lifts built into transparent columns. Once inside their changing rooms the members are pampered by a full service: they have their own shower, washbasin, toilet, comfortable furniture, multimedia entertainment and laundry service.

That's the way to kick off a spa or fitness session. That's one extraordinary way to make the guests believe that their individual wellbeing is the most important thing the operator cares about."

Spa clients

Schletterer's main UK clients are all four of Center Parcs' Aqua Sana offerings, four of Champneys' high-end spas (Tring, Forest Mere, Henlow Grange and Champneys Spring) as well as Dalhouse Castle & Spa in Edinburgh. In mainland Europe highlights include Mohr Life Resort in Austria, Mediterrana in Germany, Garden Palace in Moscow and Les Ottomans in Istanbul. The Middle East and North Africa finds Schletterer's hand in The Royal Amwaj, Oceana, Tiara Palm and The Cube in Dubai, the Luxor Hilton in Egypt and ADIA Health & Wellness Club in Abu Dhabi.

"Optimal functional provisions, material durability and maintenance are also key aspects which should be considered to guarantee the best design realisation"

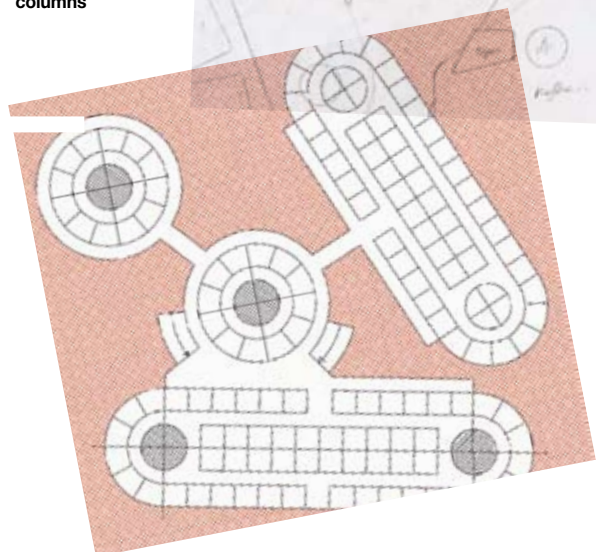
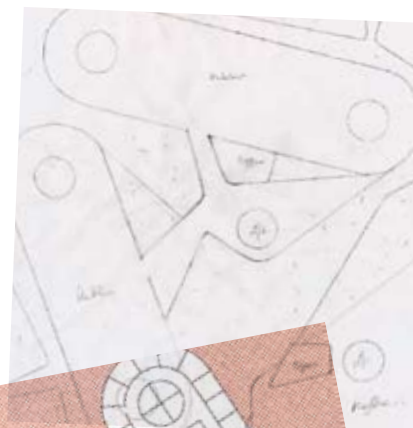


The new Elements Spa in Dubai designed by Schletterer Wellness & Spa Design, combines spa, sports and healthy food



The Elements spa offers 2,000 sqm for just 200 members. Every guest has their own private dressing room

Spa guests access their private dressing rooms using one of six lifts housed in transparent columns



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profile

Jean-Paul Blissett

Jean-Paul Blissett is Managing Director of **Syntax**, and has worked in the leisure industry for over 20 years gaining a wealth of experience to establish the company as one of the leading international health and leisure design consultancies

Words of wisdom

“Traditionally changing rooms have focused on functionality, normally consisting of prosaic rows of lockers and showers in a utilitarian environment. We see the design of changing rooms as an integral part in the success of a spa and wellness facility, and as much care and thought should go into designing these spaces as the rest of the scheme.

One should consider more options for changing, perhaps by providing different types of changing experience to match the specific activity – spa, beauty, fitness, thermal and hydro. This is driven by styling, colours, textures and lighting to energise or relax. Syntax pioneered the changing pods at Molton Brown, for example – beautifully designed, private changing pods, some with dedicated showers. The lockers were shallow, with your clothes hung facing you, making life easier.

We're now working with Pret

A Spa on the development and launch of Melt, a new, branded and modular business and designer spa concept primarily aimed at international hotels. The Melt changing spaces look at the psychological and emotional aspects of changing, in order to affect a positive change, a personal transition. The changing room is seen as a space that continues the journey of engagement and transition from the outside to the inner world, offering choices but always a private experience. Melt will provide the ultimate in chic, too.

Larger facilities with higher volumes present more of a challenge. Again, if it is possible to have several changing ‘nodes’ to feed the differing activities, this will promote more intimate spaces. Ultimately the changing rooms need to reflect the needs, philosophy and concept of the operation – from pampering spa to fitness and golf...

Oh, yes: my personal bugbear is wet and dry floors together, when guests are standing in puddles in the dry locker area. Always, the need is for better transitional spaces.”



The challenge

“Syntax is currently working on an exciting and prestigious refurbishment of the QEII, which is to be dry-docked in Dubai and re-invented into a luxury ‘7-star’ hospitality and lifestyle development and, ultimately, the most historic property in the UAE. Here the changing rooms are broken down into different areas and zones. The spaces have private changing and shower pods separated by small ‘gardens’, as well as a butler service to press your clothes.

More thought has been put into the locker itself. With better design and styling, it has features such as good lighting, ventilation, mini safes, proximity readers and personalisation for groups or special packages. Lockers are seen as decorative pieces of furniture that enhance the experience, as opposed to the regimented banks of lockers usually associated with leisure centres.

Syntax is also developing changing spaces that integrate greater thermal experiences and relaxation areas, creating a deluxe playground for real indulgence. Feature suites – such as fire, ice, earth and water – will provide guests

with a unique experience as well as the option of reserving a private thermal changing space all to themselves.”

Spa clients

Chiva-Som Resort, Hua Hin, Thailand; Porto Elounda Hotel, Crete; Molton Brown day spas; Elemis day spa, London; The Hilton, Prague; Monte Rei Golf & Country Club, Portugal; One Spa (Sheraton), Edinburgh; The Chelsea Club, London; QEII, Dubai.

“One should consider more options for changing rooms. perhaps providing different types of changing experiences to match specific activity – spa, beauty, fitness, thermal and hydro”



Above: Molton Brown Spas pioneering changing pods were designed by Syntax

Seven star haven: these renderings from the dry-docked QEII in Dubai reveal plans for a prestigious spa



Syntax develops luxurious changing spaces that integrate thermal experiences and relaxation elements



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Coming up...

In the next issue our Design Dossier will highlight suppliers of the latest equipment and finishes for stylish spa changing spaces, including: lockers and vanity units; seating and relaxation; wet areas with showers and washbasins; heat areas with sauna and steam; and towel storage and display