

Pamper YOURSELF

Looking to get preened and plucked? You'll find more and more high-end spas competing for the gay dollar

MATTHEW LINK

Royal treatment. *When it comes to spas, there are plenty that are reaching out to the gay community*

Funny that for an institution as gay as the spa, there are so very few blatantly homo ones. Sure, any high-end spa nowadays reeks of metrosexuality, with men left and right getting preened and plucked to within an inch of their lives. According to the International Spa Association, 31 percent of spa clients are men, and that piece of the pie continues to grow. But with an estimated 23,100 spas in the United States serving more than 160 million people, you'd think a few would come out already and fly the rainbow flag. After all, where would these liberated

straight men be without us homos taking the eyebrow-shaping, back-waxing lead?

Luckily, a handful of day spas and hotel spa resorts make no bones about being gay-owned and go after the gay market with barefaced gusto. If a metrosexual sneaks in under the gaydar, more power to him.

Some of the best gay spas are in resort hotels. In California's desert oasis of Palm Springs, the 15-room East Canyon Hotel & Spa (eastcanyonps.com) is one of the most highly regarded in the region. Beyond pampering yourself with Frette towels, 300-thread-count sheets and large

flat-screen TVs, this gay resort has four private treatment rooms on the premises. Your spa therapist scoops you from the outdoor tented whirlpool tub into a spa room, where you enjoy Shiatsu acupressure therapy, heated-stone massages, desert-red-clay wraps or full-body aloe vera detoxifying wraps, among other delights. If that's not enough, the spa also offers a full range of facials, including a papaya enzyme peel.

Not to be outdone, the Italian-flavored gay resort La Dolce Vita (ladolcevitaresort.com) in Palm Springs also has a full-service day spa on site, run by male therapists,

FRANK MULLANEY

with an adjacent whirlpool and steam room. Luscious treatments include deep-pore purifying facials, aromatherapy stress-reduction therapy, seaweed-infused body wraps and body polishes with salt or sugar (depending on your mood). And, of course, what spa could call itself gay without back facials and waxing services for almost every part of the body? You can always retreat to your room and your large bathrobe and Aveda bath products, as well. If you're with your honey, check out the side-by-side "Romeo & Romeo Couple's Massage and Scrubs" package.

The Grand Resort and Spa (grandresort.net) is the largest gay hotel in Fort Lauderdale, and arguably the most luxurious. Just two blocks from the Atlantic Ocean, the hotel's 33 modern rooms play it easy, thankfully, with the tropical theme, and there's a two-bedroom grand penthouse with a kitchen and private sun deck. Massage treatments are available in the indoor full-service spa or in a private outdoor courtyard cabana complete with facial ice masks, cooling towels and a gurgling background fountain, at no extra charge. Exotic treatments include warm mud massages and micro-dermabrasion, and, of course, there are pedicures, manicures and a full hair salon—even body-hair dying. Interesting day packages include the "Sports Fitness," which includes a eucalyptus body scrub, deep-tissue massage and facial. Although The Grand is not clothing optional at the pool, there is a clothing-optional hot tub in the back.

Although not exclusively gay, the 40-room Crowne Pointe Inn (crowne-pointe.com) in oh-so-queer Provincetown, Massachusetts, is proudly gay-owned. This 140-year-old former sea captain's estate is home to the award-winning Shui Spa, with its warm mineral tub, lounge area, sauna, steam room and even a lunch menu with grilled wraps and fruits. Treatments to write home about include a chardonnay grapeseed extract scrub, a vitamin C infusion facial, pedicures, manicures and men's hair removal.

As for day spas, a number of US cities have at least one that is bona fide queer.

The ultra-modern, glass-and- >>



Palm-shaded pampering. In California's desert oasis of Palm Springs, the 15-room East Canyon Hotel & Spa is one of the most highly regarded in the region.

COURTESY EAST CANYON HOTEL & SPA



Downtown pampering. Sleek Sir Spa is located smack in the middle of Chicago's queer-populated Andersonville neighborhood.

COURTESY SIR SPA

» concrete, three-story Blue Med Spa (bluemedspa.com) is a physician-supervised facility. That means that on top of looking after hair, nails and feet, this Atlanta facility can perform non-surgical skin-tightening procedures like Thermage (radio frequencies pulsed into the skin), Smartlipo (non-surgical laser lipo), Botox, tattoo removal and laser vein removal. Needless to say, the place has a strong gay following. You can also receive nutritional advice

and exercise tips, or simply chill out in the meditation den with guided mental exercises.

Sir Spa's (sirspa.com) tagline is "Where Men Get Their Go," and no one would doubt it, with its location smack in Chicago's queer-populated Andersonville neighborhood. This sleek, gay-owned 4,500-square-foot space boasts spa packages with testosterone-fueled names like The Monarch, The Duke and The Esquire. Treatments run the gamut: reflexolo-

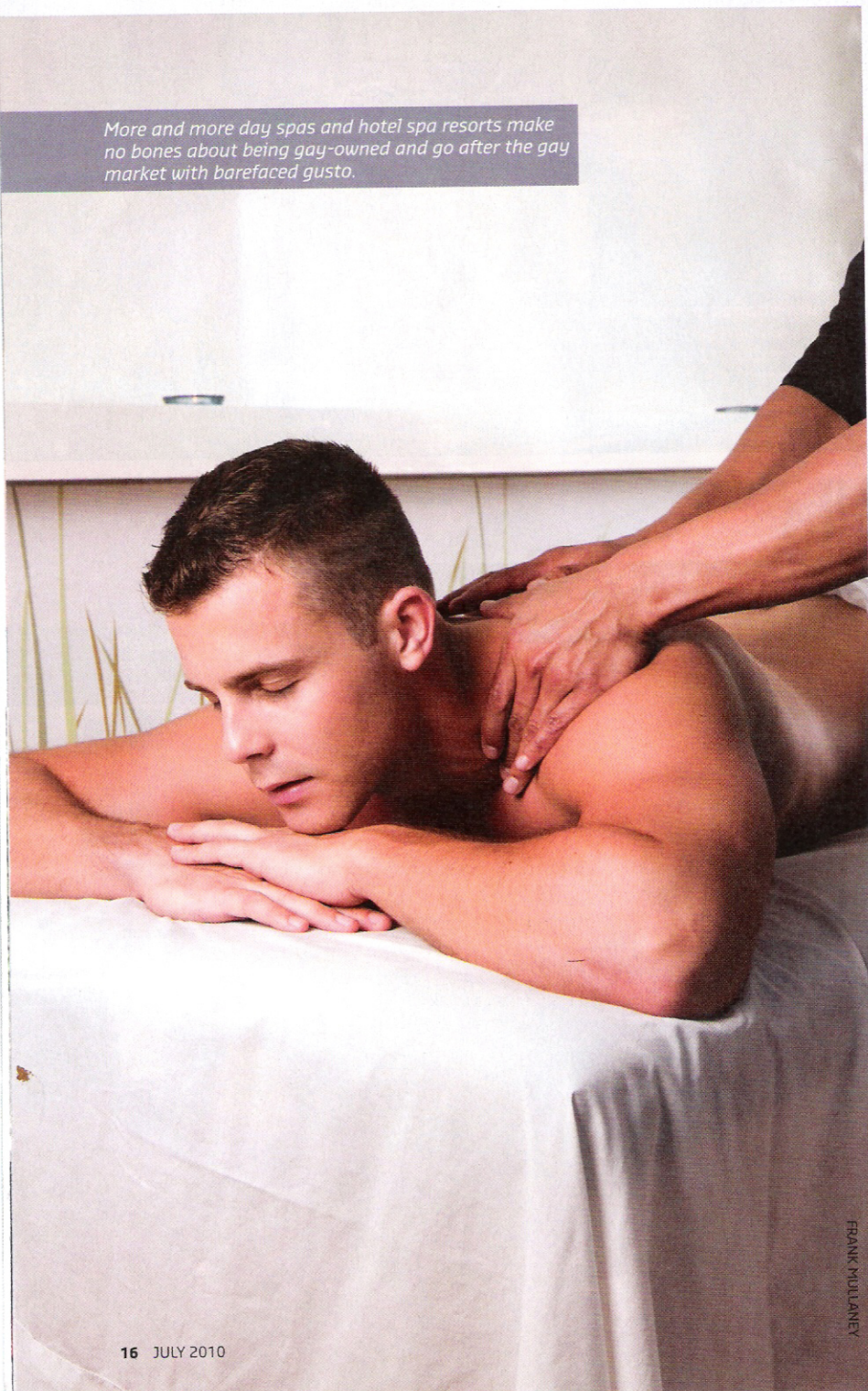
gy, hot stone massage, pure collagen facial masks and ab-defining treatments to firm and tighten midsections. There's also a fully appointed locker suite, steam room, relaxation lounge, grooming clubroom and rain showers. Take someone there for a Date Night package, with his-and-his massages followed by wine and dinner coupons.

Just off West Hollywood's main gay drag of Santa Monica Boulevard, The Gendarmerie (thegendarmerie.com) is housed in a comfy 1928 stucco cottage. You can begin your relaxation therapy in the back courtyard with a martini infused with fruit from the spa's own lemon tree. One of the more interesting treatments is a facial that uses the I-Derm deep skin ionization process (with a low-grade galvanic current that encourages hydration and rejuvenation through cell stimulation and reproduction). Beyond the scrubs, massages, waxing and trimming, this gay-owned spa also offers a full hair salon and pedicures and manicures.

Adjacent to New York's gayborhood of Chelsea, the gay-owned Face to Face spa (facetofaceny.com) enjoys a cozy home deep inside a Manhattan skyscraper. Here, the noises and dirt of the city are far away, and in the tranquil treatment rooms you can enjoy back-waxing, sunless tans, lymphatic drainage, slimming body wraps, foot scrubs and, for the truly brave, anal bleaching! Their body wax, an Australian import, is infused with essential oils that remove unwanted hair but leave your back intact. Check out the Y-chromosome facial, which targets razor burn and ingrown hairs.

Remarkable for its setting in a renovated 13,000-square-foot World War I army barrack in San Francisco's woodsy Presidio, the palatial SenSpa (senspa.com) is partly gay-owned and gay-managed. Its interior is a lush Zen world with an indoor garden meditation sanctuary, a snug soundproof lounge with a floor-to-ceiling cylinder fireplace, 14 treatment rooms (including two VIP rooms) and even an education center. Spa treatments come with a free assessment by a wellness coach, and a master healer can treat you to ancient Chinese practices like acupuncture.

More and more day spas and hotel spa resorts make no bones about being gay-owned and go after the gay market with barefaced gusto.



FRANK MULLANEY