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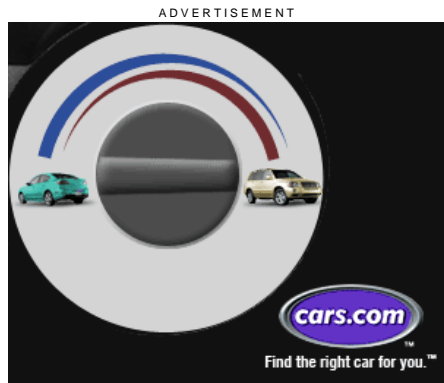
## You Want to Take a What?

If you said 'bath,' you'd be in the minority at some upscale hotels, where tubs are giving way to luxury showers. Blame the ick factor.

By Kimi Yoshino, Times Staff Writer  
September 10, 2006

The hotel bathtub is going down the drain.

In today's hurried society, baths are becoming a rare occurrence, hoteliers say, so tubs are being replaced with larger shower-only stalls.



The *ick* factor keeps many hotel guests out of tubs. Some are grossed out by the thought of who might have been soaking there before they checked in.

Hilton, one of the world's largest hoteliers, has yanked bathtubs from two of its marquee properties, the Beverly Hilton and Hilton New York. One of its chief rivals, Marriott, also is hauling some tubs to the trash.

When the upscale Sofitel Los Angeles finished a \$40-million renovation in June, only 77 of its 309 rooms were left with tubs.

The Sofitel put in rain showers and hand-held shower wands, with privacy glass that allows for a one-way view of the Hollywood sign and the 32-inch flat-panel TV (the bathroom is equipped with speakers).

"Given time constraints and things today, people don't have time for the 30- to 40-minute bath," Brent Martin, Sofitel's general manager, said. "They're going toward a great shower experience."

Martin said guests were walking away happy, save for a few international travelers — mainly from Europe and Japan — who are easily relocated to a room with a tub.

The goal, Martin said, is to make people as comfortable as they are at home. A survey of home trends released in the spring by the American Institute of Architects indicated that multi-head showers, steam showers and separate showers were increasingly popular. Whirlpool bathtubs, which not long ago were the hot bathroom accessory, are becoming less popular, the survey said.

Showers at Holiday Inn Express have become so popular with guests that hundreds each week are forking over \$80 apiece to buy the hotel chain's Kohler Stay Smart showerhead.

Holiday Inn recently spent \$20 million to upgrade its bathrooms, increasing shower size by 25%.

The hoteliers are catering to people such as Robyn Salzman, a 30-year-old television producer from Burbank, who avoids tubs during her regular business travels.

"It's more of a time thing," Salzman said. "Also, it's sort of hygiene-ish. Who knows how well they're cleaned?"

She might consider a soak in a whirlpool, but definitely not the standard tub-shower combo.

The days of bubble baths and "Calgon, take me away" commercials are history for many people.

Even in Hollywood, luxuriating bathtub scenes seem dated. No more Doris Day and Rock Hudson in "Pillow Talk," in which the two lounge, split-screen, in separate tubs.

And movie fans remember the famous bathtub scene from "Pretty Woman" with Richard Gere and Julia Roberts at the Regent Beverly Wilshire. But that was more than 15 years ago.

Hilton President Matthew Hart said he didn't consult experts or do market research before deciding that new Hiltons would be largely tubless.



**Standing room**  
(Glenn Koenig / LAT)  
August 29, 2006  
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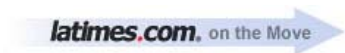
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"I just said, 'This is obvious,' " he said. "If you talk to the hotel guys, they will tell you that you really need tubs. I don't buy any of that."

At Hart's urging, all new standard rooms with a king-size bed will have spacious tiled showers but no tubs.

But what about traveling families that need to give their young ones a soak in the rub-a-dub-tubs? By dumping tubs, are hotels throwing the babies out with the bathwater?

Los Angeles resident Mark Brush, 53, who frequents Hiltons for business travel, said his wife and daughters, ages 4 and 7, insisted on baths.

"I'm actually a shower guy. I don't care if they get rid of the tub," he said. "If I'm traveling with my family, that's a different matter. I have three women in my life. They all need a tub."

Hotels will offer some choices. Some rooms preferred by families, such as suites and rooms with two beds, will have tubs. But in many hotels, tubs could become as scarce as metal room keys, ashtrays and books of matches.

Showers now have so many bells and whistles that picking one is about as complicated as buying a plasma TV. Some have jets shooting from various directions, digital temperature controls, aromatherapy steamers, even foot massagers.

Before settling on showerheads with adjustable pressure and water patterns, Marriott tested seven models. It also installed curved shower curtains for extra elbow room because people don't like rubbing up against curtains that don't get swapped out every stay.

But Marriott isn't quite ready to pull the plug on all tubs. The company recently renovated the Newport Beach Marriott Hotel & Spa, dumping the tubs from its king rooms.

That branch will collect guests' opinions before deciding whether more tub-shower combos should fall by the wayside, said Patrick Maher, Marriott's senior vice president of lodging and engineering.

"We're seeing where the consumer is taking this," Maher said.

Real estate investor Charlie Lockwood, who travels more than 75,000 miles a year for business, never takes baths, but he hates the idea of a tubless hotel room.

"I see this as a real downside," said Lockwood, who blames the decision on "bean counters" and liability-averse lawyers. "I think it's removing comfort and options for people, no matter what they want to tell you."


Many hotels say installing showers is just as costly as tubs.

If past hotel trends are any guide, the standard hotel tub could become an antique, like its predecessors: the pedestal, and the cast-iron claw foot.

"It's like a herd mentality," said New York-based hotel consultant Stan Turkel. "When one does it, the others have to."

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[kimi.yoshino@latimes.com](mailto:kimi.yoshino@latimes.com)



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