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# Spa

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# Intuitive HEALING

Spas are leading the way when it comes to holistic wellness, providing a host of alternative therapies that go beyond the physical — often with profound results. BY SHARI MYCEK

**Y**ears ago during college finals, my roommate and I escaped our stress-filled dormitory and set out on a road trip. As our friends sat hunched in library cubicles, we bid adieu to cramming and journeyed west, driving for hours through sleepy Pennsylvania towns on to Maryland's U.S. Route 40, stopping finally at a shiny silver trailer to see Betty (whom to my knowledge never revealed her last name).

I'd known of Betty since childhood when my mother, with a small group of girlfriends in tow, would slip off for five-dollar, hour-long palm readings and for days after regale us with tales of Betty's predictions. Betty worked by intuition, a gift passed to her from her grandmother and great-grandmother before that. Although her services were made known only by word of mouth, each day by 3:30 a.m. her driveway was lined with cars full of hopeful clients. She'd emerge around 8:30 — her long, dark hair tasseled from sleep, belly

spilling across wide thighs, and feet bare — to drape a handwritten "Full Today" sign across her drive. For the next 12 hours or so, she'd read palms one by one on a first-come, first-served basis — never disappointing.

Betty worked solo from her trailer, partly because she was independent by nature, but perhaps more so because her chosen work (once labeled "gypsy" or "fortune-teller" by various cultures) was not fully accepted by mainstream society. Thirty-something years later, much has changed. Today, intuitives from astrologers and tarot card readers to clairvoyants and Reiki masters are widely sought after by those seeking personal guidance — and some of the world's top spas have responded by adding these services as part of their mind, body, and spiritual offerings.

This is a far cry from the historic roots of spa-ing — the Greek and Roman days when thalassotherapy and heat therapies were the mainstays. It's even a departure from modern-day

spa staples. "Spas have been mostly about facials and massages, following a very Western approach to healing," says clairvoyant Todd Hershey, who gives intuitive readings at a number of spas including those at Miraval Resort, Red Mountain Spa, and Mandarin Oriental New York. "However, more spas are opening to alternative modalities of healing, which include Reiki, yoga, and the work I do. Increasingly, spas are becoming about creating an overall sense of health and balance. These alternative modalities help in the reduction of stress, which allows for better emotional and spiritual well-being."

Seven years ago, Como Shambhala chief executive officer Christina Ong was introduced by mutual friend and fashion icon Donna Karan to intuitive Susan King, who writes a psychic column for *Elle Canada* and wrote and hosted Britain's *Sixth Sense* television show in the '90s. In addition to seeing private clients in London,

New York, and Miami, King now also offers intuitive counseling at the Como Shambhala spas at The Metropolitan in London, Parrot Cay in the Turks and Caicos, and Como Shambhala Estate at Begawan Giri in Bali, Indonesia.

"The work that Susan does addresses the 'soul' aspect of the so often spoken about 'mind, body, and soul connection,'" says Monica Barter, director of operations for Como Shambhala spas. "We find that an increasing amount of people travel to our locations in search of not only the best treatments and activities but also personal and spiritual fulfillment. When they arrive at a location like ours, they feel nurtured and safe enough to face unresolved issues from the past. Susan's work is very unique and supports this pursuit of a more balanced life."

A "reading" with King is like sitting down in a cozy kitchen over a cup of tea with your grandmother or favorite

referring to my 27-toed black feline). "I feel you putting your hand on this cat, and it's nurturing to you," she continued. "You feel peace and comfort in stroking it." She spoke about my deceased father, and then moved to a man in my house. "He's been there a long time, a good decade," she said. "There are unspoken words — you feel he doesn't see your vulnerability and fragility and are wondering if you are to spend the rest of your life with this person. There is a foundation, a whole world, and you don't want to throw your life away overnight. But all relationships change. Life is a journey, and different consciousness levels don't always move at the same pace. So coast. Do your work: travel, write. Time will give you clarity." As it turns out, King's guidance was right on.

A year or so later, I consulted with King again, and once more she hit the mark. After both sessions, though

Her philosophy is one that's echoed by other spa-based intuitives.

**Because of free will**, the future is never set," says Hershey, who uses a regular deck of playing cards during his fast-paced, whirlwind, and always eye-opening one-on-one readings. "My job is to help people use free will to create their own destiny — in love, in business, and in personal development."

Hershey says he sees three basic types of clients. The first is looking to make their lives better by asking deep, soulful questions and being truly open to creating meaningful change. The second seeks profound transformation but essentially wants Hershey to tell them what they want to hear. The third has come for the wrong reason — i.e. their husband, wife, mother, or best friend set up the appointment. "The most common question I get is 'What's going to happen?'" he says. "A better question is, 'How do I make something happen?' And an even better question is, 'What's the purpose of this happening?' Once you understand the purpose of

a relationship, death, divorce, job change, stuck pattern, etc., you can decide if you want to do something about it or not."

The spa, in his mind, is the perfect setting to engage in high-caliber intuitive work. "When people feel relaxed and safe in the spa environment, they begin to find a sense of balance physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually," says Hershey. "And from that place true and lasting change can take place."

Denise Vitiello, the spa director at Mandarin Oriental New York (who introduced Hershey to Manhattan as part of the spa's new quarterly Wellness Series), couldn't agree more. "Cleansing and detoxifying the physical body

*Each one of us possesses intuition; we know exactly what we must do. But hearing that inner personal voice, remembering it, often gets clouded.*

aunt. Though spoken in a soft voice, her words are deliberate. She begins by sitting opposite her spa guest, during which time she pieces together a mental picture of her client's life via sounds, smells, and emotions. "I can see, feel, and distinguish whether I'm talking about a lover, a spouse, or a colleague," she says. "I go back in time a bit and then move forward eighteen months or so, offering guidance and new insight."

I had a series of sessions with King both at Parrot Cay and by phone, and the feeling I had afterward was one of relief and comfort. During my first consultation, she began by describing a large cat — "huge, really," she said, laughing (and I knew she was

radically different, I felt a sense of relief and extreme clarity, which is exactly what King hopes clients will experience. "We're all more transient these days," she says. "We move to different parts of the country — even the world. We're far from our families. We have a lot of stress and anxiety, and we've lost our infrastructure, so people seek me out as a sounding board. Each one of us possesses intuition; we know exactly what we must do. But hearing that inner personal voice, remembering it, often gets clouded." King notes that her role is to put people back in touch with their own inner guidance and help them gain perspective on whatever is troubling them so they can create more choices for themselves.



*While Western culture has been slow to fully value the quest of going inward for answers, Western spas are increasingly encouraging this by providing safe, healing opportunities for exploration in this regard.*

via bodywork, massage, and nutrition is important work—but it's not enough," says Vitiello. "There is increasing recognition of the need to meditate and get in touch with our emotions and intuitive abilities."

Along with private one-on-one sessions (which book up quickly), Hershey conducts group intuitive sessions that range from one hour at We Care Spa to three days at Miraval to a weeklong intensive at Solage Calistoga's new Spa Solage. Regardless of length, his group sessions are interactive, energetic, fun, and awakening. Going well beyond an introduction, the sessions help participants access and begin using their intuitive abilities and (many claim) find their true life purpose. "Participants are just amazed at what they experience in a group environment," says Hershey. "Many walk in not expecting to be able to do anything and walk out surprised by how much they inherently know—and that they can use their intuition to access their highest potential: turn lead into gold; sadness to happiness."

**Not all intuitive work** has to do with reading palms or cards. Massage can also be delivered intuitively. In fact, some of the best massages I've ever experienced have been stand-outs not because of the therapists' bodywork techniques but because of how they tapped into their intuition to give my body exactly what it needed.

High in the red rocks of Sedona, Arizona, therapist Kalandar delivers this type of massage at Mii Amo, a destination spa at Enchantment Resort. A Swedish downhill skiing champion,

he came to the U.S. on a sports scholarship but quickly turned his attention to studying massage therapy. With eyes closed, he assesses the energy of the body and then zeroes in on the exact areas that need attention. When asked how he knows where to focus, his reply is simply, "I can feel it."

Richel D'Ambra Spa & Salon, housed in Center City at The Ritz-Carlton Philadelphia, also offers intuitive massage. A session there begins with the therapist closing her eyes and running her hands head to toe just inches above the body. Then, using a combination of Reiki and traditional massage, she zones in on exact blockages.

Yet another type of intuitive therapy is Aura-Soma, which was developed in England by Vicki Wall in 1984 (intriguingly after she lost her sight). The system utilizes the language of color and light to help us heal and reconnect with our true selves.

Several years ago, I had an Aura-Soma reading at Mii Amo (one of the only spas in the country to offer it) with spa therapist Bhakta and was blown away by the accuracy and precision of her interpretation. The modality, she told me back then, recognizes only one true "disease," that of not knowing and following your life's purpose. A consultation begins by choosing four (from 103) glass bottles each containing two vibrantly colored liquids separated one over the other. The upper layer contains essential oils; the lower is comprised of herbal extracts, crystals, gem-infused elixirs, and water. The colors you choose and the sequence in which you select them inform the hour-long interpretive reading that follows. >> 125



**alternative therapies** From astrology to tarot card readings, intuitive offerings are on the rise, appearing more and more on spa menus. "When I first began to work intuitively, I had the need, want, and desire to work with a holistic spa group," says intuitive Susan King. "I felt that my work – to heal the spirit from trouble, pain, or confusion – was a perfect match." King has now been with Como Shambhala spas, one of the first spa groups to enlist a resident intuitive, for seven years. But other spas are now following suit. Here's what you can find and where:

**Astrology Sessions** Canyon Ranch ([canyonranch.com](http://canyonranch.com)); Enchantment Resort, Mii Amo ([enchantmentresort.com](http://enchantmentresort.com)); The Phoenician Resort, The Centre for Well-Being ([thephoenician.com](http://thephoenician.com))

**Clairvoyant Readings** Mandarin Oriental New York ([mandarinoriental.com](http://mandarinoriental.com)); Miraval Resort ([miravalresort.com](http://miravalresort.com)); Red Mountain Spa ([redmountainspa.com](http://redmountainspa.com)); Solage Calistoga ([solagecalistoga.com](http://solagecalistoga.com)); We Care Spa ([wecarespa.com](http://wecarespa.com))

**Intuitive Massage** The Crossings ([thecrossingsaustin.com](http://thecrossingsaustin.com)); El Monte Sagrado ([elmontesagrado.com](http://elmontesagrado.com)); The Ritz-Carlton Naples ([ritzcarlton.com](http://ritzcarlton.com)); The Ritz-Carlton Philadelphia, Richel D'Ambra Spa ([ritzcarlton.com](http://ritzcarlton.com)); Nusta Spa ([nustaspa.com](http://nustaspa.com))

