

THE HOT TUB EXPERIENCE

Make a splash this year!

By Karen Feld

Last year it was running. This year it's "tubbing." That's the new leisure activity that has attracted hedonists, health fanatics, and entire families across the country.

WET, "the magazine of gourmet bathing," calls it "wonderfully soothing." Sanford Berman, a Washington attorney and representative tub owner sums up hot tubbing this way: "It's a total relaxation experience that makes me forget the everyday normality of work, court, and the practice of law."

For many, it recalls those innocent younger days when playing with sailboats or rubber ducks in the bath was still socially acceptable. Then you grew bigger, and the tub seemed smaller. And you got busier, and showers seemed easier, although admittedly less fun.

Recreational bathing, however, was popular long before you discovered it. The Egyptians, Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans all partook in communal bathing. But "tubbing," as we know it today, most closely resembles the Japanese version. Their Ofuro, an indoor tub usually made of teak, was designed for relaxing with family or friends in 115 degree water.

"In the 1840s," according to a 1926 *New York Times* feature, "the bathtub was denounced in the United States as an epicurian innovation from England designed to corrupt the democratic simplicity of the Republic. The medical profession warned against it as a product of rheumatic fevers, inflammatory lungs and all zymotic diseases." In fact, when the bathtub was introduced in the White House in the early 1850s, the Millard Fillmores were widely criticized for this perk.

Yet, just a century later, hot tubs began flourishing in

California. Tubbing followed the grape stomping ritual in Santa Barbara. The first hot tubs used there were wine vats with water piped in from natural hot springs. The craze caught on and tubs with pumps, filters, and jet blown bubbles have become a luxury in California homes, and an amenity offered in most large apartment complexes. In just a decade, tubs were a way of life in California, and are now catching on just about everywhere, including the East Coast. Even Charles Schultz employed one in a recent Peanuts strip.

"Aside from the purely social aspects of tubbing, physicians recommend it for aching muscles and to improve circulation."

Judging from the audience's bewildered reaction to the hot tub scene in *Platinum*, a recent musical production at the Kennedy Center, many Washingtonians are obviously novices to the tubbing phenomenon. Very simply, it entails soaking, au naturel, in a wood or fiberglass tub of swirling water of 103 to 105 degrees. "It's an absolutely delightful experience to be in a tub. It is something that one enjoys sharing with friends," says Charles Edwards, of Hot Tubs International, Inc., Falls Church.

Tubs vary in size and shape, but generally they are round or oval, and redwood, four feet high, and either four, five, six or eight feet in diameter. A four-foot tub accommodates four people, and an eight foot tub can hold up to 20. Redwood has been the preferred wood because of its durability, attractiveness and longevity. But due to the ris-

ing price of redwood, limited availability, and increasing competition among the dozens of manufacturers, attention is being given to alternatives to redwood.

Cedar is the most popular. It leaches less, insulates better, and has a pleasant odor, but it may have a shorter lifespan since it's a softer wood. Cedar is lower in cost, but more susceptible to insect infestation. Other alternatives are teak, mahogany, hemlock, and oak. The only drawback to teak is the cost. Franciscan Woodworks in San Rafael, California, is one of the few companies that produces an all-teak tub. Teak has a naturally, slippery feeling and is highly resistant to decay. But since it is a very hard wood, special tooling is needed in the manufacturing process.

Some tubbing enthusiasts prefer square or rectangle fiberglass spas to wood tubs. Fiberglass, although more expensive, is durable, lightweight, colorful, and has unlimited design capabilities. It generally lasts longer since there is no possibility of rotting wood. "But either redwood or fiberglass has the capability of outlasting its owner with a little bit of care," says Charles Deasy, of Browning Pool & Patio. Also bacteria does not accumulate since it can be wiped down.

As a result of the demand to meet competition and varied tastes of a wider audience, aluminum, acrylic, tile and cross-linked polyethylene are providing alternatives to fiberglass. A cross-linked polyethylene (cross-linking makes the product more durable) is more flexible and more durable than fiberglass.

Tubs can be installed indoors or outdoors. They require less space than a swimming pool, less maintenance, are less expensive and can be used year round. There are dozens in the Washington area. Most are outside, although some are in basements or enclosed. Some are placed in a well below ground, and others are above ground, many with a deck or gazebo built around them.

The cost of the tub is generally \$1,500 to \$5,000. It varies with the type of installation and accessories, such as extra seats, outside shelves, covers and floor bubblers.

Installation is relatively simple in terms of plumbing and wiring. A floor drain nearby is essential if the tub is placed indoors. It is filled with a hose and holds from 400 to 600 gallons of water. It is heated and operated by either electricity, natural gas, or liquid propane. A five-foot tub using natural gas can be heated and operated for only

50 cents a day, or 75 cents a day using electricity, according to Edwards of Hot Tubs International.

Maintenance is minimal. Add chlorine daily. It is recommended that the tubs be drained, scrubbed with baking soda, and refilled a few times a year.

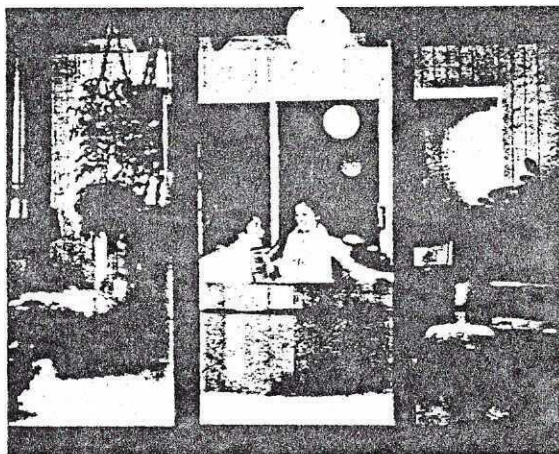
Many Washingtonians attempt to capture the California ambience with the setting they create for their hot tub. One suburban Virginia family, for example, built a tri-level deck around a six-foot tub on the acre lot behind their Great Falls home. Their property backs up to 20 acres of park, so that it gives the effect that the tub is sitting in the woods by itself. But city-dwellers such as the Edward Szrons, who put a six-foot tub on the patio of their Arlington home, and the Charles Boyles who put a tub on their Georgetown patio, have created a private area for their tubs as well.

California canyon homes tend to be more secluded than a Georgetown townhouse, but privacy has not presented a serious problem.

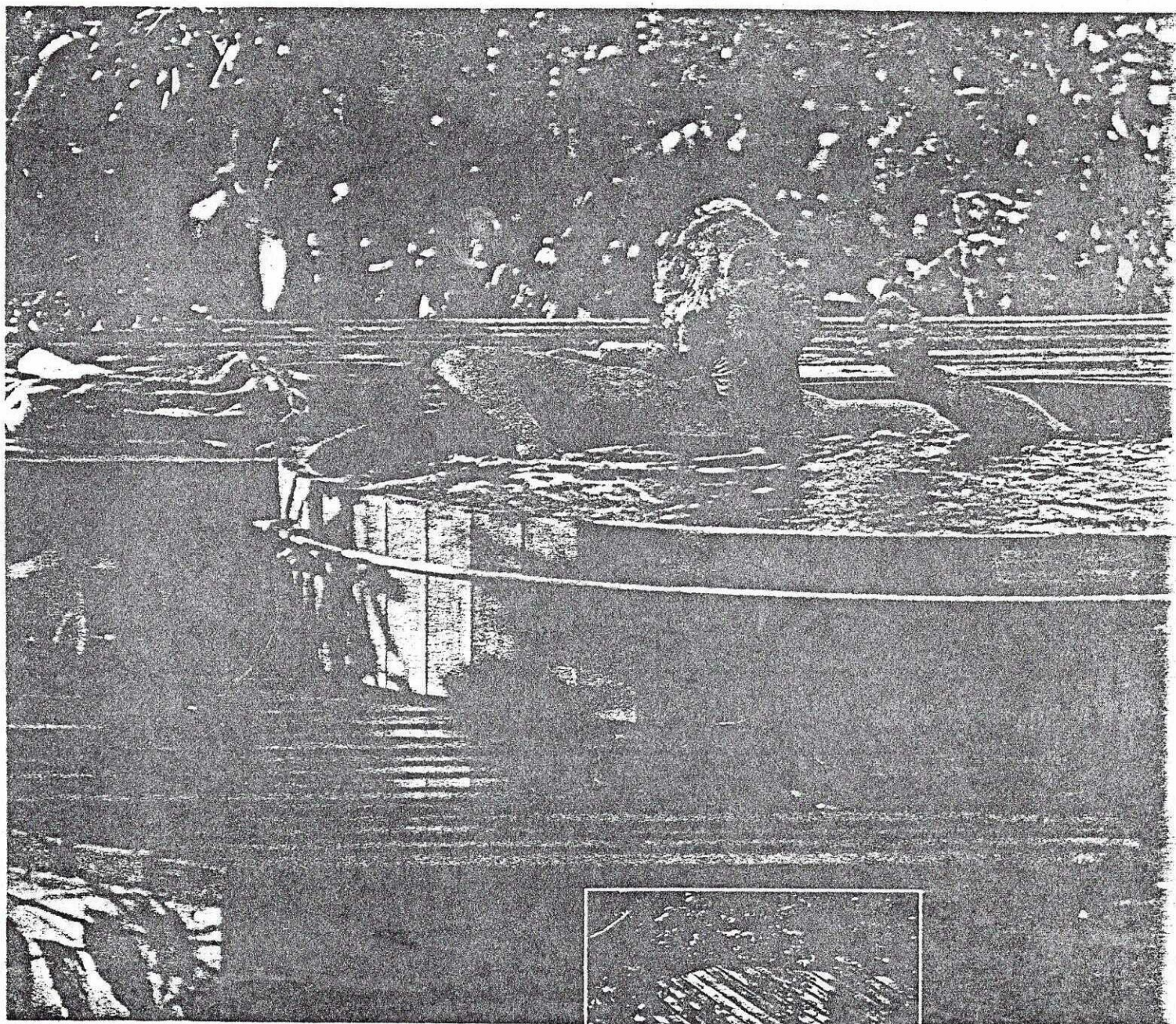
Another factor in Washington that a potential tubber must consider is temperature. "When temperatures outside are freezing, the ideal hot tub

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There are those who think this simple sybaritic pleasure will soon replace the before-dinner martini as an instant at-home relaxer.



Make a splash this year!

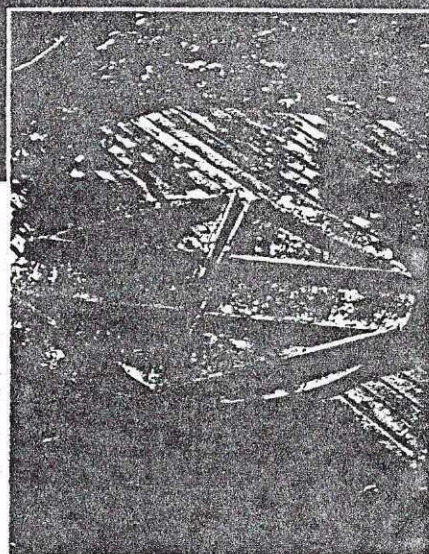


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Hot Tubs

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temperature is 105 degrees. In Fall, 102 degrees feels good. While in summer, 90 degrees feels warm," says Paul Stevens, California Hot Tubs, Rockville. The cold air from the outside cools the water down. "Tubs are spontaneous. When I go home my tub will be down to 98 degrees. I want to use it right away. Propane and natural gas will raise the temperature in minutes," says Stevens. The tubs should be insulated and

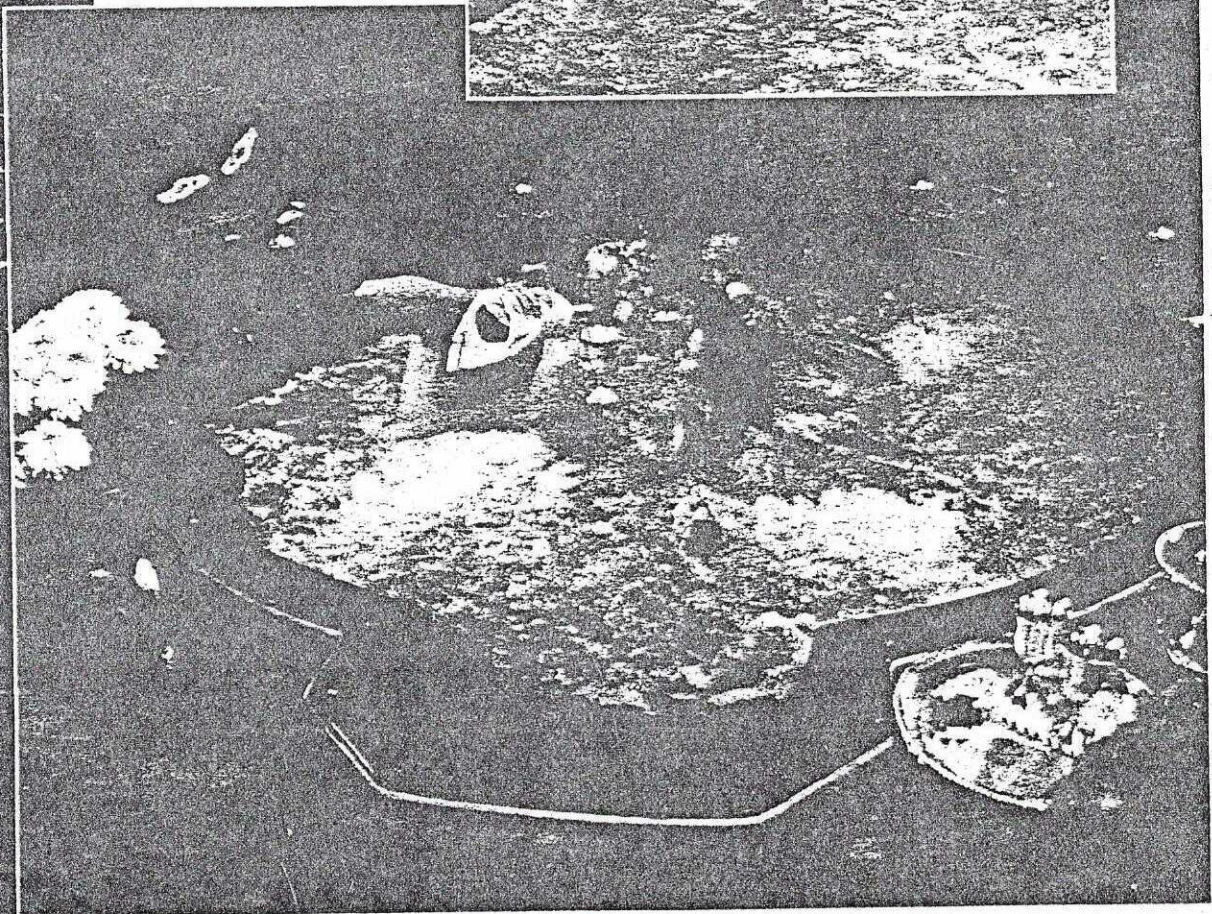
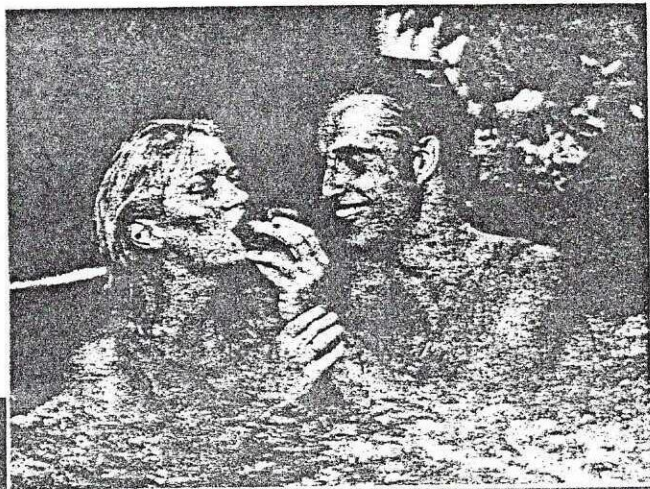


covered to keep the water from freezing when not in use.

An automatic timer can be set to go on at a certain time so that the tub will be the right temperature when you get home from the office. "It's habit forming in a nice way," says Charlie Edwards. "It replaces the cocktail."

Most hot tub distributors in the area agree that the typical purchaser is a professional couple in their thirties or forties, homeowners who are not uptight and enjoy life. Most of the first people in the area to have tubs, were those

What better way to bring in 1979 than with a hot tub party like the one pictured here? As one satisfied tub owner put it, the experience is something that one enjoys sharing with friends. The fiberglass tub at right and below is equipped with water jets that produce hydromassage for added sybaritic enjoyment. You'll have to supply your own friends.



who had travelled and experienced them on the West Coast initially.

"It's a spontaneous thing. It has a warm feeling," says John Jarbo, who received his tub as a Christmas gift from his seven kids last year. And this year, the family holiday card shows a photo of the entire family in the tub. Hot tubs are still a luxury item, but are becoming more and more commonplace.

"I don't think it's really hedonism as much as it's self-preservation," says Peter Kreyling, of Blue Ridge Coop-

erage, the only manufacturer in the Washington area. Kreyling grew up in Japan where he enjoyed a daily Ofuro. He built his own tub five years ago and has been making them commercially for the past year and a half. Aside from the purely social aspects of tubbing, physicians recommend it for aching muscles and to improve circulation. In some cases, it is tax-deductible. Psychiatrists have recommended it to relieve tension.

The size and type of tub you install will depend upon

the space available and your pocketbook. But if you opt for a wood tub, check for quality material and workmanship. Check for leakage and splinters. Be certain that the pump and heating equipment is capable of heating the tub quickly and producing vigorous hydromassage. If you use electricity, access to a 40 amp, 220 volt electrical hookup to run the support equipment should be adequate.

Wood hot tubs or fiberglass whirlpool spas are available locally from the following:

Blue Ridge Cooperage, Box

239, Flint Hill, Va. 22627. Tel. 703/675-3672. (redwood hot tubs).

The Hotub Works, 5835 Berkshire Court, Alexandria, Va. 22303. Tel. 703/960-3342. (redwood and cedar tubs).

Hot Tubs International, Inc., Mr. and Mrs. Charles Edwards, 7342 Pinecastle Road, Falls Church, Va. 22043. Tel. 703/560-6162. (California Cooperage redwood hot tubs).

B & B Exterior Designers, Inc., Rockville, Md. Tel. 301/424-6400. (portable fiberglass hot tubs).

Browning Construction Co., Inc., Germantown, Md. Tel. 301/972-3800. (Mr. Spa of California, fiberglass, portable, all-electric tubs).

Spa Warehouse East, Bethesda, Md. Tel. 301/983-0177. (fiberglass hot tubs).

California Hot Tubs, Stevens & Sons, Inc., 2285 Lewis Avenue, Rockville, Md. 20851. Tel. 301/881-8360. (redwood hot tubs).

Hollywood Hot Tubs, 6155 Dobbins Road, Unit B, Columbia, Md. 21044. Tel. 301/997-3311. (cedar and redwood hot tubs). ☆