

# Destination Bliss

With the addition of an exquisite spa, the best address in Toronto for the business traveller now gives further meaning to amenity, indulgence and sheer luxury

by Michael Carin

*The Aqua Massage Pool. Built with the understanding that it would be owned and operated by the Park Hyatt itself as a free-standing spa, no expense was spared. At one point during construction Stillwater had twenty-six craftsmen setting stone.*

The press releases for *Stillwater Spa* unabashedly declare the facility to be an "urban oasis." There are occasions, and this is one of them, when publicists do not exaggerate. The sumptuous spa in Toronto's downtown Park Hyatt delivers what it promises. The place envelops, delights and relaxes its visitors to the root of their DNA.

From the moment of entry the architecture imparts warmth, release—and opulence. Which should come as no surprise in view of the financial commitment made here. The Park Hyatt spent close to \$5 million on 10,000 square feet of a former parking garage. That works out to nearly \$500 per square foot, which even these days buys something considerably beyond deluxe. At *Stillwater Spa*, the architect/designer Harry Christakis has achieved a combination of intimacy and grandeur. The effect comes from the use of a tremendous amount of marble, granite and stone, together with ubiquitous soothing water. For example a rain curtain serenades the entranceway, and at key junctions guests cross streams that flow beneath transparent milk glass. The environment is meant to transport its patrons, and it does just that.

"You can't fool high end travellers," says Paul Verciglio, General Manager of the Park Hyatt and the guiding force behind the creation of *Stillwater*. "Whether they're on a business or pleasure trip, you simply can't attract them with anything other than quality. They immediately see it, or they notice its absence. And the first thing that a luxury traveller or a high-end spa patron sees here are the furnishings and the fixtures, the detail in the cabinet work and the moldings. And then, of course, come the treatments."

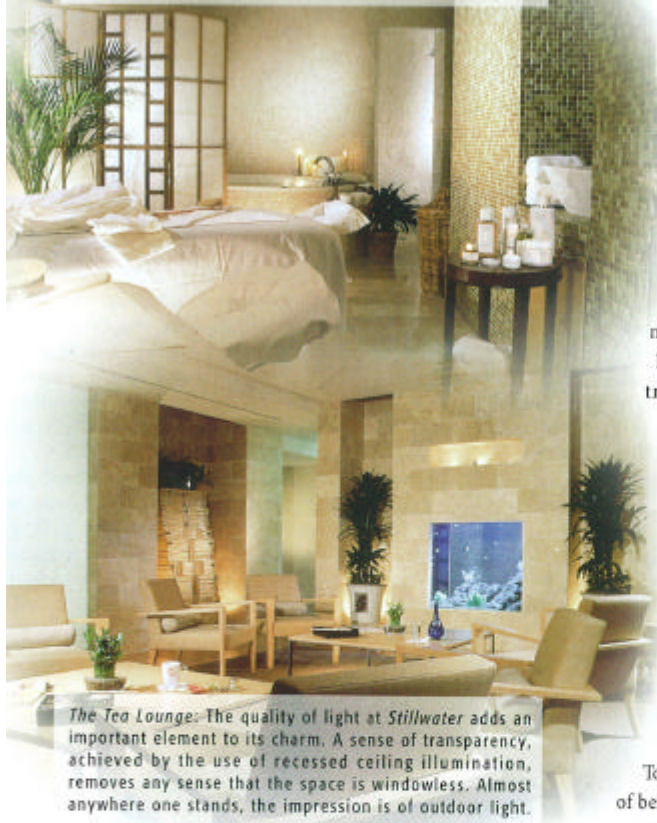
Ah yes, the treatments. Welcome to a capital city of Nirvana.

There are seventeen therapy rooms at *Stillwater* and the staff reaches seventy at peak hours. The most sought-after treatment might remain the classic Swedish massage, but people are increasingly demanding new and exotic routes to relaxation. The hour-long 'Mandarin Honey Body Glow' for example begins with a gentle exfoliation of the skin from head to toe. The therapists apply honey-infused mandarin juices, blended with sea salts. Then comes a total body Vichy treatment, an aqua-therapy that involves warm cascading showers. You lie down under this wet heaven, and turn over for equal opportunity to your front and back. The 'Mandarin' ends with a massage that uses a tangerine-scented cream. By this point the office might as well be on Mars.



*A Vichy Treatment. Touch and texture, sound, aroma, vision: the senses play the biggest part in the Stillwater experience. For the Torontonian, the spa is increasingly seen as a place to escape without the necessity of travel.*

*Massage Retreat for Two:* Spas, particularly spas as alluring as *Stillwater*, have become poles of attraction for business groups. The hotel has known cases where meeting organizers have made decisions along the lines of, 'You have the spa, we're coming to the Park Hyatt.'



*The Tea Lounge:* The quality of light at *Stillwater* adds an important element to its charm. A sense of transparency, achieved by the use of recessed ceiling illumination, removes any sense that the space is windowless. Almost anywhere one stands, the impression is of outdoor light.

"It's a treatment that has become so popular," says Verciglio, "that we're probably going to have to convert more space for it."

Two other vichy therapies are available at *Stillwater*. The 'Anti-Stress and Mental Clarity Treatment' involves a 30-minute focused massage to the neck and shoulders, and a heated purifying mud masque over the back followed by a full body vichy treatment. During the 'Hydraminerale Spa Treatment' your skin is treated to a total body masque of rich minerals and nutrients, restoring tone and luster.

If you're in the mood for something extraordinarily grand, try the aqua massage. Your first impression of this stress-draining experience might be of imperial Rome. Why? Because the private pool for aqua massage is a majestic room on its own, and marble seems to be everywhere—and thoughts of decadence become inevitable. The water is at 98 degrees, the same temperature as your body. A water wing is put under your legs to hold you up,

and for an hour you lie on your back in your therapist's arms, and you go through stretches and shiatsu treatment. Meanwhile the underwater audio speaker is playing the music of your choice.

The experience can be likened to a curative water ballet. Among other things, you're cured of any memory that such a foreign thing as business ever existed.

Relax in the Tea Lounge, Sir, for a few minutes before your facial. (The Tea Lounge has an aquarium at one end and a fireplace at the other, and here you'll encounter other white-robed guests sipping herbal teas or flavoured spring waters—the sense of cozy escape only deepens.) Wait a minute! Facials for men? Yes, they're no longer gender-driven, and they're the latest rage. Seven-foot basketball stars drop by for a relaxing facial massage, a cleansing mask, and a light moisturizing. Four different types of facials are on offer.

If you're a traveller from distant shores, you might want to try a treatment indigenous to Canada. *Stillwater* has invented the 'Canadian Maple Body Glow' massage, which involves exfoliation, a Vichy treatment, and a combination of various oils with maple syrup.

No matter your place of origin, if you're travelling with your spouse the 'Massage Retreat for Two' is a must adventure in mellowness and repose. Your therapists greet you in the Tea Lounge, ask a few questions about allergies, and then escort you to the massage suite. Here you are introduced to an oversized jacuzzi with three settings, and left alone for twenty-five minutes to soak in the ease. Talk about romantic settings: this may be the only jacuzzi in the city of Toronto coupled with a fireplace in the wall above. The sense of being pampered is quite delicious—and the massage hasn't even started yet! Your correspondent can report that he and his wife found the side by side Swedish Massage an idyllic experience from beginning to end, and returned to the Tea Lounge in a state as close to physical serenity as two workaholics are likely to get.

The next morning we trooped into the fitness room and worked out on avant-garde equipment outfitted with individual televisions and headsets. A nice touch that, being able to choose for oneself from the 500 channel universe while sweating on a stairmaster. The attention to detail and amenity extends to the changing lounges, where the saunas, steam rooms, whirlpools and showers all come with luxurious fittings. As well, there are chaise longues in personal cabanas with flat screen televisions and earphones. These sculpted little nooks are perfect to bridge the time between treatments—and to remind the guest yet again that he has arrived somewhere uncommon.

"The Park Hyatt Toronto makes it a priority to exceed our visitors' expectations," says General Manager Paul Verciglio. With the addition of the *Stillwater Spa*, that priority is achieved to delightful excess. □