FLUIDRA

TRENDS IN AQUATIC WELLNESS

for hotels and spa centers



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01 INTRODUCTION

The wellness sector is experiencing significant **growth**; with aquatic wellness and the unique experience it offers standing out in this context.

According to data published by the Global Wellness Institute, the wellness economy reached a value of $6.8 trillion in 2024, growing **at a rate that exceeds the global economy**, with a market value that surpasses the technology sector, tourism, and the sports industry.

Joining this expanding market and doing so successfully requires understanding the **fundamentals of design** in aquatic wellness-oriented spaces, as well as the main **trends and technologies** that are transforming wellness spaces.

In turn, these technical fundamentals must be put at the service of the number one priority for standing out in the sector: the ability to create **unique user experiences** that **offer profound therapeutic benefits** while functioning efficiently and sustainably.

This creates a three-pronged approach: **optimized design, personalized experiences**, and **environmental sustainability**. This combination can make all the difference when approached professionally, combining trends with expertise to stand the test of time.

Below, we address the main trends in aquatic wellness, also providing key guidelines on how to incorporate them at a technical and design level.



02 WELLNESS ESSENTIALS: FROM TRADITIONAL WELLNESS TO NEW AQUATIC THERAPIES

2.1 Finnish saunas: wellness inherited from ancient rituals

The Finnish sauna stands out as one of the most valued elements in wellness spaces.

This facility harnesses the power of **dry heat to induce** intense **sweating**. Finnish saunas maintain **high temperatures** but **low humidity levels**: humidity is around 5-20% and temperatures are around 70-90ºC.

With deep roots in Nordic culture, it is conceived **as a relaxing and therapeutic ritual** for both the body and mind, as well as a place to socialize.

In addition, the Finnish sauna is a tool for the well-being of the mind and body, with significant benefits:

- **Detoxification:** Finnish saunas eliminate toxins by promoting intense sweating.
- **Skin care:** high temperatures and sweating also help remove dead skin cells, promoting cell renewal and therefore being beneficial as part of skin care routines.
- **Cardiovascular benefits:** a **study** by Professor Jari Laukkanen's research group found that "taking a 30-minute sauna bath reduces blood pressure and increases vascular distensibility, while increasing heart rate in a similar way to moderate-intensity exercise."
- **Supports immune function:** By accelerating the body's detoxification processes, dry saunas help boost various body systems, including the immune system.
- **Improved breathing:** The high temperatures and dry air inside a Finnish sauna can help reduce congestion.
- **Muscle relaxation:** a benefit for anyone who uses a sauna, but especially useful after a workout or training session.

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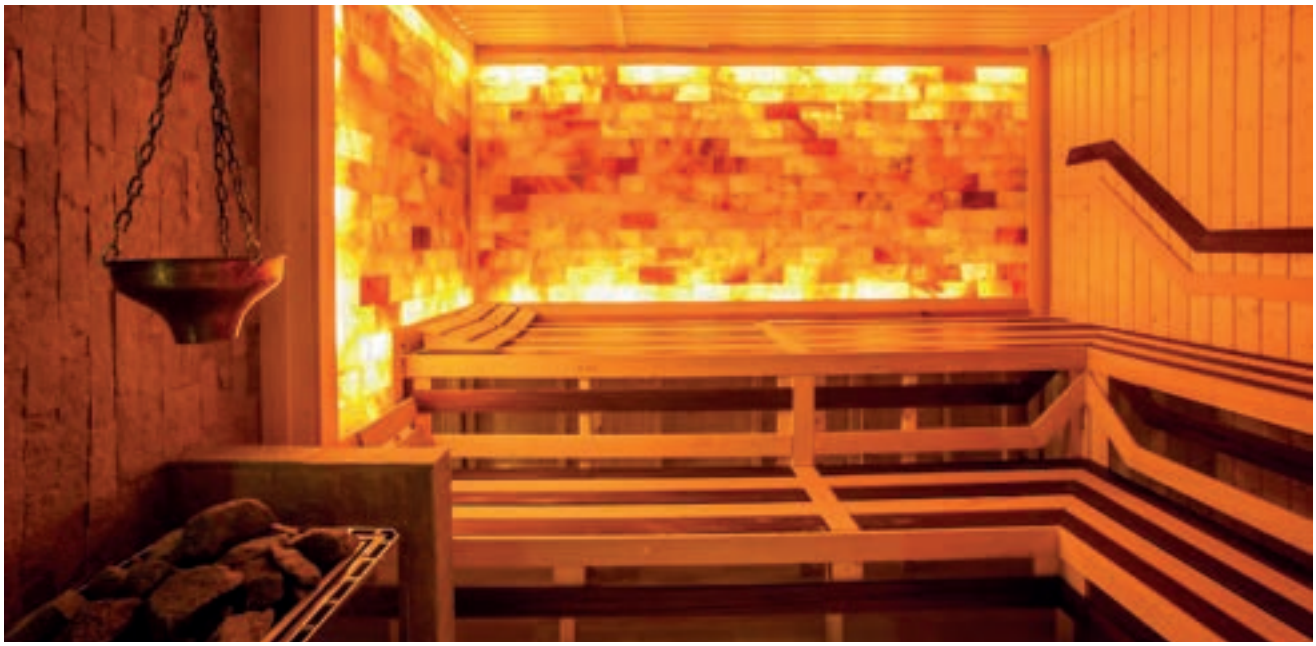


- **Stress reduction:** The impact of Finnish saunas on mental well-being was mentioned in a systematic review of the scientific literature related to saunas (**Hussain and Cohen**, 2018), which found that "sauna bathing has beneficial psychological effects that are reflected in numerous reports of improved well-being, [and] pain tolerance," a wide range of positive outcomes that "may be due to a combination of factors including the release of endorphins and other opioid-like peptides, such as dynorphins."

2.2 Salt saunas: a reinterpretation of the sauna for halotherapy

Salt saunas can be understood as a **renewed vision** of Finnish saunas, providing a differentiated experience as part of the *wellness* space offering. These spaces feature **Himalayan salt bricks** placed on one or more walls of the sauna itself. The space also has benches or stretchers on which to rest, dim lighting, and, in the center of the cabin, a salt generator or halogenerator.

The temperature in salt saunas can range from **48 to 75ºC**, while the relative humidity is between **20 and 50%.** These conditions favor the natural process of **salt ionization** and **halotherapy**: a wellness experience based on the creation of a saline environment where the skin and respiratory tract absorb small saline microparticles, which have been linked to benefits for respiratory, dermatological, muscular, and stress-related problems.



2.3 Steam baths: taking advantage of the benefits of heat and humidity

The main characteristic of steam baths is that, while temperatures do not exceed 60°C, **humidity remains at around 100%.**

Originating in Byzantine and Roman tradition, steam baths are built-in or prefabricated rooms that use **hot water vapor** to create their characteristic warm, humid environment. Inside, there is space for users to sit or lie down on wooden, stone, or marble benches, as well as dim lighting.

Due to the unique environment of heat and steam created in these spaces, they have therapeutic potential in the following areas:

- Clearing the airways and eliminating nasal congestion and mucus
- Detoxification and cleansing of pores
- Muscle relaxation
- Improving blood circulation
- Increasing oxygen levels in the body
- Reduce stress and relieve mental fatigue

2.4 Cold plunge: the most revitalizing trend in aquatic wellness

Cold plunge refers to a space within a wellness facility that allows the body to be completely immersed in cold water for a certain period. It often takes the form of a small **immersion pool** with **low-temperature water** (between 44 and 54 °F).

Standing out as one of the most significant wellness trends embraced by *influencers* and the *fitness* world, *cold plunge* also has ancient origins: as early as the late 5th century BC, Roman baths followed the example of the Greeks and installed *frigidariums* (or cold rooms) as part of their wellness circuits.

Today, *cold plunge* facilities are part of **contrast therapy**. Used after other heat-based treatments (such as saunas or steam baths), their use is linked to the following benefits:

- Stimulation of the **cardiovascular system** and improved blood flow, which translates into significant positive effects such as boosting the immune system and contracting and dilating the venous walls.
- Potential improvement in muscle recovery and reduction of soreness after intense workouts.
- General **revitalizing** effect, promoting the release of endorphins, which improve **mood**.
- Prolonged use can **increase resistance to cold.**
- **Oxygenation** and transport of nutrients to the skin, thanks to increased blood circulation.
- Blood flow also promotes improvements in **swelling** and **inflammation**, which may be helpful for those suffering from chronic pain or arthritis.
- Promotes **cell regeneration.**
- Potential increase in **metabolic rate** immediately after use (as the body works harder to maintain its internal temperature).



03 NEW AQUATIC WELLNESS THERAPIES: WELLNESS SPACES THAT GO BEYOND

The incorporation of different water-based therapies **enriches the wellness offering** and attracts a diverse clientele seeking unique holistic treatments.

This represents a valuable strategy for spas and wellness centers seeking to provide their clients with an exceptional experience, setting themselves apart from the competition.

Within this approach, there are several options:

3.1 Watsu therapy

Watsu therapy is a technique of bodywork in water used primarily for relaxation and physical and emotional well-being. This therapeutic approach is based on two fundamental pillars:

- The **principles of shiatsu**, a traditional Japanese massage and bodywork therapy that uses fluid, slow movements and gentle pressure on specific areas of the body.
- The **therapeutic attributes of warm water** and **flotation** to maximize relaxation and physical recovery.

"Watsu therapy is a technique of bodywork in water used primarily for relaxation and physical and emotional well-being"



A Watsu session is conducted by a trained therapist who supports, mobilizes, stretches, and massages the client, who is in warm water in a shallow pool. During the session, gentle, fluid movements are performed, with attention to breathing to induce mental calm. A unique therapeutic experience linked to the following benefits:

- **Physical recovery**, including positive effects in relieving back pain, muscle tension, and various problems related to chronic pain.
- **Stress relief,** actively promoting the release of tension and a state of mental serenity.
- **Improved sleep quality,** a benefit supported by several studies that described Watsu as a therapy capable of promoting "significant improvements in both sleep quality and quality of life" in people with Parkinson's disease.
- **Well-being during pregnancy:** several studies have found that Watsu therapy "significantly reduces participants' stress and pain levels and improves their quality of life and mental health-related mood."

3.2 Floatation therapy

Floatation therapy adds a new dimension to spa and relaxation centers, offering an activity that **intensifies the senses** and provides physical and mental benefits.

The **floatation tank** is the star of this therapeutic approach. It is a tank where clients immerse themselves in **warm water** (around 34ºC, close to body temperature) mixed with **Epsom salts**. In addition, the tanks are **soundproofed** to ensure there is no external interference and have very dim lighting (which can be turned off for complete darkness). Some tanks also allow music to be played, although the most desirable setting is completely silent and without light. This therapy can also be experienced in conventional pools with a high concentration of salt.

Among the most notable benefits of floatation therapy are the following:

- **Isolation and relaxation:** it is estimated that 90% of our brain's workload is spent responding to sound, light, temperature, and gravity. By eliminating some of these stimuli, the tanks provide the perfect environment to disconnect mentally and experience relaxation in the nervous and musculoskeletal systems.
- **Physical benefits:** Floatation tanks are kept at a temperature close to body temperature, promoting a decrease in heart rate and an increase in blood flow, thereby improving oxygenation. This, in turn, contributes to muscle recovery and a reduction in overall tension.
- **Well-being and mood:** The pain relief and stress reduction associated with floatation therapy are enhanced by the release of dopamine and endorphins, just as after a good workout. Similarly, the lack of stimuli in the tanks can be conducive to mindfulness and meditation.

3.3 Thalassotherapy

The Greek words ***thalassa*** (sea) and ***therapeia*** (treatment or healing) make up the term thalassotherapy or "sea therapy," a concept first introduced in 1867 by Joseph La Bonnardière.

The International Federation of Thalassotherapy defines a thalassotherapy center as "a community **health establishment** that harnesses the **benefits of marine elements** for preventive health or healing and medical supervision."

Thalassotherapy centers are usually located near the sea and may or may not include hotel facilities. In any case, it is at the facilities themselves where seawater is extracted, treated to suit the needs of use, and pumped for use in treatments, with an ideal temperature of 37ºC.

These facilities have become particularly popular in recent years, linked to the increase in ***wellness* tourism**, and make use of the health benefits of elements such as **the marine bioclimate, seawater, mud, seaweed, sand**, and other substances such as **plankton**, used together or separately.

Within thalassotherapy, different types of therapies can also be promoted, such as **peloid therapy** (the use of substances combined with seawater to generate heat in areas of the body such as joints or muscles); **algotherapy** (the use of dried or fresh seaweed placed in hot water or in poultices); **hydrokinesitherapy** (therapeutic exercises in water); and **hydromassage** (application of pressurized seawater jets to promote muscle relaxation and improve blood circulation).

A combination of therapeutic approaches linked to the following health benefits:

- Treatment for the **musculoskeletal system**, speeding up muscle, bone, tendon, and ligament recovery processes, as well as for **rheumatism and osteoporosis.**
- **Physical and mental strengthening,** improving feelings of fatigue at both physical and mental levels.
- Improvement in **dermatological conditions** (e.g., stabilizing psoriasis) and those related to body fat.
- Help with **neurological and respiratory conditions** such as asthma or pharyngitis.
- On a **psychological** level, research such as that carried out by Chennaoui et al. (2018) has described thalassotherapy as an effective aid in combating stress, fatigue, anxiety, and sleep disorders such as insomnia.

"Within thalassotherapy, different types of therapies can also be promoted"



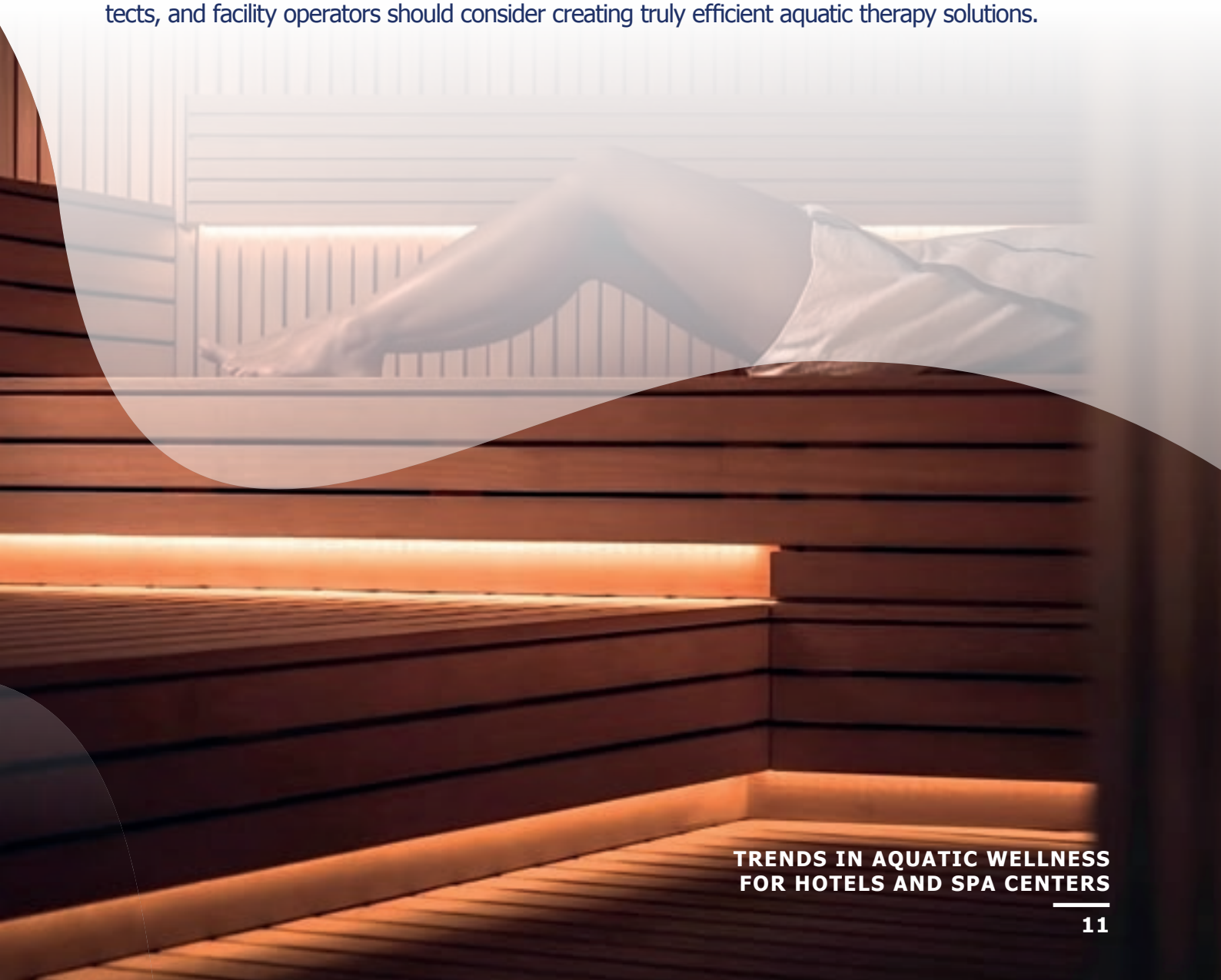
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WELLNESS SPACE PLANNING: DESIGN GUIDELINES FOR CREATING UNIQUE AND PROFITABLE SPACES

For *wellness* professionals, understanding the **ins and outs of designing** and implementing aquatic therapy facilities is crucial not only to meet user expectations, but also to be able to offer unique experiences.

However, making the right decisions in terms of design and technical aspects is also essential to ensure that a facility operates in an **optimized and cost-effective manner.**

Below, we present the main design guidelines for *wellness* spaces that engineers, contractors, architects, and facility operators should consider creating truly efficient aquatic therapy solutions.



4.1 Key points for sauna design

Fluidra's extensive **catalog of Finnish saunas** offers an overview of some of the main options currently available on the market for building modern and efficient dry saunas. In addition, the following elements should be considered when designing high-value Finnish saunas and salt saunas:

- **Structure:** saunas are generally made of wood and have a spacious interior room equipped with benches on the sides at different heights. The entire interior is finished in wood and the heater used to heat the sauna is usually located in the center.
- **Heater:** the heater must be capable of raising the temperature of the sauna to 80-100ºC. There are several options on the market, but the most popular for Finnish saunas are electric, heating the stones that radiate heat inside the sauna.
- **Materials:** It is highly recommended to use high-quality materials, such as oak, which helps retain the heat in the sauna and can easily withstand high temperatures. Other materials, such as stainless steel and glass, are also valuable in a Finnish sauna, with transparent panels that allow you to see outside. Likewise, the use of stainless-steel handles and hinges is noteworthy, as well as an automatic hydraulic closing system for the door, which is highly recommended to prevent heat loss.
- **Customized elements:** lighting, aroma dispensers, speakers, control panels, and ventilation systems are other elements to consider. All of this is designed to promote an overall visual appeal that enhances the relaxation experience.



4.2 Guidelines for steam room design

Steam rooms can be designed in different ways, ranging from **prefabricated cabins** to the creation of a **custom-built, built-in room from scratch**. Similarly, these facilities can be built into the wall of an existing building or erected as a stand-alone module, with options for outdoor installation also available.

Below, we detail the main elements of steam rooms and design options for a unique user experience:

- **Steam generator:** the heart of an authentic Turkish bath, capable of transforming these spaces into wellness experiences. Steam generators come in different sizes and with different functionalities, which must be adjusted according to the space inside the room. A generator that meets the strictest safety and quality standards must function well regardless of the types of water used and must be seamlessly integrate with other solutions and systems as needed.
- **Materials:** The solid surface design should be minimalist, with elegant, high-quality materials that are also durable and easy to maintain and clean. This includes options such as stone finishes, ceramic tiles, or acrylics.
- **Accessories:** To achieve a holistic and sensory experience, elements of color therapy, starry skies, music therapy, aromatherapy, and innovative touch control panels can be incorporated.

4.3 Design guidelines for *cold plunges*

There are no set rules regarding the dimensions of a cold-water immersion pool. Otherwise, some of the main design requirements include the following:

- **Temperature:** It is essential to ensure that the water is sufficiently cold, maintaining a temperature between 7 and 15 °C. To achieve these conditions, efficient cooling systems for the pool are required, with controlled and safe temperature settings.
- **Depth:** the pool must be at a certain depth (around 1 meter deep) so that users can submerge themselves completely.

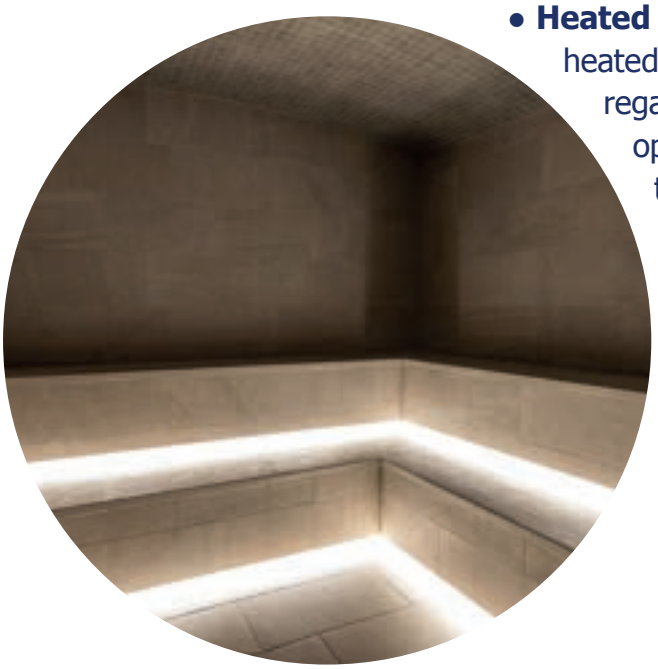
"The steam generator is the heart of an authentic Turkish bath, capable of transforming these spaces into wellness experiencies."

- **Size:** Cold water immersion pools do not need to be large, as it is unlikely that several users will want to be in them at the same time. They are not designed for swimming, which offers the advantage of versatility, as they can be installed in small spaces and are relatively easy to maintain.
- **Shape:** there are also numerous options in terms of shape. Although most immersion pools are rectangular, the shape can vary depending on the space and environment in which you want to install it. In addition, they can be installed either in-ground or above-ground.
- **Materials:** Single-piece stainless steel structures for cold plunge pools fit perfectly with modern décor, especially when they have a square shape and defined angles. In more rustic settings, however, a rounded plunge pool with wooden edges can also be installed. Finally, you can also opt for a concrete pool, which blends well in most spaces.
- **Safety features:** Non-slip surfaces should be incorporated around the pool area, handrails should be provided for user support, and clear signage should indicate the temperature and guidelines for use.

4.4 Design keys for Watsu therapies

Among the main elements to consider when incorporating Watsu therapies into a *wellness* center are:

- **Certified professionals:** It is essential to have therapists trained in Watsu techniques and essential lifesaving skills.
- **Attention to medical conditions:** Although Watsu therapy is generally considered safe, special attention should be paid to people with specific medical conditions, which should be communicated to the therapist before the session.
- **Flexible approach:** The frequency of Watsu sessions depends on individual needs and goals. While some people may benefit from occasional sessions, others integrate Watsu as a regular component of their wellness routine.



- **Heated pools:** Watsu therapy should be performed in heated pools that promote the user's well-being. In this regard, choosing the right heating solution allows operators to ensure optimal water conditions at all times, without compromising cost efficiency or sustainability.

"The frequency of Watsu sessions depends on individual needs and goals."

4.5 Key design considerations for flotation therapies

Below we share the main elements to consider when installing a flotation tank:

- **Basic conditions:** the tank must meet the essential conditions, which are water temperature at 34°C, mixed with Epsom salts. Achieving this requires proper management of the water composition, with high-capacity salt dissolution systems.
- **Filtration for high salinity environments:** salt-resistant water filtration systems must be incorporated to always ensure water hygiene and cleanliness.
- **Effective insulation:** it is essential to comply with total sound and light insulation requirements. Walls and ceilings must therefore be acoustically treated to create a peaceful environment, as well as being completely light-proof.
- **Installation:** it is advisable to place the floatation tanks in a quiet and relaxed area of the spa, so that clients can disconnect as they approach therapy.
- **Part of a package:** it is possible to offer the flotation therapy experience alongside other spa activities to provide the perfect relaxation experience. It is also advisable to offer chromotherapy or music therapy as an extra option.

4.6 Design guidelines for thalassotherapy

Thalassotherapy requires a certain degree of complexity in terms of design and engineering, as it must ensure that the nature and **properties of the seawater** on which these facilities are based are not compromised.

Therefore, below are the main measures to be taken when designing thalassotherapy facilities:

- **Open or closed circuit:** these facilities often have an open circuit, thus avoiding the need for water treatment involving filtration and disinfection. If an open circuit is not available, frequent water changes in swimming pools and hydrotherapy pools help to ensure that the positive properties of seawater remain intact.



- **Filtration:** once the seawater is in the thalassotherapy facilities, if the circuit is closed, it must be filtered using sand filters, disinfected with chlorine and, ideally, UV equipment.
- **Materials:** the equipment used to treat seawater must be made of plastic, fiberglass, or materials that are resistant to marine environments and radiation. Another option, although less recommended, is to use metal elements with high-quality epoxy treatments to prevent corrosion. In addition, the elements in the technical room and those that come into contact with water are not the only ones susceptible to corrosion by seawater: any element in the facility and lighting, among others, must be monitored to avoid this problem.
- **Solutions to prevent sedimentation and the entry of solids**
- **Technologies for pH control**

4.7 Design guidelines for beach areas

Beach areas within wellness spaces are defined as the area **surrounding** a swimming pool. It is the surface closest to the water and the place where bathers usually rest on their sun loungers, stroll or prepare to dive into the pool.

The importance of the beach area goes beyond these obvious activities: it is a key element that defines **the aesthetics, safety, and comfort of the pool area.**

In this sense, its careful design largely determines the user's experience within the wellness space.

The following factors should be considered when designing a beach area in aquatic wellness spaces:

- **Surface:** although the beach area should be aesthetically pleasing, it must have certain safety features. This includes being non-slip, uniform, red-hot reflective, and resistant to chemicals, mold, and mildew.
- **Materials:** These must be chosen appropriately to meet the requirements described in the previous point, while striking a balance between cost, durability, and maintenance. The type of pool can influence decisions about materials. For example, in-ground or above-ground pools could be accompanied by a beach area made of concrete, as it is durable and easy-to-customize material. Another good option is ceramic beaches. On the other hand, wooden and composite beach areas are a good option for above-ground pools. Cobblestones, wood, synthetic materials, stones, or tiles are some of the options available today.

05 TECHNOLOGIES FOR AQUATIC WELLNESS FACILITIES: ONE STEP CLOSER TO EFFICIENCY

The backbone of any water therapy facility is its **technical infrastructure**, which ensures safe and effective operation. Within these technologies, the following elements are worth considering:

5.1 Water treatment and filtration systems

Selecting the right filtration system is essential for maintaining water quality and clarity. Wellness professionals should consider:

- **State-of-the-art pool filtration systems**, such as sand and/or regenerative filters for large-volume pools.
- **Diatomaceous earth filters** as an option for improving water clarity.
- **Chemical balance management** using automated pH and chlorine level controllers and ORP sensors.

Noteworthy here is the inclusion of smart management systems such as **digital twins**, which promote cost savings through predictive maintenance.



5.2 Advanced water therapy technologies

Several advanced aquatic therapy technologies have emerged to enhance the experience offered in wellness centers, exceeding bathers' expectations and providing **immersive experiences.**

Sensory therapy stands out in this context, involving the use of pleasant and relaxing stimuli through the following technologies:

- **Underwater sound systems:** waterproof speakers or transducers that provide therapeutic sounds and music.
- **Aromatherapy diffusion:** automated dosing systems for consistent fragrance levels.
- **Chromotherapy:** LED lights with the ability to change color synchronized with therapy sessions.

5.3 Energy efficiency and sustainability

The application of technologies opens the door to improving sustainability in modern aquatic therapy facilities. This is the case with equipment such as **variable speed heat pumps** or **heat exchangers**, which offer energy-efficient operation with advanced and sustainable pool cooling and heating systems.

Similarly, it is possible to incorporate technologies and techniques aimed at water conservation, which reduce the environmental impact of these facilities.

"The application of technologies opens the door to improving sustainability in modern aquatic therapy facilities"

06

THE WELLNESS SPACE AS A HOLISTIC ECOSYSTEM DESIGNED FOR WELL-BEING

Aquatic wellness plays a key role in today's expanding wellness trends. As such, operators who opt for aquatic therapies as a differentiation strategy have access to a huge potential pool of interested users, but also to a market in which differentiation is key.

A well-thought-out design in these spaces opens the door to being at the **forefront**, exceeding customer expectations and offering an experience that makes a difference.

In turn, making the right decisions about the technical design of these spaces allows you to offer truly effective therapies without compromising on **operating cost** efficiency and sustainability.

In this sense, the wellness space should be understood as a true ecosystem in which **technical, therapeutic, and experiential elements** coexist with the same goal: to offer a **transformative experience** for users.

"the wellness space should be understood as a true ecosystem"





"This information contains general recommendations that must be taken into consideration on a case-by-case basis. This information is not an instruction manual and cannot be considered as such for any purpose. Any implementation or installation to be made must be made by a professional and under the appropriate guidelines. In this regard, each user is responsible for the application it makes of the information contained herein. Fluidra will not be responsible for its use. Consequently, under no circumstances will Fluidra be liable or responsible for any claim, damages or loss that may arise as a consequence of the use of this information".

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