

The spa of the future

It is difficult to predict the long-term effects of the coronavirus pandemic on the spa and wellness sector. Nevertheless, **Thorsten Bichler**, Director International Sales, and **Andreas Erke**, Head of Interior Design, are daring to look towards the future. The two experts from global market leader KLAFS agree: the pandemic will bring changes and challenges, but also a return to existing values.



An interview with Thorsten Bichler (left) and Andreas Erke (right).

Mr Erke, functioning concepts for hygiene, social distancing and the flow of visitors are currently more important than ever for hotels, saunas and swimming pools, gyms and many other industries. Implementing such measures in everyday operations is not easy as the premises are often not made for this. However, let's look towards the future from our current standpoint – at newly built sauna and spa facilities. How can you respond to the current situation today with regard to planning and design?

Andreas Erke: Planning and designing spa facilities – whether in hotels, gyms, in thermal baths or on cruise ships on the high seas – is subject to many different conditions, influencing factors and, naturally, also the requests and ideas of the clients. With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, even greater focus is being placed on keywords such as minimum distance, maximum number of visitors and optimal room size. There are no “simple” rules of thumb here and no master plans in terms of “this is how it should be done, it can only work this way”. I place the utmost importance on finding the best solution individually with every client based on the location and special characteristics of the project. In our company, we have the great advantage of being able to draw on a wealth of experience from many national and international projects in a wide range of areas and requirements. A solution that was previously created in relation to hotel planning can, for instance, also act as the crucial starting point to take a gym in a new direction. This cross-industrial perspective helps me to identify and help shape trends in designing wellness and spa facilities at an early stage. Surrounded and supported by my team of interior decorators and designers, I can thus present the client with the best possible solution – tailored to their needs and the directives that are currently in force.

It is certainly difficult to talk about trends in sauna design in light of the coronavirus pandemic and its aftereffects. Can you nevertheless grant us a glimpse into the future?

— 90°C

Andreas Erke: Space is a luxury – this applies in times of growing land prices as well as during lockdowns. We have noticed ourselves that we feel increasingly more comfortable in spacious rooms where social distancing can be observed. There is also a trend that could be referred to as a return to the past. Many people value proximity to nature during their wellness and spa stay. Alongside natural materials, which can be incorporated into the design, the spa stay can be combined with a nature-oriented relaxation experience, in which outdoor areas are included in the planning. An artificial bathing lake with a sauna house on its banks would be an example of this. Additional space to relax in the fresh air can also be created on a spacious terrace or a jetty. Sauna experts know that such areas are also used in winter. Fearless souls jump into the cool water after a hot steam bath, even in icy temperatures.

— 60°C

Mr Bichler, as Director International Sales, Managing Director for Asia, and a member of the Global Wellness Institute, you are in close contact with business partners and customers around the world every day. In your view, what effect is the ongoing pandemic having on interest in wellness products such as saunas and pools?

— 40°C

Thorsten Bichler: We have generally observed growing awareness around the world of one's own health and its importance. People are more concerned than ever with their own body and preventative options. For many people – as regards the risk of infection – their own home is now the safest place to enjoy wellness regularly, extensively and independently of external influences. The focus lies on "Wellness@Home" and creating your own oasis of well-being. A healthy lifestyle with regular downtime in the sauna accompanied, for instance, by salt inhalation therapy strengthens the immune system and prevents infectious diseases.

However, the commercial sector and projects that are in the planning stages are also not yet experiencing the much-feared slump from a global viewpoint. The pandemic has only caused the focus to shift. While the spa used to sometimes be merely an “add-on”, it has now developed into a real profit centre. In order to make wellness and well-being a tailor-made experience for guests according to their individual requirements in the future, project developers, architects, designers and hotel operators are currently working together to find new, creative options and solutions. Alongside the communal spa area, we are now alternatively experiencing, for instance, growing interest in multifunctional “in-room wellness” concepts. Sleep, fitness and regeneration are gaining in importance. Special lighting concepts, work-out solutions via hotel TV or even one’s own sauna in the hotel bathroom or suite are much-discussed approaches here.

The topic of climate and environmental protection, which was very popular at the start of the year, has tended to fade into the background in the media due to the pandemic. Does this topic remain a priority for KLAFS?

Thorsten Bichler: This question can be answered with a clear yes. For us, topics such as sustainability, environmental friendliness and resource protection continue to be crucially important and a major part of our everyday work, and are also relevant with regard to future developments.

We also do not view this as a short-term trend or marketing measure, but as a social responsibility. We have been trying to keep energy and raw material consumption as well as emissions and CO₂ pollution as low as possible for many years and strive to achieve further reductions in these areas. For instance, we use certified woods that meet ecological, social and economic standards in our saunas wherever possible, offer intelligent solutions for

energy management such as our "Green Sauna" package or our new insulating glazing, and rely on regional suppliers and short distances.

However, we generally also have to say that climate and environmental protection also continues to be of great and steadily growing importance for our clients, no matter whether national or international, and is also an argument for collaborating with us. We see this in our daily discussions and demand. Even if it is often challenging, we continue to enjoy developing and implementing sustainable concepts and trends with our clients.

— 90°C

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Image themes:



The great feeling of a hot sauna and a view of the calm lake – such nature-oriented wellness moments give guests an unforgettable outdoor experience. At the same time, incorporating outdoor areas creates an extensive spa area with plenty of space. At Hotel Pfalzblick in Dahn, you can enjoy absolute tranquillity in the sauna house by the lake.

Image source: KLAFS | Pfalzblick Wald Spa Resort
This image goes with answer 2.



New “in-room wellness” concepts take the sauna from the communal wellness area and bring it into your own hotel room. “In-room” does not necessarily have to mean indoors. At Forsthofalm in Leogang, it is possible to enjoy a sauna on the balcony of the private suite with a heavenly view of nature.

Image source: KLAFS | © Huber Photography
This image goes with answer 3.



For tomorrow’s generation – product quality, sustainability and resource conservation continue to take top priority at KLAFS.

Image source: KLAFS
This image goes with answer 4.

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