

writer Michael Nassar

THE APPLE OF YOUR EYE

Spas in the Big Apple have become as ubiquitous as tourists: one on every corner, standing side-by-side, and often found in groups. Every run of the mill nail salon now has spa somewhere in its name. Storefronts cater to time-crunched pedestrians by offering facials, shiatsu and shoulder massage – nirvana promised in less than 15 minutes. Even department stores have gotten into the act, comforting weary shoppers with hot rock calf massages before sending them back to the racks. To wit: every major hotel has either opened a spacious stand-alone spa or has one in the works. It's only a matter of time before full-service healing is as close as a call down to room service.

Yet some of the best places to find serenity in the city that never sleeps are often hidden in the most unlikely nooks and crannies, too: unmarked buildings with no signage, on the second and third floors of buildings without elevators, uptown, downtown, and even underground. For the uninitiated, the path to inner peace is about more than just knowing where to look – it's about knowing who to know.

Luckily, you know us. So whether you seek the newest treatments, the hottest trends, or the most traditional therapies, New York, New York will melt away those little town blues and have you at the top of the heap.



of Japan – using only wooden pegs and an ancient knot tying technique. There is a stillness here that belies its place in bustling, lower Manhattan. So after you’ve checked in and changed into a Japanese-style yukata robe, take time for a swim before descending to the relaxation room for a foot massage with hot sake-soaked towels that begins each spa experience.

The menu of services offers the synergy of traditional healing rituals blended with modern awareness, like massages that ceremonially begin and end with scented healing vapours and the clearing vibrations of a Japanese Rin. Saki Ki is the signature massage,

which uses a ginger and black pepper ointment followed by steaming sake-soaked towels to alleviate tension. Malaysian bamboo cho sticks rolled across the body soothe muscles and flush out metabolic waste as part of the Wellbeing Bamboo massage. You can try drowning your aches and pains in the traditional Japanese bathing room, which also features an open area for massage on the Tatami floor mats.

www.thegreenwichhotel.com

THE SPA AT MANDARIN ORIENTAL, NEW YORK

For sheer spectacle, the 14,500 square foot five star Spa at Mandarin Oriental, New York is the only game in town. Its design and unique location overlooking Central Park – occupying the 35th and 36th floors of the Time Warner Centre’s shimmering towers – makes it one of the city’s most distinct spas, if not the most expensive.

Arrive at least an hour before your treatment – you’ll want it to absorb the views before fully immersing yourself in the separate oases of heat and water: the amethyst crystal steam room channels the healing powers of an amethyst crystal, natch, to induce mental peace and meditation; the vitality pool revitalises tired and aching joints with strategically placed hydrotherapy jets, including a reclining “air bed” lounge which targets the entire body.

Suitably sedated, you might opt for Thai Massage in the Thai Yoga Suite, which is luxuriously decorated with rich, dark teak wood and gold leaf reminiscent of Buddhist temples. Or if you’re particularly flush, the 650 square foot VIP Spa Suite – the first of its kind in New York – replicates a sumptuous oriental-style home with stunning views, a fireplace, and dual massage beds.

Time – and wallet – pressed patrons, however, will benefit from the new bespoke Oriental Essence treatment, which has been devised to introduce guests to an authentic spa experience in a short period of time. Oriental Essence is a powerful, hands-on body ritual that combines the potent effects of meridian massage with the therapeutic benefits of Quintessence, a custom-blended essential oil exclusive to the spa.

www.mandarinoriental.com/newyork

LA PRAIRIE AT THE RITZ-CARLTON, CENTRAL PARK

Whether you need to unwind after winging in from Tokyo, de-stress after an afternoon on Wall Street, pamper your feet after non-stop shopping, or just de-age at any age – they’ve got it all at La Prairie at The Ritz-Carlton Spa. And who knows better than the Swiss how to combine privilege and pleasure with state-of-the-art science to meet all your needs at once?

La Prairie traces its heritage to the renowned Clinic La Prairie in Montreux, Switzerland, where for over half a century the rich and renowned have gone to repair and rejuvenate. The La Prairie facility at The Ritz-Carlton brings that same air of impeccability and Swiss science to the great American craving for the perfect spa. The emphasis here is on de-ageing, de-stressing, and pure pleasure. Warmed neck towels, heated tables, and a fine-crystal-and-silver attitude towards every detail, lets you know they take your pleasure and wellbeing seriously. Services for women and men provide an impressive array of both European and Asian massage specialties to firm, detoxify, smooth, soothe, and de-stress, while La Prairie’s unique cellular facials offer the chance to rehydrate, sculpt, firm, and de-age your skin in the most luxurious manner with ingredients like concentrated caviar extract and drops of pure gold. It’s almost enough to distract you from the captivating Central Park views.

www.ritzcarlton.com

SHIBUI SPA, GREENWICH HOTEL

The Japanese word *shibui* has no exact translation in English, but it refers to a low-key, grounded beauty that’s rich, yet not too fancy. The same might be said of the entirely unique and authentic Shibui Spa secreted away in trendy TriBeCa. Concealed within the lower levels of actor Robert DeNiro’s Greenwich Hotel, the spa is a luxurious and uncomplicated Asian sanctuary of innovative practices as well as an exclusive purveyor of La Don’s French-Vietnamese organic botanicals.

A 250-year old Japanese farmhouse has been carefully reconstructed and installed around a lantern-lit pool and lounge by a team of craftsmen – three of whom are living national treasures



THIS PAGE: Japanese bathing room at Shibui Spa; Mandarin Oriental Spa’s VIP spa suite and vitality pool; treatment room at The SPA at Andaz Wall Street. OPPOSITE PAGE: Shibui Spa. OPENING PAGES: New York cityscape, courtesy of Four Seasons.

JOANNA VARGAS SALON

Sometimes you don’t want a whole healing centre, you want a specialist. Joanna Vargas Salon is that singular experience: a bijoux boutique in the heart of Manhattan that specialises in bringing clients the most powerful anti-ageing treatments in the world. Buried in a non-descript office block, it’s like a secret held close by the lucky few. The jewel box interior is a quiet, intimate setting for amazing treatments that combine technology with nature. Plus, you’ll rarely see another soul while checking in or leaving the secluded atmosphere – just one of the reasons the salon has a cult-like following among certain bold-faced names.

Facials are the house specialty, and the MultiVitalLight procedure is 75 minutes of distilled beauty. Using the most advanced form of microdermabrasion – a diamond-tipped wand – the top layer of dead cells and surface dirt are removed in preparation for a customised vitamin cocktail designed to completely restructure the surface of the skin.

Then it’s time for the latest technology: LED light therapy, which has been used by NASA and the Navy Seals for the treatment of wounds and muscle regeneration with great success. The theory is that cells use light to create ATP, the fuel that powers life at a cellular level. Light therapy uses very specific spectrums of light waves to instigate the body’s healing of itself on that level. The benefits are profound: reduced signs of ageing, increased production of collagen and elastin, and the removal of cellular waste. Is it any wonder the salon’s logo is the cherry blossom or sakura – a metaphor for life and rebirth?

www.joannavargas.com

THE SPA AT ANDAZ WALL STREET

If you’re pressed for time – or busy shopping for bargains – you can recharge for a few minutes with high-impact treatments at The SPA at Andaz Wall Street. Tucked into a corner of the new Andaz Wall Street Hotel, The SPA is a snug sanctuary near the famous Century 21 department store.

Equipped with just two treatment rooms, The SPA caters to New Yorkers that are constantly on-the-go, offering simple spa choices in 15-minute increments that are sure to be the best 15 minutes of your day. Inspired by the concept of a “New York Minute,” you get to personalise the menu by choosing the amount of time – from 15 minutes to 90 minutes – the area you wish to focus on, and whether you want to feel energised or deeply relaxed.

Signature treatments highlight The SPA’s holistic yet simplified approach to wellness. The Luzern Oxygen Facial enhances the traditional facial with a vitamin-infused blast of pure medical-grade oxygen and also includes a hand, arm, foot, and scalp massage. For a full-body experience, the Spa Signature allows guests who cannot choose between a facial and body treatment to do both, including a thorough body brushing followed by a creamy berry seed exfoliation. One of the targeted massages is the Hands & Arms, designed to counteract countless hours spent in imperfect posture at a desk or gripping a BlackBerry.

Plus, in a clever nod to the neighbourhood, all treatments come with a complimentary suit “touch-up,” shoeshine, and a copy of *The Wall Street Journal*.

www.andazwallstreet.com

THE PENINSULA SPA BY ESPA

Coddled in the penthouse luxury of The Peninsula Spa by ESPA you'll find spa treatments that are therapeutic and timeless in an aerie above the city. Steps away from the famous Fifth Avenue shopping destination, the spa spans three floors, 35,000 square feet, and features a glass-enclosed pool with panoramic views of the city as well as ESPA's signature dramatic design elements – like a stunning marble ice fountain surrounded by a 24-carat gold mosaic by Bisazza.

The award-winning ESPA range of natural, high-quality products has created a collection of bespoke treatments exclusively for The Peninsula Spa. ESPA Super Active, boasting pure, potent combinations of 100 percent natural ingredients, is a revolutionary new line, which complements three new 90-minute facials. Offering complex lymphatic drainage massage techniques and

the use of rose quartz crystals to yield immediate, visible results for specific skincare concerns, the Super Active Repairing and Restoring Facial is designed to counter the effects of harsh products, aggressive treatments, and city stresses. Rich in plant oils and phyto-active extracts – together with scientifically advanced techniques – it helps to create an evenness of skin tone, bringing back that natural vibrancy.

Even more comforting is the knowledge that ESPA therapists set the industry standard: not only are they required to have previous spa experience, but they're also required to undergo training in the body's individual systems and how to balance them, advanced massage technique, product knowledge, spa concepts, phytotherapy, aromatherapy, hydrotherapy, and thalassotherapy. Better than you.

www.peninsula.com

CAUDALIE VINOETHERPIE SPA AT THE PLAZA

Caudalie revolutionised the spa world in 1999 when they introduced the first-ever Vinotherapie Spa, harnessing the untapped, restorative power of grapes and grapevine polyphenols in the heart of Bordeaux's Château Smith Haut Lafitte vineyard. Three more vineyard spas soon followed before Caudalie finally came to America and opened an outpost inside New York's legendary The Plaza Hotel. To that end, Caudalie now brings the vineyard experience into an urban setting for the first time, incorporating several accoutrements reminiscent of the wineries and châteaux where the Caudalie spas are found worldwide.

These include the French Paradox Wine Lounge, stocked with artisanal and terroir-driven varietals from the French, Spanish and Italian vineyards where Caudalie Spas are located; an on-site sommelier to host wine tastings between treatments, as well as

offer instructional wine classes. Bois Grillé – a signature scent of toasted oak, which reflects the aroma of the workshop where wine barrels are still hand-crafted in their ancient tradition; and Small Plates – Caudalie founders, Mathilde and Bertrand's, hand-selected favourite foods indigenous to the vineyard regions which are paired with select wines from the Lounge.

The Plaza Spa services include a Honey & Wine Wrap, a Red Vine bath, a Crushed Cabernet Scrub, a Fresh Grape Massage and a menu of world-famous Caudalie facials utilising grape and vine active patents and Caudalie products to purify, firm, energise and illuminate the skin. Like all Caudalie Vinotherapie Spas, the full menu of treatments is exclusive to Caudalie and each is highlighted by the restorative benefits of the great grape. Plus, at The Plaza there's a Fresh Grape Manicure and Pedicure you won't find anywhere else. www.caudalie-usa.com



THIS PAGE: Vichy Shower at Caudalie Vinotherapie Spa, Plaza Hotel. OPPOSITE PAGE: (top left) Caudalie Vinotherapie Spa treatment cabin; (top right and bottom) The Peninsula Spa by ESPA's treatment room and the glass-enclosed pool at dusk.



FOUR SEASONS

The iconic post-modernist Four Seasons Hotel New York was designed by world-famous architect I.M. Pei and stretches across the entire depth of a city block. Clad in the same French limestone used in the expansion of the Louvre, the tower is pierced by 12 foot-high lanterns set into graduated setbacks that distinguish the hotel on New York's celebrated skyline. The three-story, terraced Lobby Court is designed to be one of New York's grandest indoor public spaces, with marble floors and a 33 foot-high backlit onyx ceiling. Turn the corner and you'll find l'Atelier de Joel Robuchon, the legendary chef's namesake restaurant known for its sea urchin and *foie gras*. Befitting all this grandiosity, there's also the Ty Warner Penthouse up above – at USD35,000 a night, it's the most expensive hotel suite in the world.

Thankfully the subterranean spa is a bit more subdued. Descending via private elevator it's a bit like heading into a secret bunker. This is what it sounds like five floors beneath the street: quiet. And that's the point.

The Big Apple Body Treatment is a full-body signature experience that begins by awakening the olfactory senses with a fragrant 100 percent pure organic apple scrub peppered with hints of cinnamon and brown sugar. (Apples don't only taste good... their enzymes help dissolve dead cells while their antioxidants improve the health of the skin). Rinsed off under a Vichy shower, apple body butter is then used to nourish the skin during a full-body massage.

The Thai Ceremony Massage incorporates heated herbal packs to knead and compress over-worked muscles. Traditional stretches are also used to massage stiff, strained muscles and ligaments. This treatment has a therapeutic and relaxing effect on both body and mind – which hopefully remains long after you re-ascend to reality.

www.fourseasons.com/newyorkfs

THIS PAGE: At the Four Seasons – woman in penthouse bathtub, photographed by Michael Prince. OPPOSITE PAGE: Clay fireplace; and Great Jones Spa massage.

GREAT JONES SPA

At Great Jones Spa, every inch of the multi-level sanctuary is a reflection of their mission statement: inspiring health and happiness through the eastern concepts of spiritual harmony and balance. And central to that balance is the Great Jones water cure, along with a multitude of luxurious, relaxing treatments.

With the power to purify, balance, and transcend, water therapies have found expression in nearly every culture throughout history. At Great Jones Spa, they believe the restorative power of water can change your life, which is why they built a one-of-a-kind, facility unlike anything else in New York City – a stunning wet lounge centred around a three-story indoor waterfall, overlooking a thermal hot tub and cold plunge pool. Inspiring architecture, hushed acoustics and calming energy pervade the entire space. Just steps away, you'll also find the Finnish-style river rock sauna, and chakra steam room, embedded with lights to suffuse the space with gently-shifting hues.

While you can easily spend a day taking the water cure, it would be a shame to miss out on some spectacular treatments, like the Red Flower Hammam Treatment & Massage, a five-step massage ritual based on the Turkish tradition of the bathhouse. It starts in the Vichy shower, where you're cleansed with Moroccan mint tea and silt before an exfoliation with olive stones, coffee, and lemons. Natural Rhassoul clay is painted on your skin to draw out even the deepest toxins, followed by a healing massage with jasmine, cardamom, and clove oils. For a finale you're covered in tangerine fig butter. Not only will you feel divine, you'll also smell delicious.

www.greatjonespa.com

CLAY

One of the things that makes Chelsea's CLAY so unique and interesting as a spa destination is that it's part of an integrated health club. So you can fuse services from boxing and self-defence to yoga and Pilates with your spa treatments, and a CLAY Day Package lets you try a couple of private fitness sessions as well as spa services. The result is a complete wellness experience, with diverse options and personalised guidance extending far beyond the usual spa and fitness routines.

One of the added benefits of a CLAY Day is that it immerses you in the intuitive way the massage therapists work closely with personal trainers, Pilates, and yoga instructors to maximise bodywork sessions for clients who seek balanced, integrated care. Based upon a private fitness session, areas of concern can be identified before you're even on the table. The trainer's observations, combined with your personal consultation information and the massage therapists' knowledge and skills come together quickly with the goal of making spa services here as seriously therapeutic as they are relaxing. Whether you choose to reward yourself post-workout with an intensely gratifying Deep Tissue Massage, opt for serenity with an Aromatherapy Massage, or revitalise your body's energy with a Thai Massage, the personalised bodywork comes with the combined benefit of enhanced mind-body awareness.

Great design is also on the cards at CLAY. The club's sleek and sexy design is featured in Taschen's World Spa book, edited by Dwell Magazine's Senior Founding Editor and the Creative Director of the design firm, Modernhouse.

www.insideclay.com

BLISS

Bliss is the spiritual godmother of the day spa boom that swept New York City in the late 1990s. It started 20 years ago when Marcia Kilgore suffered from a shortage of cash and an excess of sebum. Forced to rely on her survival skills, the trained aesthetician started performing facials in her living room. As word of her super effective treatments and uncontrived atmosphere grew, that single room in SoHo soon begat a three-room mini-spa which begat the behemoth that's today a worldwide brand with spas in W Hotels, a no-nonsense, high-impact product line, and three further outposts in the Big Apple.

Yet the original location is still the best. And a Triple Oxygen Facial from Yelena is about as good as it gets. If you can track her down – Yelena is often called to fly around the world at the behest of her celebrity devotees. When in town, however, she caters to the regular folk like anybody else.

www.blissworld.com