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# Greening Your Spa

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**Y**ou only get one chance to make a great first impression with a new customer. And the best way to attract and keep a customer is to create an overall atmosphere that soothes the mind, body, and soul from the moment someone enters' till they leave.

An often underused spa element, plants work effectively to create the right overall ambience. Plants tie together the entire facility creating a cohesive yet dramatic look and feel, but only if they're incorporated properly into the overall design.

Using plants to create a healthy indoor environment carries historical and scientific proof. An essential component in the evolution of earth into a life-supporting ecosystem, most indoor plants evolved beneath the canopy of tropical rain forests. Naturally, these plants thrive in warm, humid, and dimly lit environments the sane environment found in a spa.

Imagine the most tranquil scene from anywhere in the world and you'll find plants are a major part of the attraction. Now imagine the scene indoors with the same lushness of plants. That is the look you want in your spa. Of course the hot tub and massage table are important aspects of any spa. But plants go much further to authenticate the theme you have selected and in a most cost-effective way.

According to a British study, plants provide the top return on interior design investments, costing less than most alternative décor choices. And, according to the study, customers perceive a building with interior plants as welcoming, relaxed, and successful.

Yet many shy away from plants, believing they have 'black thumbs'. Usually, however, the



problem is not the person. It is simply selecting the wrong plants for the environment and the main problem is usually a lack of light.

If you are concerned your spa does not have adequate natural light, select from the many species of plants that survive in low light conditions. The following plants do well in low-light conditions: *Aspidistra* (Cast Iron Plant), *Spathiphyllum* (Peace Lily), *Aglaonema* (Chinese Evergreen), and

*Epipremnum* (Golden Pothos). Always remember this rule of thumb: if a plant receives low light it needs less water, and over watering can be fatal. And you can always add light fixtures where needed.

Always select plant species that fit with your chosen theme. If you have an Asian tropical theme, for example, include *Balfour* and *Ming Aralias*. *Kentia Palms* and lush trees like *Ficus Benjamina* suit Caribbean topical themes. And cacti and other succulents create a desert theme, but keep in mind these require a high level of natural light from a south or west window or sunroom, especially if you want them to bloom.

Preserved and artificial plants are another option for low-light spaces. Harvested plants and trees are preserved and maintain their beauty for years. Unlike dried, brittle foliage that crumbles easily, preserved plants look and even feel alive. Compared to artificial or 'silk' plants, preserved foliage looks more real. The best combination is to include a mix of live and preserved plants as the live provide a warmth that cannot be matched by artificial ones.

An aquarium is a great way to add life and color to a low-light area. Watching fish swim gracefully around an aquarium melts away



## THE MIND, BODY AND SOUL

tension. And whether you opt for a freshwater or saltwater aquarium, you will find a vast array of species to enchant even the most surly customer. The vivid blues and yellows of fresh water African Cichlids combined with their entertaining and ongoing protection of territory draw the viewer into a world seldom seen without a mask and snorkel.

Synthetic salt has made saltwater aquariums a popular hobby. You can acquire marine animals from exotic places such as Fiji, the Philippines, Hawaii, the Caribbean, and the Red Sea. The alternating yellow and purple stripes of the Emperor Angelfish or the orange face of the Clown fish (otherwise known as Nemo), for examples, will add to the ambience in your spa.

Or incorporate water into your spa design with a bubble wall. Used to separate rooms or hung on a wall, the gentle sound of bubbles and flowing water will take your client to another place. And if you place your logo on the glass, patrons will connect your spa with the relaxed feelings.

Incorporating plants and water into the spa takes your theme one step beyond the usual. Not only are plants a cost-effective way to add a dramatic look, studies show plants create a healthy refuge for clients. Plants freshen air, exchange carbon dioxide for oxygen, and control humidity levels.

Add to that studies from around the world that have found bringing nature indoors improves overall wellness for clients and staff. A two-year Bavarian study, for example, found plants placed in an office left workers feeling less stressed, better able to concentrate, and more productive compared to workers in a plant-free office. A Norwegian study from the Agricultural University in Oslo found plants significantly reduced symptoms related to sick building syndrome, specifically fatigue, headaches, dry, hoarse throats, skin irritations, and feeling heavy-headed.

For a medical spa, where looking good is fused with feeling good, select natural elements that help your patrons relax and rejuvenate. Healthy plants, combined with a gurgling water fountain and soothing ambient music transform the entire facility into a relaxing experience. When treatment send, your clients will not feel jarred as they ready to leave; instead the treatment will linger as they walk to the front door.



In addition to creating a soothing atmosphere, plants freshen the air. Renowned for converting carbon dioxide into oxygen, plants also clean it by absorbing potentially harmful gasses. Both the leaves of the plants and the microorganisms in the soil act as natural air scrubbers able to reduce dust on horizontal surfaces by 20 percent. Plants also release phytochemicals that suppress mold spores and bacteria found in the ambient air. Recent research shows that plant-filled rooms may contain 50 to 60 percent fewer airborne molds and bacteria than rooms without plants.

If you have a pool or Jacuzzi in your spa, controlling humidity can be tricky. When humidity goes too high, toxic mold may grow. When too low, indoor pollutants may become irritants. Fortunately, the ideal humidity level for plants and humans is the same between 35 and 65 percent.

Plants keep humidity levels optimal by responding to the temperature. The warmer the air, the more rapidly moisture evaporates. When the air is dry, the plant transpires more and water evaporates from the soil surface. When the air is moist, plants close their stomates to reduce the addition of water into the air.

However, placing a few interior plants in a spa with poor air quality will not make a significant improvement. But placing a plant within one's personal breathing zone will. Dr. Bill Wolverton, a scientist in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), recommends placing one plant within a personal breathing area of six to eight cubic feet.

When it comes to creating the right look and feel in your spa, plants are a natural choice. Species exist to create the right look and feel for any spa theme, as well as a win-win situation for plants, therapists, and patrons alike. Plants thrive in and moderate the warm, humid conditions. Therapists stay relaxed, as well as alert and productive on the job. And every patron who enters makes a connection with nature.

Top it off with the relaxing sound of running water or the gentle movement of swimming fish, and your spa will leave a great lasting impression with every customer who enters your doors. ■



Brookstreet Hotel, Ottawa ON opens its door to going green Brookstreet Hotel has put its environmental commitment to the test by completing the Audubon Green Leaf™ Eco-Rating Survey and has been awarded the prestigious Four Green Leaf™ Eco-Rating for their outstanding results.

"We enthusiastically applaud Brookstreet and their staff for achieving leadership in the hotel industry for their commitment to eco-efficiency and environmental responsibility with their Four Green Leaf™ eco-rating," said Scott McDougall, President of TerraChoice Environmental Marketing. "It is so easy to get passionate about working with hotels, like Brookstreet, that are involved in the Audubon Green Leaf™ Program. The Program is a real team builder for the Hotel's staff as they all work towards making a difference that is measurable! I'm confident that Brookstreet will benefit by this rating both through cost savings and by becoming a hotel of choice for the increasing numbers of environmentally-conscious travellers."

