

FEBRUARY 2025

OUTDOOR

LIVING - DESIGN - TECHNOLOGY

FOCUS
Accessibility
& Wellness

Poste Italiane S.p.A. - Spedizione in Abbonamento Postale - Aut. n. MBPA/VCP/099/A, P. 2020 - Periodico ROC

ISSN 3035-2789



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THE PLAN

Italy € 8 / EU € 10 / UK £ 10 / CHF 11,50

Switzerland, Iceland, Finland and Canada

Designing Dedicated Well-Being Spaces

Four examples of harmonious integration into the natural landscape



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1,3. Peter Zumthor, Vals Thermal Baths, Switzerland. © Julien L. Balmer, courtesy of 7132 Therme 2,4,5. Studio Puisto, Pistoiekkä Resort, Finland. © Marc Goodwin (@archmospheres), courtesy of Studio Puisto

Designing thermal facilities and dedicated well-being spaces is a significant challenge for architects tasked with combining balance, functionality, and a profound connection with the natural context. Over the years, numerous projects have explored a variety of approaches to creating such experiences, using architecture as a tool to create an immersive journey capable of amplifying the regenerative power of spaces dedicated to well-being. Purposeful dialogue between materials, light, water and space enables thermal complexes to evolve into places where individuals can focus not only on physical care but rejuvenating the mind, finding ever-more-valuable moments of complete relaxation at a historical epoch characterized by high levels of stress in our everyday lives.

A landmark in thermal building design, the Vals Thermal Baths by Peter Zumthor in Switzerland seamlessly integrates into the Canton of the Grisons mountain landscape. Built from local quartzite, the complex features a green roof that makes it vanish into the mountainscape, rendering it nearly invisible from the outside. Designed as an experiential labyrinth, the interior spaces alternate light and shadow, conjuring up a mystical atmosphere enhanced by so much steam. The wellness center features six rectangular pools at different temperatures, a sauna, and a Turkish bath. The main pool is situated at the heart of a cavernous space. To complete the facility's offerings, an outside sun terrace and panoramic pool offer stunning views of the Alps.



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Nestled within the volcanic landscape of Svartsengi in Iceland, the Blue Lagoon is another prime example of perfect integration into the surrounding environment. Designed by Basalt Studio, the thermal and hotel complex features a 62-room luxury hotel laid out as a natural extension of the landscape, evoking the branches of a river merging with the earth. A new lagoon connected to the existing one is framed by lava rock, which was also used for the spa's internal walls, generating a sensory experience that deepens connections with the Icelandic landscape.

Remaining in northern Europe, the Pistohiekkä Sauna-Restaurant overlooks the shores of Lake Saimaa in Finland. Designed by Studio Puisto, the venture set out to revitalize the Pistohiekkä area, a tourist destination from the 1980s, with an enveloping space constructed from local wood and surrounded by trees. In an ongoing dialogue with the colors of the Saimaa landscape, the design juxtaposes dark exteriors with light wooden interiors. The layout revolves around a rounded central courtyard, where both the sauna and restaurant are



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6,7,9. MacKay-Lyons
Sweetapple Architects, Balnea
spa + réserve thermale,
Canada. © Maxime Brouillet,
courtesy of MacKay-Lyons
Sweetapple Architects

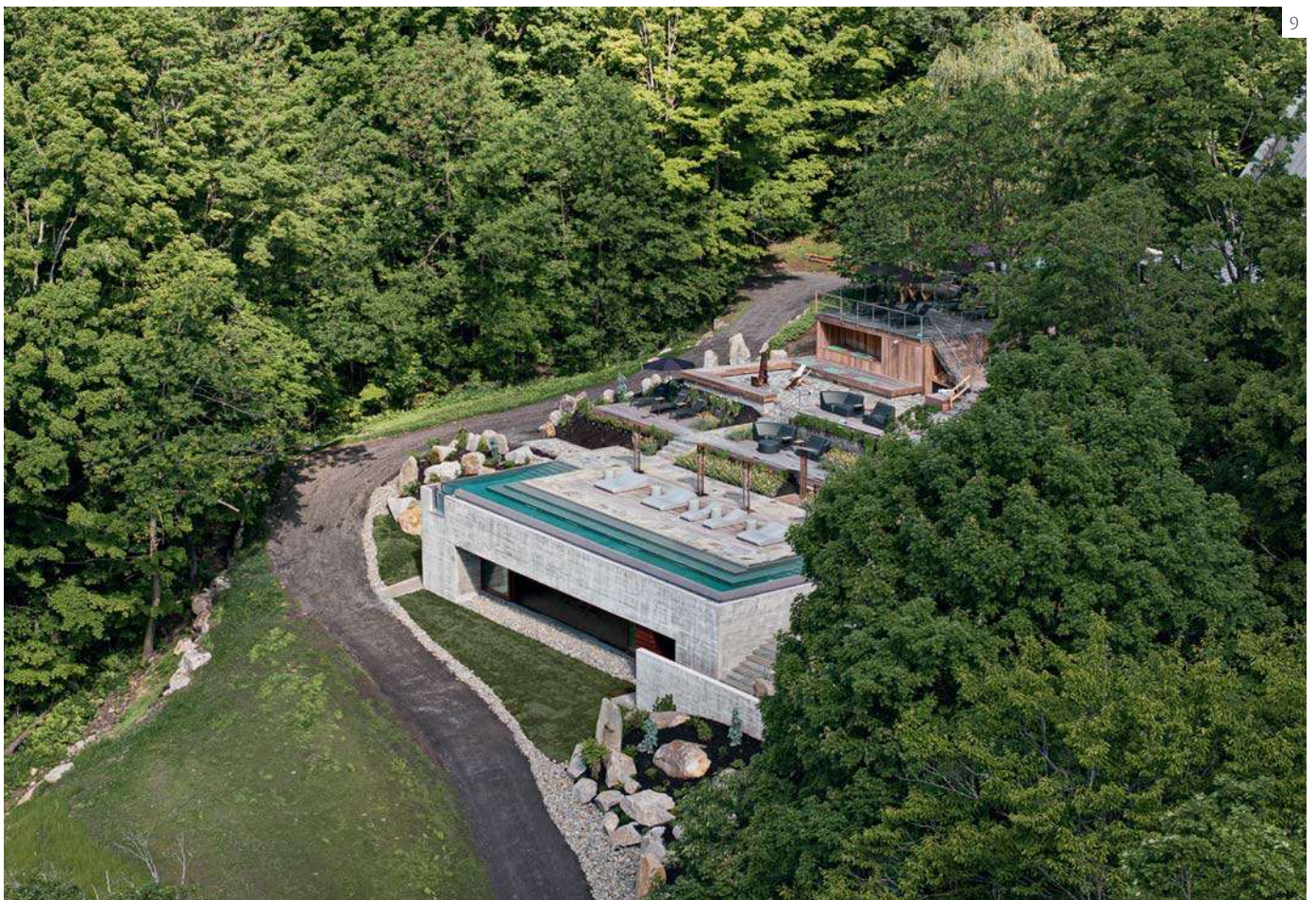
situated, each offering views out over a lake. Terraces and outdoor areas provide additional spaces for guests to appreciate the lake from every angle.

A new pavilion designed by MacKay-Lyons Sweetapple Architects for the Balnea spa + réserve thermale center, in Bromont (Quebec), Canada, presents us with another 360-degree nature experience. The structure nestles within a vast private nature reserve, accommodating the thermal complex's other buildings. Near Lake Gale, the new concrete volume was conceived to be in harmony with the reserve's pristine environment, echoing the texture and solidity of natural Appalachian rock. The project centers around two primary spaces: a 62 sq. m thermal pool that can hold roughly 25 people, and a relaxation room featuring a stretch of soft sand to conjure up an exotic beach atmosphere.



8,10,11. Basalt Architects, The Retreat at Blue Lagoon, Iceland.
Courtesy of Blue Lagoon

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