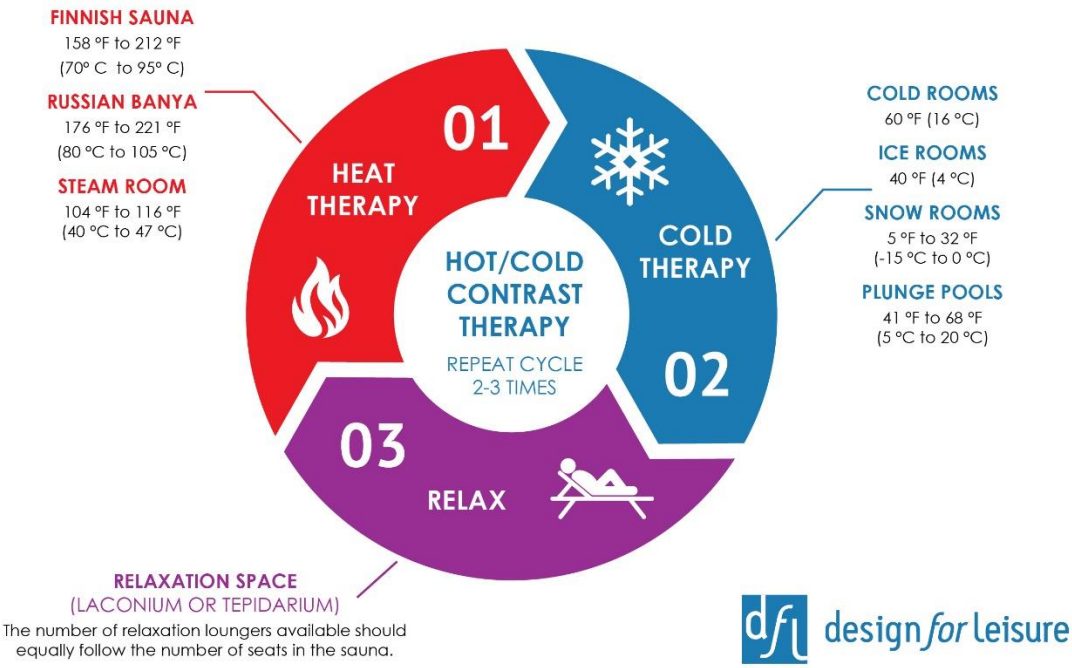
Essentials Required for Effective Hydrothermal Bathing

Don Genders, Design for Leisure Founder, explains the most important features of a true hydrothermal bathing experience.



First of all, it's absolutely crucial to have thermal rooms that are truly HOT or users won't get the benefits of hot/cold contrast therapy. And, of course, to achieve the wellness benefits of hot/cold contrast therapy, you also need a truly COLD experience - which, even if you plan to use a simple shower, will also require some planning. The other crucial element is rest/relaxation space, something that is often overlooked because people have a hard time seeing the value (ROI) of this kind of space, but, in reality, there is no point of offering a sauna without a relaxation area. It's really a mandatory part of hydrothermal bathing that can't be shunted aside to save space or money. Finally, though it's not a "must," I fully believe fresh air and outdoor space is critical to any wellness area whether it's at home or in a 5-star spa.

Detailed explanations of each key area:

Heat Therapy – Saunas must be hot and operate in the traditional 'Finnish' or Russian Banya style. This means infrared 'saunas,' which are so popular in North America should be used as a treatment and not considered a hot room. In reality, most infrared rooms do NOT get hot enough to even be considered a sauna. The only exception to this is infrared cabins that use ceramic infrared heaters, something found more commonly in Asian countries where this form of heating can achieve very high temperatures similar to a traditional sauna heater. For example, the German Sauna Standard states that, by definition, a sauna has to operate above 70° C/158° F to be called a sauna.

Cold Therapy – A simple shower can achieve this. However, the problem with this is that most showers run off the city water supply, which, in some regions, can reach summer temperatures of 21° C/70° F. This makes showers unreliable as an effective cooling solution all year round. Chillers or shower lines is a successful enhancement of this simple form of cooling. Even better are cold rooms (16° C/60° F), Ice Rooms (4° C/40° F) or Snow Rooms (-10° C/14° F). Then there are cold plunge pools which, depending on region, can be anywhere from 8° C/46° F to 12.5° C/55° F.

Whatever the case, there should always be showers to enable rinsing off between hot and cold, particularly with cold plunge pools as they are normally small and excessive amounts of body fats will quickly clog filters and sit on the water surface in an unsightly 'oil slick'. In addition to conventional bathing type showers, there are 'feature' showers varying from simple bucket showers, to wide nozzle waterfall showers through to 'experience' showers that feature a range of theatrical AV and olfactory features designed to keep the bather 'interested' for longer and enhance the cooling experience. Another option to consider is a foot spa or Kneipp hose – but the water must be chilled!

Relaxation Rooms/Space – For some reason, these areas are not very well understood and can be seen as non-revenue generating wastes of real estate. Trying to explain that the time required for a person's body temperature and heart rate to normalize after being in a hot or cold room is basically equal to the time spent in a sauna can be very difficult! However, the number of relaxation loungers available should equally follow the number of seats in the sauna.

Outdoor Space – There's nothing better than fresh air for overall wellness. The ability to walk in open air following a hot experience should be essential! Of course, it's not always possible to achieve this but access to some fresh air should always be prioritized.
And, in more rural locations, the outdoor spaces can be used creatively with outdoor plunge pools, Kneipp walks and, of course, saunas. Access to natural water or even man made 'natural' pools is also a massive bonus.

Original post can be found here:
https://www.designforleisure.com/post/essentials-required-for-effective-hydrothermal-bathing