

Boutique Spas

By Judy Chapman

Intimate environments, limited edition product lines, niche boutique hotels and personalised treatments: no longer is small less significant. In fact, small is the new big - especially when it comes to spas.

“WHEN A MAN IS WRAPPED UP IN HIMSELF, HE MAKES A PRETTY SMALL PACKAGE” - *John Ruskin (1819-1900)*

There is something beautiful in staying small. Think of the life of those who reside in rural Japan - a hot spring bath, a sip of sake or a green tea ceremony. Like the words that float from a Japanese haiku, it's often the subtle things in life that retain grace.

Eugene Wh, owner of Bangkok's hip new boutique hotel, The Eugenia, seems to think so too. Forget busy foyers and the constant ringing of phones. Eugene says that at first people thought he was crazy to open a hotel with just 12 rooms where he couldn't expect much of a financial return, but he knew to follow his heart. “All the guests are friends, as those who are strangers soon become friends,” he says when explaining the benefits.

Increasingly, we are shying away from brands that make big note of themselves. Handmade creations, dreamt up by people who think for themselves and have a story to share, are what we appreciate. Spa products with a shorter shelf life are becoming popular, too. Think freshly harvested plants that are handpicked, hand-blended and then bottled and sold off to spas like sweet little offerings. French brand PHYTS, for example, is a handmade spa brand that has a shelf life of only two years unopened and nine months opened.

Likewise, Spa Consultant Adria Lake has launched an organic skin care line, PURE Skin Care.

“The limited availability of our organically grown and superior ingredients also limits the quantity of products we are able to produce at any one time,” she says. “Also, unlike synthetic or reconstituted ingredients which can be easily reproduced, our pure and organic ingredients are




subject to nature's whims. Each production is so unique that its exact composition can never again be replicated.”

Customised treatments are another emerging trend, the new mindset being that no two facials should ever be the same. Instead, therapists will tune into what your body really needs, so be prepared for spontaneous Reiki during your next facial.

It is little wonder that the bigger brands are embracing this new mindset. Long ago, the Mandarin Oriental spas launched their personalised Time Rituals menu where guests booked time rather than treatment. The retail sector of the spa industry is now worth at least 20 percent of the overall spa revenue and climbing; but it's the smaller brands that are making their mark. Adria's limited edition PURE Skin Care so delighted the Four Seasons buyers that it is now on the shelves at their Jakarta, Jimbaran and Singapore properties.

Spas, too, will become more niche-conscious. According to Raoul Andrew Sudre who has consulted on various projects including The Beaufort Hotel in Singapore and the two Bulgari hotels in Italy, it's good to be aware of global trends, but it will always be those thinking outside the box who will inspire us.

Think of it this way. Where would you rather be? In a shopping mall spending your money on products manufactured at rates of a million per hour, or dining in a small restaurant where the chef is cooking up a dish made with local ingredients, thus putting profit directly into the community of the people who are serving you? 

Judy's Top Five Boutique Spa Products

Day Lotion by Arthur Lawrence Nutritional Skin Care

(arthurlawrence.com) is the world's best moisturiser and, as Arthur says, is the blood of his regime. Arthur is a one-man-show, so good luck trying to get hold of a jar, they are as rare and precious as gold. The entire range is exceptional, with remarkable results. **1**

Wild Earth Nepal (wildearthnepal.com) is a Himalayan-based company that not only creates handmade products made from Himalayan herbs but is also pro-active in sustainable development as regards the conservation of rare herbs, and goal of generating income for the people of Nepal, especially women. Try their Tibetan Hot Springs collection of therapeutic oils. **2**

The Maldivian Monsoon Ritual at the **Aquum Spa at Huvafen Fushi** in The Maldives (*pictured here; peraquum.com*) Co-founder of the spa is Jane Quinn who is one of those rare individuals who really does think outside of the box when it comes to spa treatments. Rumour is that she's breaking the boundaries with a new boudoir-style spa at their Seychelles property. **3**

Red Flower (redflower.com) is a bohemian boutique range of flower-inspired products created by Yael Alkalay. She spent several years working for Shiseido and Calvin Klein in Japan before stepping out on her own. Her products have alluring titles like Gingergrass & Bamboo Scrub and Moroccan Rose Petal Candles - all inspired by her travels. **4**

Ytsara (ytsara.com) is a Thai-based spa brand created by the dynamic French girls, Marie Eve & Florence whose creations become more innovative each season. Out of all their Asian spa rituals, the Mohom Indigo Healing Art is my new favourite. It's a hot herbal poultice treatment inspired by ancient Shaman practices - on the menu at the La Residence Phou Vao in Laos. **5**

