

There are good reasons to combine materials in the bath. Though I have seen some in which a single, highly active stone predominated—making a bold and original statement—one material is often just too much, whereas you can modulate the effects of different elements by combining them in ways that are mutually complementary. (Balancing contrastingly finished slabs of the same material, such as a honed marble on the floor and a highly polished countertop, achieves a comparable effect.) You can also combine materials in ways that “zone” the bath, giving it a subtle yet muscular architectural presence. This can be as simple as using panels of the same stone on the floor and in the shower and setting off each panel with a border. Or you can craft a frame of tile around the stone panel featuring the “jewelry” of valves, to create a discrete artwork within the environment of the shower. Parsing the materials this way, with some undertaking the melody, others the accompaniment, gives each part of the bath its own character and degree of importance while unifying the space into a balanced, consistent whole.

Something I always advise: Do not put every single idea into one room. The more you edit your materials, the clearer the message and the more restful and consoling the experience. When working with people on their baths, we take samples of the materials they’ve chosen and, quite literally, layer them one on top of the other, beginning with the wall materials, followed by the floor, the tub and sink (or vanity), and concluding with the details. The exercise tells you very quickly what works and what does not and enables you to make effective and inspired substitutions. It is similar to laying out your clothes before a night on the town—you know immediately when the bath’s “wardrobe” has, or has not, fallen into place.

The axis culminating in the tableau of the enveloping soaking tub balancing the oversize rectilinear window on its curving lip is given force and directionality by the identical facing walls of the hall.

