

Room for TWO

Foster togetherness at your spa by creating ideal couples spaces.

By Lisa M. Starr

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR AN EXAMPLE OF THE POPULARITY OF COUPLES SERVICES,

look no further than Le Petite Retreat (www.lprdayspa.com) in Los Angeles. When the spa opened six years ago, owner Lisa Kustek was ahead of the curve with two complete couples rooms. But the demand for couples services was so high that she and co-owner/husband Ron soon reconfigured the spa, installing three more couples rooms. Now Kustek reports that the spa's couples rooms are booked three to four weeks in advance.

Couples services have become the mini-escape of choice for partners who don't have the time to get away for a long weekend and for pals looking to cement the bonds of friendship—indeed, a few hours spent in a couples treatment room can provide some much-needed togetherness. But without the proper design and service selection, that haven for togetherness is just another room.



A Perfect Union

Couples marketing involves offering clients the opportunity to have services together, in the same treatment room at the same time. Although it isn't uncommon to see couples services offered in single rooms that are joined in some way, such as a sliding pocket door, or even a window, allowing the spa to book the rooms for individual services when not being used by a couple, many designers agree that this option doesn't quite offer the same experience. Says Lydia Abernathy Mondavi, principal at The Abernathy Group (www.lydiamondavi.com), Napa, California, "Treatment rooms for couples should be an open, fluid space, allowing the couple to truly be together and share the experience."

If you're still in the planning stages for your spa, it's easy to incorporate a couples treatment room. "Adding a couples room is a no-brainer," says William Caligari, managing principal of William Caligari Interiors/Architecture (www.williamcaligari.com), Great Barrington, Massachusetts. "They're inexpensive in terms of the required infrastructure. The room needs to be spacious enough for four people—two therapists and two clients. A couples treatment room doesn't need to be double the size of a single room, however; typically, a room that's 50% larger will suffice. If a single treatment room



is 10 feet by 12 feet, couples services can easily be offered in a room that's 15 feet by 12 feet. The room is 50% larger, but costs only 10% more to build."

At Skinsational Day Spa (www.skinsationalspa.com) in Carlsbad, California, owner Joyce Carboni knew she wanted to create a couples treatment room when she expanded her spa in 2005 from 1,600 square feet to 5,000 square feet. She situated her room at the front and center of a U-shaped corridor of treatment rooms. The original design called for doors and sinks on either side and a removable wall or barrier to separate the space into two rooms, but the correct type of dividing wall couldn't be

obtained, so the space remained one large room. This setup has become an advantage in its current use for couples, however, as one door is close to the men's locker room and one to the women's. Although Carboni has never actively promoted her couples room, it's shown to everyone during spa tours, and she reports that because the spa is located near Camp Pendleton, many couples from the base visit to enjoy some time together before or after a deployment.

Another option to consider is a treatment suite, complete with additional amenities such as a fireplace, a



Couples rooms at Canyon Ranch (pictured top and bottom) in Tucson, Arizona, provide space, comfort and ambience.

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large shower, a hydrotherapy tub, or an attached lounging area or patio. This, of course, would mean setting aside a space larger than 12 by 15 feet, but with good planning you can fit quite a lot into a small space. A fireplace situated in the corner with two cozy chairs next to it, hydrotherapy tubs or steam showers, a lounging area or seating for a meal can add ambience and give you more marketing options. Caligari has found that steam rooms are more popular in couples rooms than saunas. “Soaking tubs are great too, but you have to manage cross-gender issues between the therapist and the guests,” he says. “You’ll need to add a curtain or screen to help preserve modesty.” Keep these extra amenities in mind as you develop and price couples packages; many spas charge for use of the space for a particular length of time in addition to the charges for services provided.

Once the layout of the couples room or suite is in place, choosing the right decor is key. “The decor should be inviting,” says Caligari. “Couples booking these services are looking for something special; they’re trying to create memories.” Caligari likes to pay special attention to the ceilings in couples rooms. One of his favorite effects is to paint the ceiling a dark cobalt and attach small pieces of mirror across it that catch the light of candles in the room, creating a wonderful starlight effect that’s easy and inexpensive. Mondavi likes to ensure that couples treatment areas also include some private



space, such as a separate bath or shower—especially for couples that aren’t romantically involved.

The Spa at Laguna Cliffs Marriott Resort (www.lagunacliffspa.com) in Dana Point, California, has a couples treatment room with a Swiss shower and two treatment tables, and a treatment suite that has two Swiss showers with steam and a private patio with a whirlpool, fountain, sun loungers and a seating area. Spa director Jane Lohman says that the suite has a two-hour minimum booking time, and the spa will provide champagne, roses and strawberries, and sometimes a meal, depending on the package. She reports that the suite is very popular, especially for marriage proposals—if the spa is notified of an impending proposal, the staff will sprinkle rose petals and lit candles throughout the suite to add romance to the setting.

The ultimate couples getaway can be found at The Treehouse Spa (www.hamptonisland.com), part of the Hampton Island Preserve in coastal Georgia. The Treehouse, a private and secluded building situated all alone among the marshlands of the resort, was designed by Mondavi to be a special retreat for two people. The spa has a lower-level seating area with a table for a meal, and the upstairs treatment area, featuring two treatment tables and a custom-built copper soaking tub that



The Treehouse Spa was specifically designed to offer couples a magical spa retreat.

accommodates two people, is separated only by screens from the great outdoors. Couples book the space for a specific amount of time, and they're the only ones there aside from the therapists. Some of the body treatments offered include a rosemary and mint scrub or a lemon verbena sage and thyme body polish, and all of the ingredients used and the tea served are made with products grown in the organic gardens of the property.

So Happy Together

When planning couples services, remember that a "couple" can take many forms—the idea is to attract two people to visit your spa together. Although you may primarily target romantically involved partners, don't forget to include packages suitable for girlfriends, siblings, or mothers and daughters.

Certainly, massages are perfect for couples to receive in tandem. Massage is the single most popular service in the majority of spas, and ideal for creating a relaxing getaway. Swedish massage and its derivations are easily delivered in a room designed for two guests since they require little equipment apart from two massage tables. Body treatments can also be performed easily in couples rooms, especially dry body treatments that don't require a shower afterward. If you do have an en suite shower, consider offering scrubs and wraps as well. Facials are popular among couples, but your room must be large enough to accommodate esthetics equipment for two and have running water easily accessible by both estheticians. Since the point of couples services is to promote togetherness, Mondavi suggests



Retail for Two?

As couples flock to day spas for some together time, they present an unprecedented opportunity for profit. Two new **couples-targeted retail collections** from Life Elements can help you boost your spa's bottom line.

Life Elements founders Curt and Martha Van Inwegen searched for high-end products to help increase their own connectedness and intimacy; when they failed to find them, they created their own. The C&M Couples aromatherapy-based collections, Inspire Romance and Create Passion, were designed specifically to encourage intimacy between couples. The Inspire Romance collection uses pink grapefruit, bergamot, frankincense, sandalwood, cedar and lavender essential oils and fragrances to encourage bonding. The line features a candle, linen mist, bath and shower gel, and massage creme. The Create Passion line uses oils and ingredients known for their aphrodisiac qualities, including ylang ylang, black pepper, ginger, patchouli and jasmine, to heighten sensual energy. The line features a candle, massage creme, bath and shower gel, personal towelettes, linen mist and personal lubricant. Both collections are available in full sizes and in "lunchbox" travel sets that can easily be retailed or included as a take-home gift as part of a romantic couples package. For more information on the lines visit www.lifeelements.com.



designing your service offerings so that there isn't any reason for the couple to need to leave the room and "break the spell."

Remember: It isn't necessary to perform exactly the same service at the same time; there's no reason why one person can't receive a Swedish massage while the other has a hot stone massage, or a body wrap, or even a facial. It all depends on how you market both the facility and the services, and how the room is equipped and spaced. (Will an esthetician and a massage therapist working together in the same room get in each other's way, for instance?) When scheduling couples services, it's best if the services are the same length in time so that they can begin and end in tandem.

Steve Capellini, Miami-based massage therapist and author of *The Royal Treatment: How You*

The couples suite at the Spa at Laguna Cliffs is a popular spot for marriage proposals.

Canyon Ranch couples suites include a dramatically designed hydrotherapy area.

Can Take Home the Pleasures of the Great Luxury Spas, suggests including packages that give permission to couples to talk during the services—a bonus for friends who book the room together. A quiet service might begin with a ritual introducing the clients to the peaceful environment, while another package might be worded to allow clients to “catch up with their friends.”

Spas vary on their approach to pricing couples services. The couples rooms at Le Petite Retreat are large and beautifully decorated, but don't contain extra amenities, so the spa has no surcharges and offers no discounts on the packaged services. At Skinsational, Carboni has developed all-inclusive packages for her couples room. The Skinsational Sensory Journey includes two Sacred Stone Massages, lunch served in the room, champagne and chocolate truffles, and a signature spa gift, for \$300. Skinsational also offers a Wellness package that includes two massages, two signature facials, lunch, a signature spa amenity and two spa robes to take home, for \$525. The spa includes an extra 30 minutes of free time in each couples package, and the fee for each package covers this extra time as well as the cost of the food and champagne.

The Spa at Laguna Cliffs' two-hour Soul couples suite package includes 50-minute massages, lunch and champagne. Services within the package are



given at a 10% discount since the guest is essentially booking two treatments at once, but the package fee does include a \$75 room usage fee. In the spa's regular couples treatment room, clients are charged the full price of the service plus \$15 per person for use of the amenities, including the Swiss shower.

Offering couples services does require some logistical coordination. Expectations will need to be set for couples regarding their timing for use of the room and amenities like showers, steam rooms and tubs, since it isn't likely that a clock will be visible in the room. At Skinsational, guests are told that therapists will tap on the door when 10 minutes remain in the scheduled time to allow couples to finish their shower or bath and put on their robes. Staff at the Spa at Laguna Cliffs tell guests, “You have a few moments” rather than, “Take your time getting dressed” to avoid room turnover problems.

“One of the advantages of offering couples services is that the experience can be very different from standard spa services,” says Mondavi. “It allows for a much more private spa encounter, and if you have an outdoor component, such as an outdoor tub or lounging area, it really adds an element of adventure. Letting a couple spend time together, enjoy services together and even shower or soak together really enhances the entire spa experience.” ●

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The couples room at Bear Mountain Sante Spa in Victoria, British Columbia, is the perfect antidote to a bitter cold winter day.