

# 2003: A "SPACE" ODYSSEY

By Andrea Sercu

Courtesy Clodagh

Throughout the 20th century, society attempted to peer into the future of décor. From the foreshadowing of video telescreens in George Orwell's *1984* and the sterile white spaceship chic in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* to flying hovercraft and domed housing in *The Jetsons*, the media played oracle.

But not even Nostradamus could have predicted the prevailing décor in today's homes and businesses. Given both a return to modernism and a focus on multiculturalism, today's dominant décor theme seems elusive; yet, the eclectic mix of genres is both integrative and deftly suited for today's lifestyles.

## New Trends Taking Off

**Return to Modernism.** "Design today is all about different kinds of modern, from elemental modern, which takes many elements of traditional modern design and pumps them up, like dividing spaces with glass and different lighting, to Balinese modern, which takes on more of a Pacific Rim flavor," says Janette Peccarelli, design director for Takara Belmont, Irvine, California. "There's even a Costa Rican modern, which is kind of like an organic Frank Lloyd Wright, with natural materials and a bit of whimsy mixed in."

Spas are installing more eco-friendly fabrics, flooring and wall finishes.

We're still seeing tables, chairs and sofas with legs and high-shine chrome finishes blended with dark, exotic woods, she notes. But there are also the bold colors of the '70s—greens, golds and burnt oranges; the bronzes and metallics of the '80s; and the "green" demand for recyclable, sustainable materials of the '90s and today that are truly defining the new era in spa décor.

"What we're seeing is a blending of

modernism from the '40s, '50s, '60s, '70s and '80s; it's a retro-modern look that blends all of the decades since the beginning of modernism," says Michele Pelafas, licensed interior designer and director of salon and spa design for Belvedere, Belvidere, Illinois.

Adds Peccarelli, "Everyone's breaking all the rules from all the different styles, but they're making it the look of the new millennium." Think embellished legs on tables and chairs; bright, geometric shapes; chrome, globe and dome light fixtures; and circles—lots of circles.

**Going Green.** As more consumers "go green" in their daily lifestyles and holistic treatments continue to enhance awareness of all things natural, day spas are heeding the call and installing more eco-friendly fabrics, flooring and wall finishes. "There's a conscious concern to see more and more materials be part of the circular loop of what can be recycled back into the earth," says Cynthia Maxion of Maxion Design, La Mesa, California. Many spas are building floors with bamboo, trees that replicate quickly, or cork, a bark that can be removed without harm to the tree.

"Cork is huge right now," says Jonathan Pugh, director of the Salon & Spa Design Studio, Farmington Hills, Michigan. "It's softer to walk on than wood, but you can treat it like hardwood. You can achieve a matte or shiny finish, and it's available in any color. You can create all sorts of patterns with cork, even have your logo inset into it. Also, it's not that expensive."

Takara Belmont uses hay, another renewable material, in core particle board and



Courtesy Cladagh

Today's décor features a mix of modern design styles of the past.



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recyclable materials in its furniture, and HydroCo, Torrance, California, has a new wet bed made of recycled cedar culled from shipwrecks and logging refuse. Clodagh of Clodagh Design International, New York City, turned recycled lumber from old warehouses in Brooklyn, New York, into steps at the Mezzanine Spa at SoHo Integrative Health, SoHo, New York, and into a colonade at the Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort & Spa in Farmington, Pennsylvania.

A pioneer in the movement to design with green materials, Clodagh is always searching for new natural materials to incorporate into spa décor. She has floated soy husks in a nontoxic base for wall panels and, at Nemaocolin, installed lights made out of mulberry leaves. At Yon-Ka’s training spa in El Segundo, California, souvenirs of nature are

worked into the reception desk: Polished river stones are visible under the floated glass check-writing surface and wheat grass grows right out of the desk top!

At a new spa currently in the works, Pugh helped create a waiting room featuring a greenhouse where water cascades down on plants “like an interior rain forest,” he says “It’s all about bringing the outside in.”

In keeping with the concept of ecology and nature, water walls are bigger than ever before and are being used in more creative ways. For instance, at Spa Helios, a medi-spa in Rancho Mirage, California, mini water walls are inset like windows in a serpentine wall of stacked slate. “The world’s just getting noisier. Are any of us out of the flight path?” asks Peccarelli. As a result, the white noise of water is playing an increasingly critical role in day spas.

**Getting Cultured.** More day spas are using décor to make a local cultural connection or to get in touch with cultures from afar. “I believe there’s a whole trend to reconnect with our past,” says Maxion. “We thought modern meant *The Jetsons* with lots of glass and steel, and I predicted years ago that we’d see computer art. That isn’t the case. People are tired of looking at screens. They want to connect with a feeling of their heritage. For instance, spas in Alaska are now drawing from the Aleut culture. In addition, you’re seeing heritage intertwined with things that are modern, and modern things are taking on an old look—plastics look like they’re from nature and glass looks like it was buried in the sea long ago,” she says.

“Spas are taking more cues from the local environment while merging elements from faraway places,” echoes



Courtesy Clodagh

Clodagh and other spa designers are incorporating natural materials, like these lights made out of mulberry leaves (right), into spa décor.



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Pelafas. “We’re seeing a blending of local cultural and period styles, everything from Russian to Western to Asian.”

At Providence Place in Providence, Rhode Island, Cynthia J. Vocell of the Boston-based Cynthia J. Vocell & Associates design firm helped create a beach scene reminiscent of the local coastline with a sand-scaped tile pattern in the vichy room. And at a new spa to open this spring in Kiawah Island, South Carolina, the décor will

## Facility Design

Décor includes more than just art elements; spas of today are also adapting the look and layout of their facilities to offer clients the comforts they demand in a variety of ways.

**Downsizing Downtime Areas.** “For a while, everyone wanted big, open spaces with tons of natural light,” says Pugh. “We saw big rooms with lots of furniture. Now, people are going exactly the opposite with smaller, intimate settings, especially in relaxation rooms.” While these areas used to seat maybe 12 people, many spas are now incorporating single-room relaxation zones.

“When a guest gets out of a service, she wants to relax, close her eyes and let go of the outside world,” says Jack W. Cornell, Albany, New York-based senior design consultant for Spa-Elegance.com, a Web-based distributor of products and supplies. Thick curtains or Japanese space dividers can help downsize large relaxation rooms and offer clients more private spaces. An increased use of libraries containing educational materials, fiction, poetry and healthcare literature is redefining relaxation zones in spas today, says Pelafas, who has designed libraries for spas in Seattle and Chicago.

**Suite-ning Service Flow.** Many spas that have embraced the move toward highly flexible multipurpose rooms have taken the concept one step further with treatment suites that establish a specific traffic flow as a means of maximizing client turnover and improving transition between treatments. For instance, the client may enter one door from the hall to receive a facial, then pass through an interior door to receive a massage in the adjacent room. Then, she might pass through yet another interior door for her wet treatment.



Courtesy Yasmine Djerradine Spa

Many spas have turned away from large, open rooms to incorporate smaller, more intimate relaxation areas.

include sea grass baskets hand-woven from local materials, native oyster sticks mounted on the walls as art and a reception area mural that reflects the area’s wild grasses seen outside. When Clodagh designed the Nemaocolin Spa, a Japanese artist was commissioned to forage through the local woods for sticks, branches and leaves, which were then used to craft window shades and other works of art.

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This circuit allows busy spas to accommodate new clients in the facial room while the first guest is receiving her massage or vichy, and prevents guests from having to constantly step into the hallway to reach their next treatment.

If you don't have the space required for a treatment suite, you can still achieve a flexible floor plan with the creative use of fabrics and design. Vocell recommends using lavish fabrics to create a sense of privacy between pedicure stations, for instance.

And as with all multipurpose spaces, the need for soundproof barriers remains a key concern, reminds Cornell. He advises placing rubber seals around door frames; using hollow metal or solid wood doors; installing double plasterboard walls; and installing fiberglass insulation between studs in key quiet areas.

**A Natural Glow.** Pendant lights, geometric chandeliers and Balinese fixtures crafted of exotic glass are all lighting up spas today, but it's indirect lighting that really has these spaces glowing with new radiance. “When Edison invented the light bulb, people thought it had to be seen because it was a new invention,” Maxion says. “Yet, with the emphasis on earthy, natural finishes, people now understand the value of lighting to create a more natural feel, like the glow of fire in a cave.”

At Spa Helios, soft light filters into a relaxation room via UltraGlass windows inset in the serpentine wall built of ledger stone. Dimmed torchier lights on the wall and the glow of additional lights tucked behind each tier of a stepped cove-lit ceiling complete the effect.

According to Pugh, more spas are planning the lighting up front and giving thought to its purpose, both functional and esthetic. “It used to be all function-

al,” he says. “Then lighting became very decorative, but that didn't work well. Now, companies are coming out with great fluorescents that light well and can be hidden, perhaps behind a crown molding system.”

Layered lighting is key, adds Maxion, who uses up to five types of lighting in a treatment room, including task lighting (in shelving or cupboards); heat lights; treatment lights; lighting for cleaning; and ambient lighting in a soffit or cove.

Walter Siegordner, president of Salon Interiors, Hackensack, New Jersey, suggests installing lights in the floor for a subtle wash of color on the walls. “These techniques help create shadows in spaces unlike direct lighting from above, which can appear too harsh,” says Siegordner.

**Create a Retail Experience.** Spa owners who display products on shelves along walls like so many books in a bookstore often discover that they can't compete with the visual displays of bath shops and boutiques. In these highly merchandised environments, products are pulled away from the walls and placed on round tables or in attractive point-of-purchase groupings that tell a product “story.”

For example, at Spa Helios, Peccarelli installed backlit, carved wood niches and “floating” glass shelves to help the products come alive. The use of objects that appear to be suspended in space, such as cable-supported shelving and banquettes that appear to float off the wall, is increasingly popular as well. “Anything that creates an illusion, where the architecture piques interest and prompts viewers to ask, ‘How did they do that?’ is very hot,” says Peccarelli.

## Material Matters

**Floors That Endure.** In addition to more cork and bamboo floors, designers

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are installing man-made pavers in spa floors. These high-fired, less expensive materials carry the look of natural stone but don't require sealer, which means more texture in the finish, says Maxion. She also suggests replacing water-based grout, which tends to accumulate mildew, with moisture-resistant epoxy grout, especially in wet rooms. “One of the biggest problems in spas is the moisture that eats away at fabric and materials,” she notes.

**Winning Walls.** Wall colors in spas are more complex than in the past. Rather than featuring a flat hue, many designers are blending color with texture that is physically tactile, visually textural or both. Hot texture techniques include troweling materials, such as marble dust, onto walls; faux painting; and even use of faux materials, such as fake leather, as wall coverings. Pugh likes to add silver fleck to sprayed nylon coverings and pair them with low-voltage lights to create shadowy effects. As another plus, there's little waste in the processing of these materials, he adds.

**Sensual Surface Treatments.** Maybe it's post-9/11 fallout or perhaps a craving for creature comforts, but feel-good fabrics such as faux fur, leather and suede are popular, and we're seeing more carpet in hallways, relaxation rooms and entrances. Silk-like polyester rayons; “watery” satin sheens; and golds, coppers and silvers are giving surfaces a more glimmery finish.

Belvedere's Pelafas sees a definite trend in the increased use of sophisticated materials. “Because of the advances in technology in interior design, we're seeing special effects—a play with depth of light in materials and surfaces, flooring and wall coverings,” she says.

Colors, too, are becoming more complex. “Natural colors, which are

called ‘complicated colors,’ are in. Instead of just saying ‘green,’ we're saying ‘green with a little red and black,’ ” says Maxion. “They're the colors you find in minerals.”

Demographics and psychology are also playing a role in the color schemes of a spa's walls, floors and furnishings, says Vocell. “You can no longer say, ‘these are the colors,’ ” she says. “You have to say, ‘This is my target market, and these are the colors that best represent that group.’ ”

While 10, 20 or even 30 years ago many people predicted that creative use of white space would dominate our living, play and work environs, the décor of the day is almost the opposite. Yes, modernism continues to follow us into the new millennium, but people crave color, touchable fabrics and elements that connect them to their cultural heritage and nature. Spas that choose their décor from the eclectic styles of today to match their clients' desires and needs will be best poised for success in the future. ♦

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