

Western Canada's Asian Escape at *The Spa Ritual*



by Susan Mate

I'm feeling very Zen, stretched out in my comfy robe, on a heated limestone chaise lounge, next to a toasty fire. But with an organic Blueberry Matcha Smoothie in one hand and chocolate-dipped strawberries on the table nearby, I'm hardly in traditional Thailand as I sink deeper into my curved thermotherapy chair.

Unique touches like these ergonomically slumped beds of rock are what set apart The Spa Ritual, a new Calgary spa. It isn't just somewhere you go, it's something you experience. And that experience begins soon after you walk in the doors.

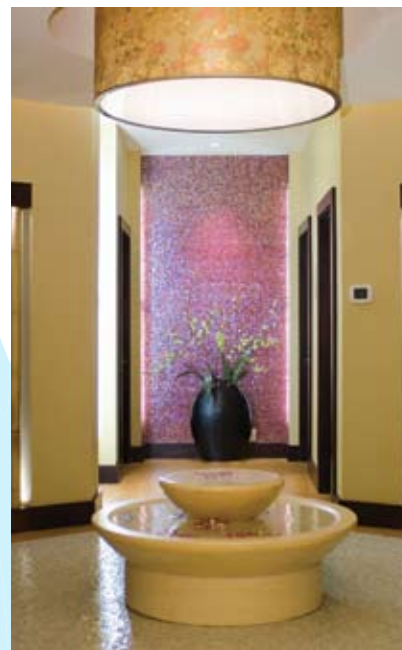
I catch a whiff of eucalyptus as I'm invited to sit on a bench and trade my street shoes for a pair of cushy slippers. "This is where we welcome you here, and ask you to leave the outside world behind," explains Marketing Director Heather Greene. "It's very special that

you can walk through these doors and be transported along your path to wellness."

Decor of the 7,000-sq.-ft. spa is clearly Asian, with many dramatic dark-wood walls and doors, soft but warm lighting, carvings, and bamboo and cherry blossom accents. Greene notes spa President Shauna Walker spent four years developing the wellness spa after travelling in Southeast Asia. She felt deeply impressed by her experiences there. "She was so inspired by the gracious nature of the Southeast Asian people; she felt at home in a foreign place. Shauna wanted to create an authentic spa experience that drew upon the wisdom of gracious hospitality and holistic wellness.

We are inviting guests to embark on their path to rejuvenation. Our therapies, rituals, and products are meant to inspire balance and an interest in personal wellness," Greene notes.

The spa's founders brought in a Japanese tea master to teach protocols for tea ceremonies. A line of six tea blends (the Grounding tea is being served here today) was created for the spa as were The Spa Ritual body products. The teas are also sold in the spa boutique and tea ceremonies and tastings can be arranged for guests. The Spa Bistro serves healthy Asian-inspired cuisine. Preservative-free natural ingredients are used in the cuisine



and in the spa's selection of signature bath and body products like lemongrass shampoo, conditioner and skin cream. Scented candles are made of non-toxic soy. Even the cucumber-infused water, in the Som'ta pre-treatment lounge, is purified.

The Spa Ritual is a founding member (and the only western Canadian member) of the Green Spa Network, an international umbrella group of spas committed to strict environmental standards. The spa uses recycled products, organic cleaning supplies and low-electric-output equipment wherever possible.

This spa is at the leading edge of the social spa-ing trend, with several spaces and treatment rooms for bridal groups, showers, girl's getaways and couples retreats – couples can book The Royal Thai Suite, featuring a private eucalyptus steam and showers, two treatment tables, ritual foot baths and the Bali Moon tub. The Lotus Garden is a social spa-ing space featuring three couples' rooms, including the Royal Thai Suite, two wet treatment rooms and a private dining area. Guests may book this space for private parties and groups. The aesthetics room is also very social – six pedicure stations



and five manicure stations in one spacious area. The pedicure baths have been fitted with pipeless technology, in the spa's commitment to best practices and the highest hygiene standards.

Now back on my favourite thermotherapy lounge in the Bali Sanctuary, I've enjoyed a eucalyptus steam and am feeling VERY relaxed. Fortunately, massage therapist Julijana Jovanovic arrives to take me to my 90-minute Royal Bamboo Massage. This treatment, new to North America from Asia, uses varying sizes of oiled bamboo to glide deeper into muscles than hands can alone. I've chosen

the ginger aromatherapy massage oil and after 90 minutes I am a puddle of good-pain bliss; this woman is a pro.

More importantly, I have indeed left the outside world behind, if only for a couple of hours. The Spa Ritual has given me relaxation, serenity, hospitality – and I didn't have to travel to Thailand for the experience.

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