



GETTING STEAMY

A hammam, or steam room, with a distinctly Mediterranean flair is the central part of the master ensuite in Aileen and Christian Girouard’s home.

Building a hammam into a 100-year-old attic offers a colourful retreat for Glebe Family

RHYS PHILLIPS
OTTAWA CITIZEN

It is generally accepted that the two best home renovation investments are kitchens and bathrooms. Large and well equipped, the best of the former multi-task as the home’s family central, a laboratory for epicurean experiments and the place where guests feel most at home when entertaining. Conversely, the most coveted latter are no longer simply functional necessities but a place of retreat, a private spa for relaxation and renewal.

But it is not always easy to fit such bathrooms-cum-spas into older homes. This problem was compounded in Aileen and Christian Girouard’s otherwise spacious, 100-year-old Glebe house perched on the “Nepean Hills” overlooking the Rideau Canal. They live, with their two children, on the upper two floors while a rental apartment makes up the ground level.

But a complete renovation of the attic with its high but partially canted ceiling into a master suite and bedroom for the children allowed the family to insert a bathroom spa complete with a hammam, or steam room, originating from ancient Spartan, Roman and Islamic cultures.

In response to the couple’s request for an appropriate space to adhere to a wellness regime, designer and Carleton architecture professor Paul Kariouk started by stretching along the east perimeter wall a long granite counter topped with twin, elongated sink troughs.

A horizontal mirror stretches the full length of the counter, tucked under the slant of the roof and above a backsplash of bright sparkling red and orange mosaic tiles with blue streak inserts. A glass-enclosed shower is tucked into an existing window dormer, ensuring abundant morning

light to enhance the vigorous morning shower ritual, says Kariouk.

The toilet is accorded privacy by being placed in a corner alcove under a whimsical spire-like ceiling created by jogs in the roof structure — a true throne room.

In the centre of the attic level sits the bathroom’s defining element, the hammam, enclosed in a bright, burnt orange cube. Once through its large glass door, a generous soaking tub sunk into a raised floor is flanked along one side by a broad ceramic bench for sitting or reclining.

The floor, walls and bench are clad in creamy rich tiles under a barrel-vaulted ceiling of sea-blue mosaic tiles. Numerous different-sized rectangular windows, infilled with opaque, hand-cut orange glass, are punched through the walls. These appear to glow with sunlight when backlit by light from the surrounding bedrooms.

The idea, says Kariouk, “is to reinforce the peacefulness sought in a hammam.”

In form, texture, materials and especially colour, adds Aileen Girouard, “we wanted the bathroom’s design to reflect a distinctly Mediterranean sensibility.”

Built-in speakers for piped in music to enhance the spa experience are complemented by dimmer controls for the ceiling lights to further ensure just the right mood as the steam swirls.

The steam vents are designed to hold eucalyptus or other such exotica that ensure a little aromatherapy. And when one is done sweating out the day’s cares, a large rain shower, inspired by the couple’s stays at Montreal’s Hotel Place d’Arme, provides a cooling rinse.

Neither cramped nor overpowering, the family’s hammam is a welcome retreat, a private cocoon for repose and rejuvenation.



The hammam features built-in speakers, dimmer controls for the ceiling lights, steam vents designed to hold aromatherapy fragrances and a rain shower for a cooling rinse.

The design idea was to ‘reinforce the peacefulness sought in a hammam.’

PAUL KARIOUK
Designer and Carleton
architecture professor



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Architect Paul Kariouk started by stretching a long granite counter topped with twin, elongated sink troughs along one wall. A horizontal mirror stretches the full length of the counter, tucked under the slant of the roof and above a backsplash of bright sparkling red and orange mosaic tiles with blue streak inserts.