



# FINDING NIRVANA

By Andrea Sercu

Picture yourself floating in a saltwater tank in an environment virtually devoid of external stimuli. All around you lies water heated to a steady 95 degrees—the same temperature as your skin—and overhead is a fiber-optic dome filled with twinkling “stars.” Slowly, the thoughts in your brain start to slow, the endorphins begin to flow and, while you remain buoyant on this sea of salt, your body sinks into a deep state of nirvana.

In today’s fast-paced world, clients are clamoring for services that can slow down the frantic pace of their daily lives and lead them to the increasingly scarce moments of peaceful solitude we all crave and need. According to Dr. Herbert Benson, founder of the Harvard-affiliated Mind/Body Medical Institute, Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, stress-related disorders account for between 60% and 90% of all doctor visits in the United States. You can help clients de-stress, detox and relax through the environment you create in your spa.

From flotation tanks, such as the aforementioned one at London’s Nirvana Spa, to a simple Ayurvedic treatment of warm sesame oil poured over the third eye, you can help your clients quiet the “mind chatter” with relaxation services that soothe all the senses.

## “HOW CAN OUR STAFF PROVIDE RELAXATION IF THEY DON’T HAVE IT THEMSELVES?”

### First Things First

Of course, the path to relaxation begins with the intention and attitude of your staff. Melissa Yamaguchi, co-owner of Yamaguchi Salon and Coastal Day Spa, Ventura, California, advises looking at your staff: “How do they look? Does their energy translate into being harried, frenetic, confused and disorganized, or are they breathing at a beautiful, slow, rhythmic pace? As owners, we have to take care of our staff. We can’t ask them to provide calm and relaxation if they don’t have it themselves.”

Toward that end, the management at the Ventura-based spa encourages therapists to take care of themselves, and holds semi-monthly training classes to teach staff members how to properly describe services. “I’ve received services before where the tech said, ‘Just relax, I’m going to take care of you,’ but if I knew how to relax, I

wouldn’t be there!” Yamaguchi points out. “We’re an Internet and satellite TV society. The whole world is at our fingertips, and we’re forgetting how to slow down. We need our technicians to take care of themselves before taking care of the clients.”

Your staff should also realize the importance of making the guest’s visit seamless to avoid introducing any additional stress into her day. “Relaxation should begin from the moment the client enters the door,” says Dee DeLuca Mattos, managing director of DePasquale the Spa, Morris Plains, New Jersey. “Once the client enters, we don’t want her to think anymore. A big part of the stress in a woman’s life comes from having to think 24/7, whether it’s about little things like what her children are going to have for lunch, or major issues like how she’s going to close a deal today. So, once the receptionist has the client’s name, we should have the capability to facilitate that visit all the way to the end without even having to ask what service she is here for today.”

### Relaxing the Body and Mind

There are a variety of spa treatments that speak the language of relaxation. Here are a few new practices, as well as some time-proven techniques, for quieting the body and mind.

**The Ayurvedic Touch.** In the foothills of Birmingham, Alabama—a place considered to be the “root chakra” of the Appalachian Mountain Range—spa-goers from as far away as Canada and South America make the pilgrimage to Spa Moksha where the 5,000-year-old Indian treatments of ayurvedic medicine come together with modern treatments to soothe the mind, body and spirit. According to spa COO Shana Ingram, guests travel to



Courtesy Gene Juarez Salon & Spa

Meditation rooms allow clients to relax after and between services.

“OUR GUESTS WANT SERVICES THAT DO MORE THAN MAKE THEIR TOES LOOK PRETTY.”

this Southeastern branch of the renowned Chopra Center for Wellbeing to sample such offerings as the Pizichilli, a service in which two therapists use specialized small hoses to bathe the body in a continuous flow of warm, herbalized oil as the body is gently massaged. Other ayurvedic offerings include the Vishesh, which employs a deep tissue friction massage to relieve tension, and the Abhyanga, a completely synchronized massage in which two therapists oil the entire body and work in complete synchronicity on the body. “The movements calm the client in such a way that she’s not thinking on only one side of the body. If one therapist is working in

circular motions on one side of the body, then the other therapist is doing the same on the other side, so the brain relaxes too,” says Ingram.

**The Tea Ceremony.** Yamaguchi Salon and Coastal Day Spa also calls upon ancient cultural traditions in the search of a sanctuary from stress. At this Southern California spa, clients are invited to embark on a four-hour tea ceremony steeped in the traditions of centuries-old Japanese tea presentations while also learning balance and harmony through the relaxing spa treatments of today. “Our guests are really looking for services that do more than make their toes look pretty,” says Yamaguchi. “This is an in-depth wellness treatment that’s all about the client.”

Known for its feng shui approach to beauty, the spa first assesses the client’s feng shui elemental profile. Interestingly enough, two very different personalities—earth (nurturing, selfless, helpful to others) and metal (rigid, organized, focused on getting things done immediately)—comprise the prime candidates for this service. The metal personalities are those people who might say, “I don’t have a lot of time, but my shoulders are tense,” but it’s also for the earth person, who constantly nurtures others but doesn’t always get it back, says Yamaguchi.

The technician begins the service by bowing to the client, lighting a candle in front of her and presenting her with a cup of tea while explaining the day’s treatments. Services include a ginger tea scalp massage; a green tea body treatment, including a massage done intentionally with long, slow strokes and no acupressure; a facial; manicure and pedicure, which are also customized to the person’s elemental type; and a light lunch. Throughout



Courtesy, Jennifer's Inner & Outer Beauty

Warm oil poured over the third eye can help calm the mind and de-stress the body.

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the service, cups of herbal tea are brought in periodically and presented in the traditional Japanese manner.

**By Way of Water.** Water treatments can be stimulating, but they can also be calming with the proper setting and packaging of services. So rather than soak the overstressed in a bubbly hydrotherapy tub that might raise the heart rate, therapists at DePasquale the Spa prefer to steep their guests in the Japanese Steeping Tub with air jets that oxygenate the water. The guest is served herbal tea after emerging from the tub, and, once she's rinsed under a European rain shower, relaxes to a 50-minute massage.

At Canyon Ranch SpaClub in Las Vegas, there's the Siesta, which includes a trip to the spa's cavitosonic chamber, where water turns to mist via ultrasonic sound waves in a black-lit room charged with negative ions. "This is important because our bodies

are charged negatively, but we live in a positively charged world, so when you're in this chamber for 80 minutes, you're, in essence, recharging your battery," says Shawn Smith, Canyon Ranch SpaClub massage department manager. During the service, the therapist applies a hot sea foam mud, massages the feet and places hot stones on the places we store tension most—the upper shoulders.

**Sound Therapy.** Another alternative path to a calmer, more relaxed body and mind is through the ears. "Sound therapy is all about balancing the body and is done in conjunction with piped sounds that work on the chakras," explains Mattos. Because most mainstream clients relish the element of touch in spa services, she suggests combining a warm stone therapy or a localized massage that targets the stress points, such as the temples or shoulders, with the sound therapy that effects relaxation through tones.

At Canyon Ranch SpaClub, relaxation is also heralded via sound waves during a Tibetan bowl service, in which the therapist alternates between playing the crystal bowls and working on the body with reflexology, chakra stone placement and reiki.

And at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa, Ft. Myers, Florida, clients may feel as if they've just entered a NASA laboratory rather than a treatment room when they encounter the BETAR, the Bio Energetic Transduction Aided Resonance bed. This space-age geodesic dome structure bathes the body in sound waves to induce deep relaxation while New Age music and aromatherapy permeate the surrounding air.

**Colors That Calm.** Although the connection between colors and the mind may rarely register in our conscious thoughts, color therapy can have



Courtesy, Stellar Spa

This black-lit cavitosonic chamber is charged with negative ions to help over-stressed clients recharge.

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a profound effect on our inner state. Like sound, color therapy uses vibrational healing to balance the psyche. Recognizing that connection, Beauty Kliniek, San Diego, California, has tapped into the light spectrum for use in its Journey Through Color service, in which color, light and sound conspire with aromatherapy oils, warmed stones, elixirs and energy balancing to create a healing treatment for the face, chakras and reflex points of the feet. Clients select a color from a color wheel, which is then matched with corresponding essential oils. The client smells and drinks the oil in the form of its floral water. Lights, crystal bowls and a special instrument that emits notes to correspond to the selected color are also employed.

**Group Relaxation.** Couples and groups of clients can learn the art of relaxation together in fun treatments that encourage in-tandem de-stressing.

Canyon Ranch SpaClub caters to the stressed-out couple who could use some downtime together. In the spa's Resort Chamber, couples are invited to self-apply muds from around the world while steam fills the chamber under a fiber-optic "starry sky."

And at Beauty Kliniek, groups of six women or more are invited to enjoy a Ladies' Night Out, during which they unwind with eucalyptus steam before receiving a massage, light meal and a yoga class together.

**Meditation Techniques.** For more than 4,000 years, labyrinths have led humans down the path to inner peace by training the mind to be in the moment and follow the path directly under foot. Balance Day Spa, Greensboro, North Carolina, is among the few day spas that have taken the lead in offering a labyrinth as a walking meditation tool. Owner Felicia Brown got the idea after walking the labyrinth at her church and discovering firsthand the calming effects it can have on the mind, body and soul.

If you don't have the space for a full-scale labyrinth, you can offer clients small "finger labyrinths," in which they trace the path with a finger rather than the foot. Finger labyrinths offer similar relaxing effects, says Judith Lazarus, author of *Stress Relief and Relaxation Techniques* (McGraw Hill, 2000), and they make great additions to relaxation and waiting areas.

Meditation rooms can accomplish the same goals. Balance Day Spa is installing a meditation chamber with comfortable couches and pillows and relaxation tapes with headphones. "This gives clients time to relax without having to be involved in a service. I can't tell you how many clients have told me after a treatment that they wish they had a place to take a nap," says Brown. The spa also plans wellness



Courtesy Canyon Ranch

New relaxation services cater to couples who want time to unwind together.

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seminars for businesses and organizations to teach participants simple breathing and relaxation techniques.

Yoga and other holistic exercise forms have also caught on in a big way at day spas across the country, and it's not just for the toning benefits they offer. Clients crave the solace they receive from an hour spent “quieting the mind while stretching the body.” Yoga relieves stress, clears the mind and oxygenates the body and brain.

At Sandra Caron European Spa, located in San Mateo, California—part of the stress-laden Silicon Valley—clients can relax and rejuvenate with the Complete Rituals Yoga Class. The ritual begins with a water-jet foot bath with rosemary oil, followed by two cycles of alternating temperature treatments—a warm steam followed by a cool shower and a hot sauna followed by a cold shower. Then after a fir needle oil application, the client participates in a 90-minute hatha yoga session (all for \$20). The

class starts with face, hand, torso and foot self-massage and works extensively with deep breathing as well as poses.

Annge Carroll, the class instructor, says the water therapies and essential oil application mean her students show up for class totally “present” and ready to work on all levels—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual. “This brings yoga back to what it was originally designed to do: Get rid of the aches and pains of the body so one can meditate with a clear focus,” she says.

In addition, you can bring a more meditative state to any treatment using guided imagery. Linda-Anne Kahn, founder and owner of Beauty Kliniek, for instance, will often take clients on a guided imagery tour of a seashore where they “walk” right up to the water's edge and enter a temple to sit and meditate. “I also like to take them on a color journey, where I work with different colors for the different chakras of the body and surround them with an azure-blue light, which is perfect protection, and pink, which is unconditional love. When we do a clinical aromatherapy treatment, we also incorporate guided imagery,” Kahn notes.

And if you don't have room for yoga, a labyrinth or a meditation room, perhaps you can clear some space on your Web site, as Canyon Ranch did. The site features “rooms” for breathing; meditation and relaxation, including meditation for loving and to stop smoking; and visualization journeys.

Perhaps the most important way spas can help their clients relax is to remind them how to breathe and slow down. Take a moment for yourself and your staff, and then pass along the positive energy to your guests. ♦

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Courtesy of The Regent Las Vegas

The use of color during services can encourage relaxation.