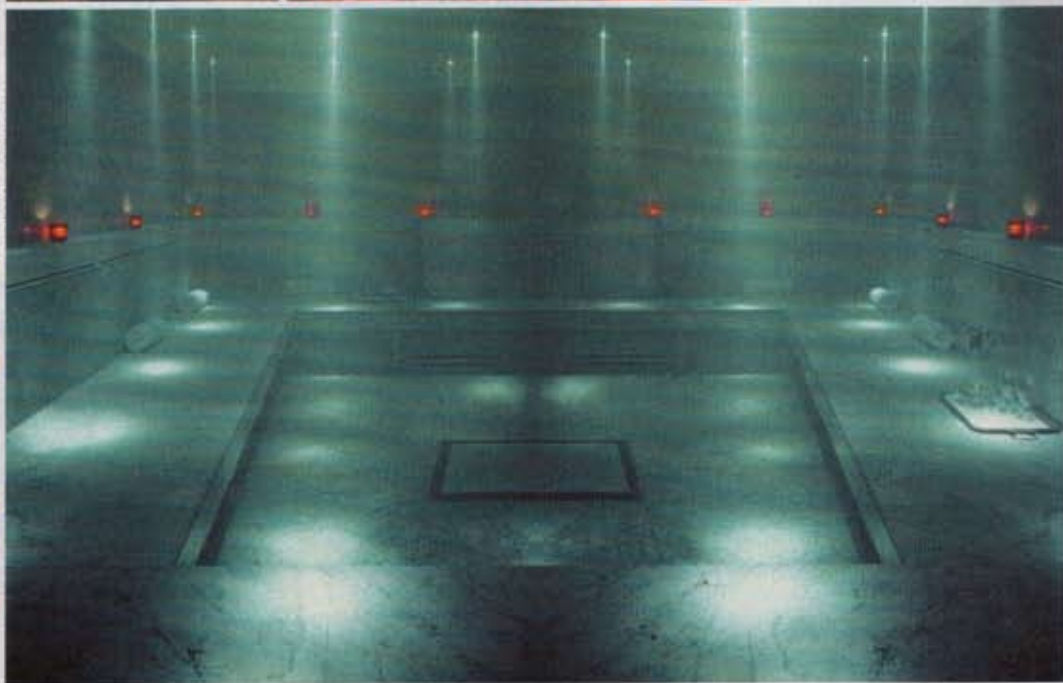




The heat is on: clockwise from top left, the belly stone at the W Seoul-Walkerhill; the relaxation area at the Faena Hotel + Universe in Buenos Aires; the Faena's Philippe Starck-designed hammam; the courtyard at La Mamounia in Marrakesh.



Bath Party

LET OFF SOME STEAM AT THESE HOTEL HAMMAMS.

Most people, save for a few hippies in Northern Californian communes, are not used to lounging around half-naked with strangers. But get over it. *Hammams* — Turkish bathhouses — are steaming up hip hotels around the world.

Back in medieval times, *hammams* were a necessity for common city folk, who didn't have indoor plumbing. A visit was a functional ritual — a combination of bath, social outing and spiritual cleansing.

The latest crop takes its cues from tradition. After undressing, you travel through chambers of varying degrees of heat, starting with a shower in the coolest room. Then, in a slightly warmer room, a *tellak* (bath attendant) covers you in detoxifying clay. Next, you are ushered into a hot room where buckets of cold water are stationed to prevent heatstroke and then placed on a heated marble belly stone. After a luffa sloughing and a final rinse, your skin feels as satiny as a newborn's.

As the *hammams* at places like La Mamounia in Marrakesh and Cagaloglu Hamami in Istanbul draw record crowds, other hoteliers are hoping their guests will want to bathe en masse. This summer, the Landmark Spa at the Mandarin Oriental in Hong Kong will install Turkish baths. In Buenos Aires, the Faena Hotel + Universe just opened the doors to its Philippe Starck-designed Italian-marble *hammam*. "My idea was to go back to that day where you sat for hours in the spa talking and having *gommage* treatments," says the owner, Alan Faena. "One of our intentions was to encourage socializing — that's why we make great parties inside the *hammam*." André Balazs insists the *hammam* opening at his new Standard Spa in Miami in late summer is about "health and community." But it's fair to assume that the steam will be used as a social lubricant. Balazs's attendants will sell scrubbing products to encourage men and women (in bathing suits) to rub one another down. It's getting hot in here.

THERE'S THE SCRUB

Inspired by her Turkish grandmother, Yael Alkalay, the founder of Red Flower, introduces a bathing-treatment line this month called Hammam (available at Barneys New York). It consists of these seven products:

- Moroccan Mint Tea Silt Purifier (below left), \$32.
- Lemon Coffee Blossom Olive Stone Scrub (below center), \$62.
- Orange Quince Steam Room Mist (below right), \$36.
- Cardamom Amber Oil, \$44.
- Neroli Cypress High Atlas Mineral Soak, \$38.
- Tangerine Fig Butter Crème, \$52.
- Jasmine Rose Rhassoul Clay Polish, \$24.



ANN MARIE GARDNER