



President of
Aspen Spa Management

His International career began when he was on the staff at Cornell University, teaching in several academic departments and in Physical Education and Athletics where he was Fencing Master and Director of Martial Arts.

His hotel background and experience led to consulting. He soon became a renowned expert in Luxury Hotel Spas. His work took him to all parts of the planet.

He accumulated knowledge in Asian healing Arts in Japan and in the South East Asian basin.

He is one of the few consultants that is really hands on. His knowledge of architectural design and spa operations has made him a leader in the Industry.

His company offers a complete turn-key possibility from design to management including staff training inspection services.

When asked what he brings to his clients, he smiles and candidly says: "40 years of mistakes they will not have to make!"

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SPA PHILOSOPHY

By **RAOUL ANDREWS SUDRE**

THERE are not one but several Spa philosophies, just as there are a number of different Spas in the world today! However, what is important is to make sure that clients that go to a Spa will be able to identify it with a specific concept that leads to a style, a way of operating that is relative to the soul of the Spa. The soul is what makes a Spa special; it represents the philosophy of that particular Spa.

One must be sure the philosophy of the Spa is compatible with its own "Mission Statement" or that of the hotel or the resort of which the Spa is a part. The different types of Spas by large generic categories are:

1. Medical Spas
2. Day Spas
3. Destination Spas
4. Resort hotel Spas
5. Urban hotel Spas
6. Holistic Spas
7. Health Club – Fitness Spas

Each and every one of these will have sub-categories. For instance:

1. MEDICAL SPAS can be oriented towards esthetics, toward check-up and lifestyle improvements, or dedicated to detoxification (drugs, alcohol, tobacco), possibly "obesity control" or sexual performance improvement. In all cases, Medical Spas respond to a "social

THE SOUL IS WHAT MAKES A SPA SPECIAL

need” that people recognize but are not willing to go to a clinic or a hospital to take care of.

2. DAY SPAS: In most cases, they are an extension to a Beauty-Hair-Nail Salon. In some cases, they are emulating Hotel/Resort Spas and, in a few instances, Destination Spas. As they are stand-alone, they need to identify clearly their own orientation so as to eliminate misunderstandings by clients as to the nature and type of Spa they are operating. For the most part, Spas are not “supermarkets”. They need to have a clear identification of the concept they want to follow. They can be Holistic, anti-aging, esthetic, whatever they have chosen to be (hopefully as a result of a market study); but in any case, their menu, their product lines, their décor, and the uniforms they wear all need to project the same message. That message is the “Philosophy” of the Spa.

3. DESTINATION SPAS are spas that offer a specific program of treatments and activities. Some anchor their program on medical check-ups and medical follow-ups. It is most important for these types of Spas to clearly identify their philosophy so as not to mislead their clients.

Destination Spas tend to think that their way is the right way, which is alright as long as this “way” is spelled out clearly. Some destination Spas are based on extreme exercise and nutrition, sometimes called “boot camps”. Their collaterals and communication should reflect that and they will thereby attract the “health nuts” and “enamored with my body” crowd. Holistic Destination Spas will usually choose an ancestral traditional healing methodology to develop their program. Traditional Chinese Medicine, Ayurveda, Native American, Yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong, Shiatsu, etc., will be on their menus and, to be true to their philosophy, they will create an atmosphere through decoration and style to exemplify the culture they are inspired from.

They all will claim to foster “lifestyle enhancement”, but they need to spell out clearly what their view is of the “ideal lifestyle” they advocate! Vegetarian cuisine, no alcohol, and a lot of exercise will appeal to some and repulse others! Destination Spas tend to think that their way is the right way, which is alright as long as this “way” is spelled out clearly. Some destination Spas are based on extreme exercise and nutrition, sometimes called “boot camps”. Their collaterals and communication should reflect that and they will thereby attract the “health nuts” and “enamored with my body” crowd. Holistic Destination Spas will usually choose an ancestral

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4. RESORT HOTEL SPAS will need to harmonize with the resort's main features to be a complement to the services offered. The harmony between the hotel and the Spa will yield better results than a collection of different styles. After all, when clients choose a resort destination, it is its location and cultural specificity that attract them. So it stands to reason that if the Spa is in alignment with the concept, it will automatically have a predestined captive audience. The opposite will hurt both the hotel and the Spa.

5. URBAN HOTEL SPAS: Here, contrary to the Resort Hotel Spa, the successful Spa philosophy will be the one that understand best the need of the clientele and be able to serve it best, meeting its expectations. Most urban hotels that bring a Spa to their hotels fail to understand that simple guideline. They often will sub-contract to a Day Spa operator and essentially bring within the hotel space a salon type of Spa that in fact only satisfies the expectations and the needs of a minority of the clients in residence.

The ideal Urban Spa's concept is to cater to its transient clientele. A very accurate market study will be needed to accomplish this. If the hotel is a business men's and/or women's hotel of an international nature, it will need to incorporate anti-jetlag treatments, recognize that time is of the essence, and that multiple treatments performed simultaneously will be sought as well as grooming treatments, etc.

6. HOLISTIC SPAS can be found in Day, Resort, Destination, and even Urban hotel Spas. Here again their philosophy needs to be adapted to the objective of the client's stay or visit, and stay true to its concept.

7. HEALTH CLUB – FITNESS SPAS: Many health clubs or gyms have jumped on the Spa bandwagon. Why not?! Their philosophy is wellness through exercise. Spas should reflect that approach by offering physiological massages, saunas, steam baths and Jacuzzis, and operate their Spas accordingly.

Bottom line: There is no such thing as a "Spa Philosophy". Slices of cucumbers over the eyes, pebbles on the back or mud masks on the face are not a philosophy, but simply a simplistic way of selling an idea of health and wellness improvement.

The philosophy will take over from that caricature and deliver what is most appropriate for a specific clientele. ■