

Brrrr! Warm up with a hot tub

(NC) — The first hot tub in North America appeared in the 1950s in Santa Barbara where some imaginative ex-GIs converted some old wooden wine vats into hot tubs — similar to the hot tubs they had used in Japan. It was the start of the modern hot tub/spa industry which has recently become popular across Canada and the United States.

Today the industry has grown far beyond converted wine tubs, and consumers can find a large number of hot tubs and spas on the market.

What's the difference?

What's the difference between a spa and a hot tub? A hot tub is a water-tight wooden container designed to hold 300 to 1,000 gallons of water and one to 12 people. It may be round, oval or rectangular, with straight or slanted sides. Most hot tubs have a heater, pump and filter — called support equipment — to keep the water hot and clean. Many also have hydrotherapy jets, called hydrojets, or air bubblers to create a bubbly water effect.

A spa is operated and used like a hot tub. It also uses similar heating and filtering systems.

Spa shells are usually manufactured of either a vacuum formed acrylic material or constructed of concrete or gunite on site.

In the acrylic spa models, which are the most popular in Canada, there are a variety of designs, colours and sizes. Design shapes range from squares and rectangles through rounds, pears, kidneys and octagons. Multi-level seating, recliners and loungers are available features.

Standard colours include blue, brown and black marble, solid blue, bone and sequoia. Spa sizes start with the intimate two person model and go to sizes that will hold 10-12 persons comfortably.

For the hot tubs, you can buy expertly crafted round wooden tubs in a variety of woods — redwood, cedar, mahogany and teak.

Where can you put them?

Most spas and hot tubs can be installed, inspected and ready to use within a couple of weeks. You can put them indoors or out — below ground, partially below ground or completely above ground. You'll



(NC) — Hot tubs provide relaxation and enjoyment.

find spas and hot tubs on patios, decks and roofs, in family rooms, basements and greenhouses — almost any location conducive to a relaxing soak.

Increasingly popular are the portable or self-contained spas which can be set in the backyard, on a patio or set up indoors. When the time comes to move or change houses, the portable spa can be taken with you. Portable spas utilize compact equipment packages with pump, filter and heater hidden beneath the spa "skirt."

All the owner has to do is have an electrician safely wire the equipment to a power source, fill the unit with water and then turn it on.

Automated controls

Today you can buy your spa or hot tub equipped with electronic control panels. These can be set for continuous 24-hour low-speed heating and filtering and for automatic startup and shutdown. Control switches for heater, whirlpool or air blower jets are now mounted on the side of the spa and can be operated

while soaking.

A new innovation is a remote control, which can be operated from inside the house or even from a car or plane. Such controls turn on the heater, jets and blower. A simpler control is a time clock

which can be set to heat up the system and automatically shut it down at preset times and at preset temperatures.

Advances have also been made in the various chemicals to sanitize spa water and keep it clean and fresh.

The most popular are chlorine or bromine-based chemicals developed especially for use in hot water and free from chlorine odors associated with earlier chemicals available.

Today you can also buy automated chemical controllers that monitor and automatically feed the required amount of chlorine, bromine or other pH-controlling chemicals into the spa. Alternative water purifiers include those using ions or ozone to kill bacteria and algae.

Lights set into the walls of the spa are also becoming popular. The latest development is a fibre-optic light that illuminates without any electrical connection to the spa.

Benefits of soaking

According to some medical authorities, a good soak in a spa or hot tub is a form of preventive medicine — a means of avoiding illness. Spas and hot tubs offer a drug-free way of reducing stress. They are said to relax muscles, encourage socialization and reduce anxiety.

Of course, you should consult your doctor before using a spa or hot tub if you have any type of health problems.

For more information contact: The Canadian Spa & Pool Association, 6303 Airport Rd., Mississauga, Ont. L4V 1R8 (416) 676-1591.

Unique gifts for hot tub or spa aficionados

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(NC) — What do you buy for that person on your gift list who has everything — including a hot tub or spa? How about a huge stocking full of hot tub and spa amenities? Consider these unique gift ideas:

Spa Fragrances — They come in a rainbow of scents to fit every mood and mask any chemical odor.

Spa Thermometer — To keep easy track of water temperature for prime hot water comfort and safety.

Hot Tub Rental — For that friend who dreams of owning a hot tub or spa, have a hot tub driven up to your friend's door ready for everyone to jump in and enjoy.

Spa Bar/Tables — Your friends

can enjoy a fruit drink, play a card game or read a book while soaking with a spa bar, gameboard or table.

Custom Tiles — Provide custom tiles with logos or signatures to be installed alongside the tiles around your friend's spa.

Control System — A central control switch which can be installed right alongside your spa will program pump and heater operation, pool cleaners, lights, music... action!

Spa Pillow — Buy two or more so everyone who likes to relax in the spa or hot tub can do so in comfort.

Hot Tub Apparel — Choose from all styles of wraps for wearing to

and from the spa. Wrap-around styles are easy to remove before hopping in.

Hot Water Safety Sign — A handsome, water-resistant sign that comes ready-to-mount in blue or brown. It contains information on water temperatures, lengths of stay in spa or hot tub and medical restrictions for spa/hot tub use.

To find any of these items look in the Yellow Pages for your nearest hot tub or spa dealer.

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Speed skating: Life in the fast lane

In speed skating at the 1976 Olympics, Sheila Young Ochowicz became the first American to win three medals in the history of the Winter Games: a gold in the 500-meter sprint, a silver in the 1,500-meter and a bronze in the 1,000-meter event.

The intensity that Ochowicz and other speed skating medalists exhibited during their competitions, with muscles tensed and faces etched with concentration, is depicted on a special coin released by the Royal Canadian Mint as part of its 10-coin Olympic series.

The silver coin captures the essence of strength and excitement created whenever athletes push themselves to the very limit in the pursuit of excellence.

As well as being exciting, each design

is totally authentic. All designs were reviewed by the appropriate sports governing bodies to ensure such authenticity.

Speed skating has been an integral part of the Winter Olympics since they began in Chamonix, France, in 1924. The speed skating hero that year was Clas Thunberg of Finland, who won two gold, one silver and one bronze medal in four events.

Other athletes such as Eric Heiden of the United States; the great Dutchman, Ard Schenk; and the Canadian, Gaetan Boucher, have all distinguished themselves in world competition.

Ochowicz says she is pleased that her sport is being depicted on an Olympic coin.

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