

# SPAS

ON THE CUTTING

# EDGE

In this city, we become obsessed about what's hot in dining, fashion—and even spa treatments. Here's the latest buzz on the trendiest ways to relax and beautify. **By Troy Segal**



While they may seem like islands of calm and tranquility, day spas are affected by the winds of changing times, therapies and client tastes. Here are some trends in treatments that have evolved from novelty to near-ubiquity among New York's leading beauty and wellness providers.

## ON LAND OR SEA

Spas have been heading back to nature as of late, with elements from the earth and ocean playing a key role in treatments. When you opt for a sand quartz bed massage at **Spa Nalai** (Park Hyatt New York, 153 W. 57th St., 646.774.1210), you may be in a room 25 stories above Midtown, but you feel transported to the beach of a Greek island. The warmed sand molds to your body, thinly covered by a sheet, so limbs never become stiff, and the therapeutic aspect of the heat the sand distributes makes muscles more malleable during the massage. A poultice of sandy pebbles, periodically pressed on tight areas, acts as an extension of the therapist's hands.

Perhaps you prefer a sense of floating on the sea? A warmed water mat plays a key role in the Advanced Marine Biology Facial offered within the old-world elegance of the **La Prairie Spa** (The Ritz-Carlton, 50 Central Park So., 212.521.6135). While the mat gently cradles you, the aesthetician treats your face with a succession of serums and masks derived from micro-algae—rich in antioxidants—and other oceanic ingredients, such as seaweed (good for maintaining skin's elasticity). The arms and legs get massaged, too, with other marine-rich tonics and hot sea stones.

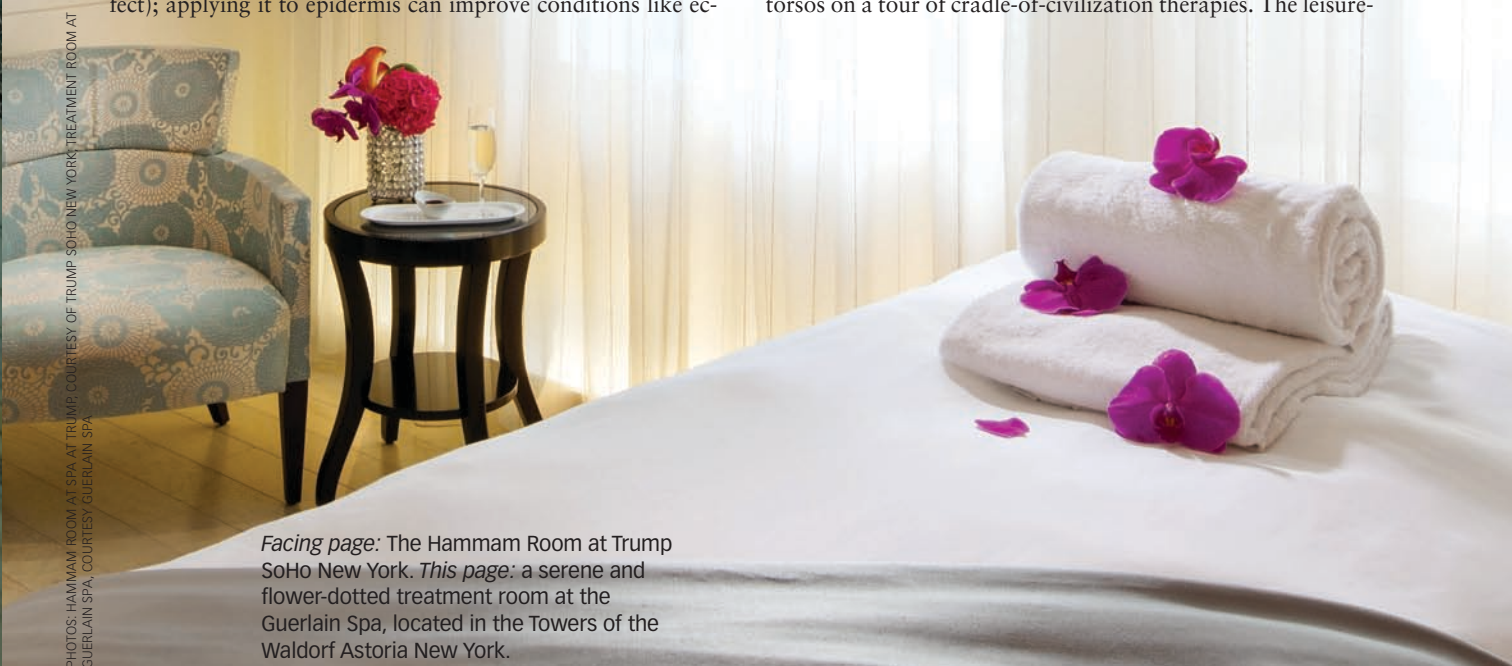
While the benefits of salt water (and things that grow in it) are well-known, increasing numbers of folk are swearing by the benefits of dry salt, or halotherapy: Breathing it in reputedly alleviates asthma, allergies and wet coughs (virus and bacteria, which thrive on moisture, hate its dehydrating effect); applying it to epidermis can improve conditions like ec-

zema and psoriasis. Halotherapy center **Breathe Easy**, located within the **Oasis Day Spa** (1 Park Ave., 212.254.7722), offers a chamber that resembles a beachy den. Leather recliner chairs sit on a floor covered with large Himalayan salt crystals; the walls glow with salmon-colored salt bricks and lamps made of salt rocks. A vaporizer gradually fills the air with micro-particles of salt, undetectable as they drift into lungs and onto the skin. In the course of a typical one-hour session, you can read, chat, listen to music—or have one of Oasis' hour-long Swedish or deep tissue massages in a private alcove.

## OUT OF THE EAST

The use of natural things—especially gritty things—is typical of traditional therapies from Asia and the Middle East. So another spa innovation is the embrace of ancient practices from these lands. In the last few years, for example, the number of spas and fitness centers offering a hammam (aka Turkish bath) experience, “a deep-cleansing ritual of heat, scrubbing and soaping, has only gained steam,” puns the 2015 Spa & Wellness Trends Forecast issued by Spafinder Wellness, a media and marketing company for the spa industry.

Making such services its signature is the **Spa at Trump** (Trump SoHo New York, 246 Spring St., 212.842.5505), which immediately creates an Arabic ambience with its courtyardlike entryway, with Assyrian-style, shell-lined vaulted ceilings and gold marble fountain. Within its domed, mosaic-tiled treatment rooms, guests can opt for a service like the Moroccan Hammam: lying on a heated marble stone while the entire body is washed and exfoliated with a black olive soap and then covered with Ghassoul clay, which alleviates oiliness and tightens pores. Both products, along with the stone, are authentic to Morocco, Spa Director Nadine Shelf emphasizes. **The Spa at Mandarin Oriental's** Clearing Factor Journeys treatment (80 Columbus Circle, 212.805.8880) takes guests' torsos on a tour of cradle-of-civilization therapies. The leisure-



*Facing page:* The Hammam Room at Trump SoHo New York. *This page:* a serene and flower-dotted treatment room at the Guerlain Spa, located in the Towers of the Waldorf Astoria New York.

PHOTOS: HAMMAM ROOM AT SPA AT TRUMP, COURTESY OF TRUMP SOHO NEW YORK; TREATMENT ROOM AT GUERLAIN SPA, COURTESY GUERLAIN SPA

*Below:* The Breathe Easy Center at the Oasis Day Spa allows visitors to do just that. *Right:* Men's grooming and wellness services are becoming more popular at spas everywhere.



ly service begins with a scrub of fine Dead Sea salts (from the Middle East) and Kama oil (from India), and ends with a wrap of neem black clay (African in origin); in between, guests experience the Chinese version of cupping, in which heated domelike glass cups are briefly placed at strategic points on the body, creating a suction that draws impurities to the skin surface, where they can be massaged away. The method “allows the body to purify and refine itself,” explains Assistant Spa Director Nicole Yih. “You’re healing from the inside out.”

## INNER WELLNESS

Healing is another theme on state-of-the-art spa menus. “Everything is about wellness in therapies today,” says Allan Share, president of the Day Spa Association, an industry trade group. “People don’t just want pampering—not that there’s anything wrong with that—but treatments that will make them feel better,” and provide systemic benefits as well.

The **Marilyn Monroe Spa** (135 W. 45th St., 646.640.3830), for example, offers a facial that consists completely of massaging the 43 muscles in the face and around the collarbones with specialized techniques that encourage deep drainage of the lymphatic system and increased blood circulation—and, as a bonus, a glowing complexion (which lasts for days). Encouraging the elimination of fluids and other toxins is also the aim of the deep detox therapy recently introduced by **Exhale** (150 Central Park So., 212 561.7400). Ten EKG machinelike pads are placed around the stomach, thighs and backside; electric

current is then applied at gradually increasing intensity (a somewhat pins-and-needles sensation). In addition to detoxifying, the stimulation can lead to a more toned shape, by causing the underlying muscles to contract and burn fat, as they do while exercising. In contrast, **Bliss Spa** (568 Broadway, 877.862.5477; and two other locations) relaxes muscles in its stretch therapy. Garbed in workout clothes, you lie on a table while the therapist elongates various muscle groups, using bands and belts to position them farther than you could do on your own. A 30- or 60-minute session not only alleviates tightness and soreness, but also improves flexibility.

## HIS MANLY BROW

Spas and salons have been catering to the male of the species for some time now, of course. But one new wrinkle—or should we say antiwrinkle?—is the type of treatments they’re seeking: going beyond traditional massages and hot-towel shaves to seek antiaging or appearance-enhancing services.

According to Danny Kerr, owner of **Spiff for Men** (750 Third Ave., 212.983.3240), his grooming salon in the last two years has seen an approximately 50 percent jump in demand for treatments, such as its 45-minute, deep-cleansing facial, designed (the menu reads) to fix “skin experiencing a premature aged look” with exfoliation, pimple extractions and a detoxifying mask. Spiff also offers an hour-long purifying back treatment, which includes a thorough rubdown to remove dry, dead skin. At unisex **Julien Farel Restore Salon and Spa** (540



Park Ave., 212.888.8988), menfolk now make up almost half the clientele and even have a floor of their own, a handsome, gray- and taupe-hued space with a modernistic barbershop vibe, stitched-leather walls and sleek Italian furnishings. Here, too, treatments that appear to turn back the clock are in demand, says Salon Director John Doran: facials, not unlike those on the women's menu (except that aestheticians massage male visages with downward rather than upward strokes, paralleling the way beard hair grows), and—the salon's specialty—hair services, like the salt & pepper camouflage. It's a balayage technique that blends a color (close to a man's natural hue) in and among gray hairs, "so the gray is less dominant," Doran explains.

## THE PERSONAL TOUCH

The idea of services and products "personalized for your skin type" has been around for a long time. But now, says Spafinder Wellness Global Media Director Betsy Isroelit, "technology has advanced to the point where spas are not just using pre-packaged products that 'fit' you, but truly bespoke items—fresh ingredients, made right on the spot."

It doesn't get any fresher than the custom color foundation at the **Red Door's** makeup counter (200 Park Ave. So., 212.388.0222). First, you indicate whether you like your foundation sheer, medium or full, then whether you prefer a matte or a natural finish, and finally if your skin is dry, oily or normal. Then a video camera is held up to your cheek, your skin tone is analyzed, the results are uploaded into a computer, and, with the press of a few buttons, a bottle of your exclusive formula is mixed, shaken and stirred, while you watch. And

for the body: Did you know the French have identified three different kinds of cellulite? **L'Institut Sothys** (37 W. 57th St., 212.688.9400) does, and its signature slimming treatment has different serums to combat them. Depending on the type marring your thighs, tummy or tail, the aesthetician selects one—or concocts a combination—and applies them with a kneading motion. The therapy is typical of Sothys' approach in "customizing treatments based on clients' needs, rather than following protocols," notes Spa Director Trena Ross.

## BEAUTY EXPRESS

A vogue is also growing for services that are short but sweet. Within its Art Deco digs, **Guerlain Spa** (100 E. 50th St., 212.872.7200) offers the time-pressed a midday reprieve: a 25-minute massage that does a targeted number on troublesome body parts. With its new FaceBar, **Ling Skincare** (12 E. 16th St., 212.989.8833) offers a facial in a half hour, via an infrared energy tool whose warm rays help the applied serums penetrate the skin and stimulate collagen production. **Dermalogica** in SoHo (110 Grand St., 212.219.9800), a futuristic flagship of the famed organic skincare line, cuts the time even further, with its 20-minute MicroZone treatments. Each of these mini-facials targets a different skin problem or need—and, since they don't require appointments, appeal to the impulse spagoer. "You don't have to undress; you don't mess up your hair," notes Dermalogica Director of Global Education Annet King. "And since it's done in an open space, friends can come and chat, or shop, or have a treatment next to you."

Sand bed, customized foundation or a quickie facial—whatever trend intrigues you, there's a place to check it out.



At The Mandarin Oriental, you can experience the Chinese treatment of "cupping," which brings impurities to the skin's surface to be massaged away.