

# designing spa menus

writer Catharine Nicol

**B**efore getting into choosing the treatment, whether consciously or not, the very first impressions are gleaned from the look of the actual menu. The quality, condition, design and readability are all important. A certain amount of flowery description is to be expected, unless this is a men's spa or a men's treatment, but descriptions that don't actually tell you what you're going to get are extremely frustrating. "From research we have done, women (and many leisure guests) like to understand the details and story," says Anne McCall Wilson of Fairmont Raffles Hotels and Resorts, "while men simply want to know the result."

Above all else, spa-goers appreciate descriptions that are honest. This is the prelude to your treatment, so starting with unrealistic expectations created by the menu only leads to disappointment on the table. "Even the most hardened spa skeptics appreciate originality and honesty," says Adria Lake of A.W. Lake Spa Concepts. "The best spa menus are easy to read and understand, clearly outlining what is to be expected without promising miraculous transformations. At the end of the day, a treatment is only as good as the actual experience – no matter how well or beautifully it is written or described on the menu."

Treatment names add more than you would think to the overall attractiveness of the treatment, again possibly subconsciously. But it is the intelligent, humorous titles (think Bliss Spas) that attract attention. "Creativity goes a long way in naming and describing treatments, as well-written menus are more interesting to read and can engage the intellect and emotion of the reader," says Lake. "Use humour and don't take yourself too seriously."

For men's spas, while descriptions are shorter and more to the point, names are still significant. "The packages that we created are inspired by and named after different historical

legends and personages, to which we have given strap lines that are very much tongue-in-cheek, and hopefully help to convey a more relaxed, but iconoclastic approach," says Olivier Bonnefoy of Gentleman's Tonic. "Many spas seem to lack imagination in this area and will typically have the 'Executive Facial' or 'Male Massage', but this approach doesn't exactly sell itself."

He underlines his menu's use of masculine images such as a maritime compass, etc - as emphasising the bespoke concept of the spa. "The images that were chosen are classic, masculine and understated and are used to outline our different service areas."

And then you get to content. The most popular treatment on a menu has always been, and looks like it always will be, massage. Sometimes you just need to choose something you know is going to hit the spot; Swedish and aromatherapy for relaxation, deep tissue for digging out the kinks. They are kings of the spa menu. "I believe the basics vary according to the location," says Niamh O'Connell of Hyatt Hotels and Resorts. "The old faithfuls are featured, mainly due to the fact that these are treatments many spa goers enjoy and for some it is within their comfort zone to request these treatments. But in some locations, Swedish and deep tissue may not necessarily be the 'go-to' massages, for example in China our 'go-tos' would be Tui Na and Chinese foot reflexology."

You'll likely find maintenance grooming next in the popularity stakes, although usually at the very end of the spa menu – manicures, pedicures and waxing. And very close on their heels come facials. Facials are not exactly the new massage, but some spa-goers are increasingly elbowing that massage aside and going for a facial when they're looking for relaxation, with the bonus that they will feel, but more significantly look, refreshed afterwards. Particularly when travelling for work, the facial is the new weapon in the businesswoman and businessman's armory. After all, no one is immune to the power of looking healthy.

Spa directors spend a long time agonising over which skincare product companies to go with, especially with regards to facials, and for good reason. Spa-goers who know their brands can be incredibly loyal. In Asia,

you'll often find a combination of something local and something high-tech from the west. For a spa with plenty of regulars, facials may, in fact, be kings of the menu. Offered in packages, a series provides cumulative benefits and ensures loyalty. Here its results-driven facials that count, usually anti-ageing, with the effects visually apparent.

Not all spas include them, but I am a big fan of the express treatment. A 30 to 45 minute massage or facial may not be ideal, and most spa professionals would say it's not enough to do any real benefit, but when your shoulders are somewhere near your ears, they can be a mini godsend. They are also a great way to try something you haven't before, as there's a limited amount of financial and time investment involved.

Scrubs, wraps and baths, à la carte or in packages of treatments, are still mostly the preserve of the leisure guest. And here it's all about the ingredients. If you're in

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Thailand, it's about the fresh herbs and fruit – lemongrass, ginger and papaya. If you're in a city you're probably more likely to see slimming spirulina and Moor Mud.

There's nothing better when you're on holiday than being able to try something that epitomises a healing tradition of the country you're in. From simply including local ingredients (also good environmentally), to healing traditions like the Thai compress, Filipino Hilot massage and authentic Shiatsu in Japan, to a consultation with a Chinese Traditional Medicine doctor for example, the ingredients give a sense of cultural adventure in a very safe environment. "A sense of place anchors a spa and also the experience in your guest's memory," explains Lake. "One of the main reasons people travel is to experience the local traditions and also to expose themselves to the unfamiliar. Spas provide this opportunity, and when done well, it is memorable. A well researched treatment that features local ingredients and pays homage to local traditions allows guests to walk away having learned something new about the place they have visited, and more often, about

themselves - and this is priceless."

To the uninitiated it may seem that menus repeat themselves, each one a close avatar of the next. To the seasoned spa-goer the differences are the details that jump out, and they often also include that sense of place. "Signature treatments tell the story of the place," says McCall Wilson. "At the Willow Stream Spa at Fairmont Peace Hotel, we have incorporated some of the art deco style of the place into wonderful treatments like Spiral Aura and Mystic Peace. While massage is still the number one selection, in many of our locations the signature treatments fall behind massage as number two. Guests see these as an extension of their vacation experience in this place."

One of the more successful trends, although not new, is personalisation. When you have an hour to devote to yourself you may find that the menu's suggestions don't quite hit the spot, and this is where making up your own treatment combination, or getting help from a spa concierge following a short consultation, can pay huge dividends. Mandarin Oriental spas have long offered Time Rituals. Guests book an amount of time and are free to choose what they'd most like when they arrive. When you're strapped for time and just need someone to iron out the kinks in your shoulders and neck, this is where personalisation wins over.

Talk to the spa professionals and they explain that rather than selling massages and facials, they're really trying to provide you with an experience. "Our philosophy is also about having spa experiences, not just treatments – so the menu has to reflect that too," says McCall Wilson. This could mean spending time soaking up the atmosphere in the vitality pool pre-treatment, going for the carefully choreographed multiple-treatment packages, or even choosing real experiences – in some spas, classes in yoga, meditation and Tai Chi, local martial arts or sessions with a fortune teller.

From a simple relaxing massage to an appointment with your future – whether you are aware of it or not, a well written and presented spa menu with a good balance of treatments is just as much a work of art as the rest of the facilities. 🌿

As spa guests, we are, naturally, all different, with individual likes and dislikes, priorities and varying degrees of spa experience. When settling down with a cup of ginger tea and the spa menu, we may know exactly what we're looking for, or we may end up reading the entire spa menu looking for inspiration.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Le Royal Monceau Spa Raffles Paris





## from the spa professionals

### Adria W Lake, A.W.Lake Spa Concepts

A well-developed menu is original, innovative, and honest. A shorter menu featuring extensively researched and result-oriented treatments offers more value and performs better than a big menu offering generic/standard treatments. Shorter menus also allow spas to better manage product inventory, keep overall costs down, and maintain consistently higher service quality. A well-designed menu continues to evolve to keep therapists motivated rather than frustrated by the number of treatments they have to remember, prepare and perform well. What's important is to keep your menu relevant to your target market. Have their needs or expectations changed? If yes, then your menu should reflect these changes.

### Anne McCall Wilson, Fairmont Raffles Hotels International

The treatment menu is part of the quality of the treatment experience. The menu has to reflect the philosophy of the spa and story of the brand. Our brand has some key components – energy, (sense of the energy of the place and the facilities) and authenticity. A great understanding of the location and the market is important - 40 per cent of our guests in our spas are from the local market (or more) so we have a mix of guests who live locally, and others visiting from around the world. Their expectations and needs in a spa differ. Generally leisure guests read a lot more detail on everything, while others know exactly what they want and they simply ask.

### Geraldine Howard, Aromatherapy Associates

A menu should give the correct impression of the treatment they are going to have – it's crucial to manage expectations to ensure you satisfy clients. Clarify what, exactly, a treatment consists of, alongside flexibility and the ability to treat the needs of the individual, rather than just going through the 'routine'. Men look for more data on the benefits, alongside short, sharp, explanations. If you have a busy spa, don't change the menu; if not, re-examine the treatment menu and make alterations accordingly.

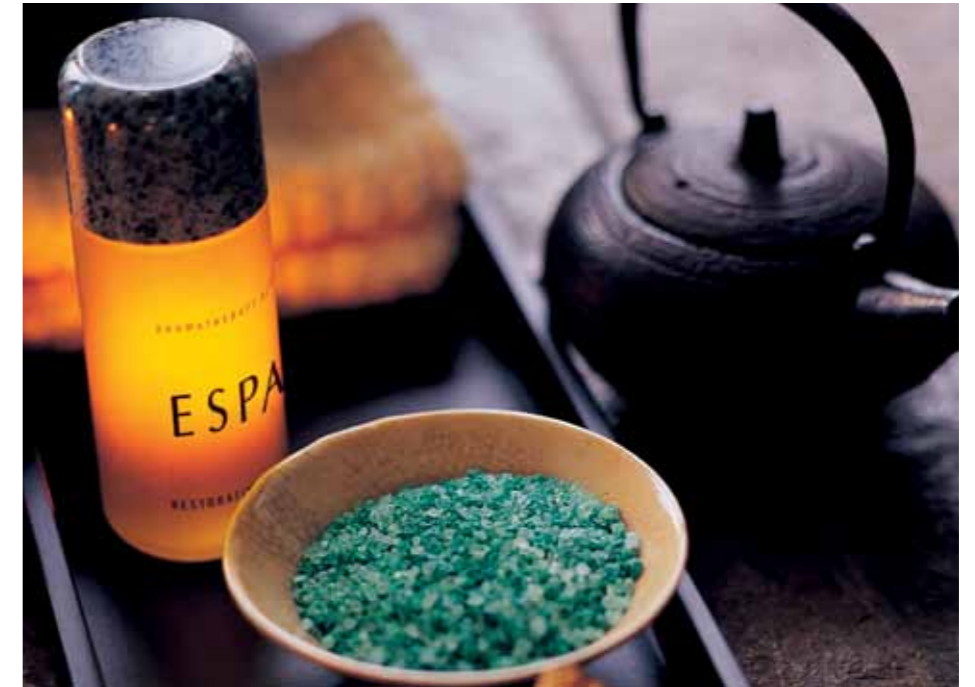


### Olivier Bonnefoy, Gentlemen's Tonic

In as far as the male market goes, menus should be simple and clear: segregate your menu and use laymen's language, avoid using flowery adjectives such as 'pampering', 'bliss' or 'oasis'. By doing this, the male consumer can more easily identify with the services and treatments on hand and it can speak volumes about one's brand identity and business. I think having dedicated men's treatments helps a male client identify that the spa has thought of treatments and services that are gender specific to him. In the last 10-15 years there have been a slew of articles and television programmes that have educated men, and coupled with dedicated marketing on the part of consumer brands that have been targeting men, they are aware that their skin, hair and body are entirely different from that of women, and therefore it's imperative that spa menus reflect this segregation clearly.

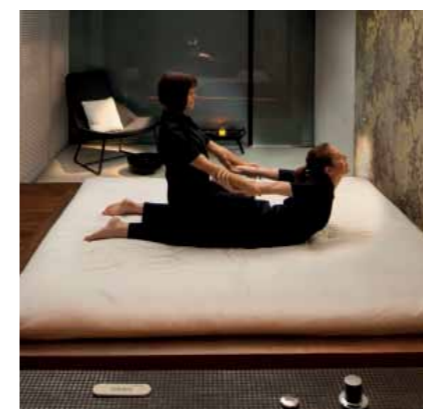
### Judy Chapman, Karma Resorts

"When creating the kids' spa menu for our Karma Spa at Waterbom Park, I went straight to the source and actually asked a lot of kids what they liked. I felt the names had to be as uplifting and joyful as the slides and rides inside the park, thus our kids' spa menu includes 'Ice-Cream Foot Massage', 'Snow White Facial', 'Gossip Girl' (sisters and friends spa), and 'Princess Manicures and Pedicures' to name a few. For [my niece, for example] whilst the colours of her nail polish need to be glittery and appealing to the youthful eye, being in the spa was also about connection time with her mum."



### Niamh O'Connell, Hyatt Hotels and Resorts

It is essential that the menu is clear and concise. I follow a simple guideline: explain what the treatment involves and how one will feel afterwards. Ultimately, a person selects a treatment because of the desired result. The style and tone of the copy should enable the reader to visualise the experience and evoke the sense of how they feel after the treatment, without over writing or complicating the copy with industry terms. Looking at the industry now, we can see a lot of the traditional methods are 'in vogue' and spa goers are realising the importance of the wellness aspect rather than simply the cosmetic.



### Chik Lai Ping, YTL Hotels

A poorly constructed spa menu will leave the guest, as well as the therapists, uninspired. For men, the menu should be quick and macho, simple and clean. Women's menus should be a bit flowery, complemented with soothing colours. For more mature women, gear your menu towards anti-ageing, more realistic and effective treatments. Gen Y, I would imagine, want a more sophisticated, new and trendy menu. The spa menu is the "business card" of the spa. It is the single most important representative piece of collateral. It helps to communicate the concept of the spa to the guests. The description creates the perceived value while pictures speak a thousand words.

### Deborah Sims, The Face Magic Haven

Writing a great menu comes with experience in terms of knowing what your client would want to know. Detailing what the treatment is about is important, as is the effectiveness and safety of the treatment, and in brief how it would be performed. If I were doing a spa I would use my words differently. I would concentrate and focus more on effectiveness, tranquility and the relaxing atmosphere. But for a medi-spa 'safe' has to be in every aspect. Before and after photos really show people the big differences that the procedures can make. Testimonials on the menu let clients know that the procedures are effective.

THIS PAGE: Salt and oil at ESPA at Peninsula; Thai Massage at Spa at Mandarin Oriental, Barcelona. OPPOSITE PAGE: Massage at The Retreat, Hong Kong; male body massage at Angsana Spa, Dubai Marina

### Trent Munday, Mandara Spa

The menu is the first impression of the quality of the spa, the professionalism of its staff and the price expectation. If people get what they assumed they were paying for when they read through the menu, the concept is aligned and the results are good. Complicated treatments

with complicated words will be perceived as more expensive. More result-oriented descriptions will also be perceived as higher value for the guests. The pricing must match what is offered and what the guest expects so that bottom line is not compromised.