

—) TO YOUR HEALTH(—

# Looking Good, Feeling Good

*Today spas are about more than just scented oils and shiny nail polishes*



**Enjoy the benefits of the oxygen bar at the Sanibel Day Spa.**

by **Beth Luberecki**

**S**tep into Aquagene, the spa at the Pink Shell Beach Resort & Spa in Fort Myers Beach, and you won't just find well-heeled, baby boomer women sitting in the treatment chairs. Thanks to the spa's "Aquateen" services, you also might see a fourteen-year-old getting her first facial, or a twelve-year-old athlete enjoying a back and neck massage.

"We're a little more family friendly, which kind of sets us apart from other local spas," says Betty Jane Grieco, spa director at the Pink Shell. "[Aquateen] has been a very popular thing, and it's growing. The younger generation is used to going to spas now with their parents; almost every hotel has one."

Indeed, the growth of the spa indus-

try over the last several years has created a diverse clientele that's more educated and experienced about spas than ever before, which is helping to drive a variety of trends in the industry. "Spa IQ is on the rise, and I think it's a good thing," says Susie Ellis, president of Spa Finder, a major spa marketing and media company. "It's making staff more knowledgeable, and I think it's maybe flushing out some of the things in our industry that weren't quite as credible."

Men began seriously dipping their toes into the spa waters a few years ago, and their presence at spas continues to grow as they realize that manicures and facials aren't just for the ladies. According to Ellis, the industry average is about 30 percent men, but in resort areas, like here in Southwest Florida,

men can constitute up to fifty percent of a spa's clientele.

"Their friends are doing it, and men don't make fun of it [anymore]," says Pam Attuso, co-owner of Sanibel Day Spa. "They admire their friends who can go in and get a pedicure or a facial."

Couples treatments are also on the rise, leading many spas to create special rooms for these private experiences. An expansion of the Retro 1940s Day Spa at the Tween Waters Inn on Captiva will include a new couples suite with two claw foot tubs and two treatment tables. The spas at the Pink Shell and Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa also have separate spaces for couples.

But it's not just couples who can use these rooms. A mother and daughter or two girlfriends might also book them for

PHOTO BY PARADISE ADVERTISING



**Heaven is a massage on the beach at the Retro 1940s Day Spa at Tween Waters Inn.**

a chance to spend a little time together in a relaxing atmosphere.

Spas are also becoming a popular place for groups. The Pink Shell often hosts private parties at its spa, anything from a teenage birthday gathering to a bridal party looking for some pre-wedding pampering. According to Grieco, it's a great use for the spa at night, a time when the treatment tables have traditionally been unoccupied.

"The group of people who used to meet at a restaurant for dinner and drinks now meet in the spa environment," says Mira Choromanska, spa director of Spada Salon and Day Spa in Fort Myers. "And here, you get a resort experience without the expense of going and leaving for two days. People come to our spa for four or five hours and they have escaped like they wanted." A recent expansion of Spada Salon and Day Spa will make it even more appealing to groups, adding not only more rooms for treatments but also a space for groups to gather between massages and body wraps to converse or enjoy some light snacks.

These group gatherings are just one way spas are "lightening up" a little,

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adding splashes of fun to an environment that used to be very sedate. Tween Waters' spa will be adding a retro Hawaiian tiki nail bar, where clients can get their nails done while enjoying a tropical cocktail. "That'll be really fun," says Amy Sbarra, proprietor of Sbarra's Day Spa Services, which runs the spa at Tween Waters. "I think people, even if they just had a manicure recently, will want to go in there just to try it."

But while there's more fun on the

menu, people have also begun to expect more from their spa treatments. "I think that people are looking for alternatives to the real invasive face-lift," says Sbarra. "People are really looking for results-oriented [services], some kind of visible results. We've had to rise to that occasion."

Aquagene recently began offering a new cellulite solution body treatment, aimed at firming and toning problem areas. Though Grieco says clients can benefit from just one treatment, the spa

PHOTO COURTESY OF TWEEN WATERS INN

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Enjoy the social pleasures at Spada Day Spa with a relaxing drink between services, or the soothing experience of a couples massage at the Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa.

is really promoting it as a series of six in order for clients to achieve the best results.

Sanibel Day Spa's new photo-rejuvenation treatment uses intense light therapy to tone and tighten the skin. According to Attuso, when it comes to plastic surgery, "a lot of people don't want to go there. So they can help a little without going under the knife." The spa also offers an oxygen bar and an "Aqua Detox" treatment where an ionic footbath draws toxins out of the body

through the feet. "It's just another way of helping to detoxify the body in a very relaxed atmosphere," says Attuso. "We're proud that we can offer these things on such a small cutting-edge secluded island, that we can still bring all these things to people."

As life continues to become more and more stressful, a lot of people are also turning to spa treatments as a way to not only relax but also stay healthy. "Over 70 percent of doctor visits are stress related," says Spa Finder's Ellis. "So some-

thing that will de-stress is really contributing to your health."

So look for the word "pampering" to be replaced by "wellness" in the spa vocabulary. "We're educating guests and clients that this is a necessary part of their everyday routine, such as fitness," says Terri Beckham, director of spa and tennis at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa. "It's very important to our health and well-being."

That's one reason why medical spas are becoming more prevalent, and why

## The Right Touch

Amy Sbarra's days used to be filled with the hustle and bustle of life in New York, where she worked in sales and event promotions for places like Studio 54. But today, her days are filled with the soothing sights, sounds, and scents of the spa.

When Sbarra moved from New York to Sanibel in 1997, she was ready for a career change. "I tried to think of something that I could do that would give me the money and the time to pursue my art," she says. "At the time, I was getting great relief from receiving massage therapy, so becoming a licensed massage therapist popped into my head." After attending the Florida Academy of Massage & Skin Care in Ft. Myers, she worked as a massage therapist at South Seas Island Resort for about six months before starting her own business on Captiva's Andy Rosse Lane. She was soon joined by a nail

technician and began offering services besides massages. That's when her day spa business was born.

No longer based at just one location, Sbarra now serves as proprietor of Sbarra's Day Spa Services, which provides spa services to several local resorts and communities. Perhaps best known is her spa at Tween Waters Inn on Captiva, which is undergoing an expansion. Sbarra also provides spa services at Casa Ybel Resort on Sanibel and is in talks with several other resorts and communities.

"The spa industry is enjoyable for me because it is about making people feel good inside and out," she says. "Plus the way that I have approached it keeps it creative and new every day. The best thing about my job is that it doesn't feel like work."



Though she hasn't yet gotten around to working on her art, Sbarra is an accomplished singer who would like to line up a steady, local gig performing swing, jazz, and standards. She

calls herself a "dramatic soprano" who can vocalize 3 1/3 octaves. "My vocal chops are really strong now," she says. "Now I just need someone to give me an opportunity!"

As for her spa business, she expects to continue to see it grow, partly due to all the baby boomers settling in the region. "Ten years from now, I hope to have my concept franchised and to be retired," she says. Maybe then she'll have time for her art.

—Beth Luberecki

PHOTOS BY DAVID MEARDON, CRAIG HILDEBRAND AND COURTESY OF SANIBEL HARBOUR RESORT & SPA

more doctors' offices are starting to offer spa services. Many people are looking for more than just massages and body wraps. They're looking for a place where they also might be able to get Botox injections, laser skin resurfacing, or ayurvedic treatments.

"Consumers really like the expertise of the medical community," says Ellis. "But they like the ambience of the spa community. If you can get the expertise of the medical community with the ambience of a spa, that's when you really have a winner and the consumer is really drawn to that." 🌴

*Beth Luberecki is a Venice, Florida-based freelance writer and the features editor of Times of the Islands.*

## More Info

For more information about, or to make an appointment at one of the spas mentioned in this story, please see below.

### Aquagene Spa at Pink Shell Beach Resort & Spa

275 Estero Blvd., Ft. Myers Beach, 239-463-6181, [www.pinkshell.com](http://www.pinkshell.com)

### The Spa at Sanibel Harbour Resort & Spa

17260 Harbour Pointe Dr., Ft. Myers, 239-466-4000, [www.sanibel-resort.com](http://www.sanibel-resort.com)

### Sanibel Day Spa, Periwinkle Place

2075 Periwinkle Way, Unit 27, Sanibel, 239-395-2220, [www.sanibeldayspa.com](http://www.sanibeldayspa.com)

### Spada Salon and Day Spa

13161 McGregor Blvd., Suite 1, Ft. Myers, 239-482-1858, [www.spadaspa.com](http://www.spadaspa.com)

### Retro 1940s Day Spa at 'Tween Waters Inn

15951 Captiva Dr., Captiva, 239-472-5161, [www.tween-waters.com](http://www.tween-waters.com)

To learn more about the spa industry, visit the Web sites for the International SPA Association ([www.experienceispa.com](http://www.experienceispa.com)) or Spa Finder ([www.spafinder.com](http://www.spafinder.com)). Both sites offer a search feature for finding a spa in your area.

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