

Spa article for N.Z.Beauty

If you look up the word 'spa' in Wikipedia (the free online encyclopedia) you find -
*The term **spa** is traditionally used to mean a place where water that is believed to have special health-giving properties occurs. This is usually a mineral or hot spring and can include cold water treatments. The term is derived from the Belgium town of Spa.*

Today the word spa has a large variety of meaning. For some it's just means 'a bath with bubbles', but for most I think it still conjures up a place to rest, retreat and enjoy personal time out. Perhaps the word is being overused. I have even seen a 'dental spa' being offered - quite amusing for an 'ex dentist' like me, who can't remember anything remotely relaxing occurring in the dental chair!

In my terms it's a location that features a mixture of areas: wet areas which incorporate the relaxation and thermal units, a treatment area with therapy rooms, large public areas with pools and facilities such as a bar, and often private suites that can be used by a family, or couple, for therapy with their own thermal units and water features. It's a place you can go to spend many hours.

While working in the UK I had the privilege of pioneering a market change so that spa became included in many new sports clubs and hotels. Major groups such as Virgin Active Clubs included a large wet area, treatment rooms and even barber shops at their sites. These became essential to their clients, standing alongside the well equipped gyms, running tracks and exercise pools, increasing memberships and revenues. One we established near Birmingham paid for itself before opening with the presale of 'gold memberships' to the golfers. It was a natural development to a great golf and country club.

In Australasia I believe we are close to seeing spa becoming an important market force.

Larger complexes, sports clubs and hotels will start to add more than just 'the sauna in the corner' as clients' expectations increase, and the establishment sees the revenue and loyalty rewards. Lodges and retreats will make themselves 'destinations' as clients look for places to enjoy, and city based salons will offer 'metro spas' – places to hide and unwind even if you only have a couple of hours.

In New Zealand I believe we have environmental and cultural advantages that make others envious. Even our city locations have great views, so unlike many European sites that spend huge sums to design away their positions. We need to capitalize on this with quality installations and well designed spas that will attract and keep clients. For this we will need a vision to ensure the clients find what they are looking for. This means we will have to do more than 'theme' a few treatment rooms or place Jacuzzis by windows. 'Quality' encourages clients to spend time and money, and good service makes them come back.

As a suggestion for a small spa area I would recommend the following:

A choice of 2 thermal units.

One of these should be a ceramic room, which with careful design, could operate at a variety of temperature and humidity levels. This then gives the operator a choice of setting it as an Aroma Bath, Tropical Room, Steam Room or even a Rasul or Mud Room. My caution would be that these rooms are a specialist's work; the technical needs to make sure they operate correctly are not obvious.

The other should be Sauna or the increasingly popular Sanarium® which allows the 'wooden room' to operate from a sauna's high temperatures to a light steam bath. A lot of design ideas can be incorporated with glass windows, crystal lighting, fibre optics and a range of exteriors.

These units could be as small as 2m x 2m for 2-3 person occupancy. But I have supplied them to accommodate 25 people each! Also in larger spas you have a greater range of units and they are set to run in one operational mode. I often supplied a large Sauna, a Sanarium® and ceramic Steam Room, set around a hydro pool area. Extras then were units such as Igloos, Ice Rooms and Caldariums

A shower & rest area.

After using a thermal unit you should cool down and rest for a time before repeating the process. Showers can have a variety of features such as: kneipp hoses, waterfalls, multiple body heads, bucket shower and even features such as tropical rain and ice mists. The idea is that these are separate from the washing showers in the changing area and next to the rest area.

The rest area is one of the most important parts of a spa. It needs to have a great atmosphere, be warm and inviting, and perhaps have some features: Infra Red emitters over a lounge or even the new ceiling mounted Solariums. Fresh drinks are needed to re-hydrate and even perhaps the opportunity to have a healthy snack.

The treatment rooms.

New ideas in these rooms include ranges of hydro baths, hot stone tables and other special treatment units. However, even if it's the standard treatment couch it costs little to make sure the interior of the room looks good, has a variety of lighting levels and is

warm and quiet. Personally I have found exterior noise very annoying when I have been enjoying a great massage.

Some of the best spas I have seen have been quite small. When I was a judge for 'UK Spa of the Year' one of our finalists only had only four rooms in a remote English town but had created a Japanese sanctuary on a simple budget. Her vision for spa beat many larger competitors - she understood the need to offer what the clients wanted, which brings me back to Winkipedia's definition of spa where '*special health-giving properties occur*'.

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