

SPA SEARCH

BY MARGIT BISZTRAY

PHOTOGRAPH BY GARY JAMES



Spas were once only places for massages, manicures and pedicures, but these days, your daylong pampering includes a choice of culinary creations. Brickell Avenue's RikRak Salon, seen here, even incorporates a cafe and executive chef into its offerings.

COCKTAILS & COIFS *Spa Pampering Now Includes Food and Drink*

You wanted your salons and spas to be more like you: efficient and able to multitask. You got the simultaneous manicure and pedicure while relaxing on hot river stones, absorbing a clay facial and zoning out to chanting Tibetan monks. You wanted them to be places that transported you, even if just for an hour or two, since you can't manage a cruise or a week in Fiji at the moment. You got Turkish *hammam* baths and Balinese rituals. You wanted environments that nourished not only your hair and skin but also your soul, endowing you with a sense of well-being and inner harmony. You got aromatherapy, the sound of trickling water, and Italian linens. Now you'd like a snack, you'd like a drink, and no, you don't only mean citrus water or herbal tea. Recently, salons and spas have responded to this latest request, and the results have been mutually rewarding.

Ric and Raquel Watters have owned and operated RikRak Salon & Boutique for 21 years—including five at their present location on Brickell Avenue downtown. As business grew, the couple noticed

that the longer clients spent in the salon, the more often they were asking for delivery menus.

"It got so we had to employ someone full-time just to handle food orders—a service we nonetheless provided to customers free," Raquel recalls.

When the time came to relocate, the first priority was finding a space large enough for a café. "We

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have 70 people working here and continuous clients," Ric says. "It was a hassle to order in."

Today, RikRak employs a full-time executive chef named Massimo Esposito. Italian by birth, Esposito makes everything from scratch and to order, including smoothies, grilled *panini* sandwiches such as the Spa Tuna and Capri Paradise, and salads with names such as Sex Appeal and Beauty Ride. Fruit ripens on the countertop, while tomatoes do so

in the storage room alongside hair products. The espresso rivals Milan's, and there is a wine list.

Besides convenience, refreshments make RikRak more fun. Fridays, when women stream in to turn weekend-beautiful, RikRak gives away free Snow Queen and Roberto Cavalli vodka martinis at lunch. Packages, such as the Strawberry Champagne Pedicure or the Lemon Twist Martini manicure, invite socializing—a way to fill the precious, decompression hours at day's end with personal maintenance and time with friends.

Late one Thursday, Vanessa Fioravante, vice president of media relations for The Patton Group, sat beside owner Marysol Patton while they received blowouts and manicures. The two hashed over final details for an extravagant opening that The Patton Group was handling that evening, but as the last strands of smoothed hair fell into place, they paused for a sip of champagne. "This will be our one-and-only downtime all day," Fioravante joked.

Raquel points out that in Miami, beauty is time-

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consuming. "For smooth hair, you're fighting the humidity," she says. "Bare skin needs to be waxed. Open-toed shoes require pedicures. And in Latin cultures, beauty and fashion are high priorities. I've also noticed that with more happening with the arts scene here, women are asking for up-dos and makeup. There are so many events."

"I have clients who come here in the morning before an event and spend the entire day," she adds. "We prep them from head to toe: hair, hands, feet, skin, shoes, clothes, jewelry and makeup. Of course, while they're here, they're going to need to eat. They start with their morning coffee, have lunch and maybe ease into the evening with a glass of wine."

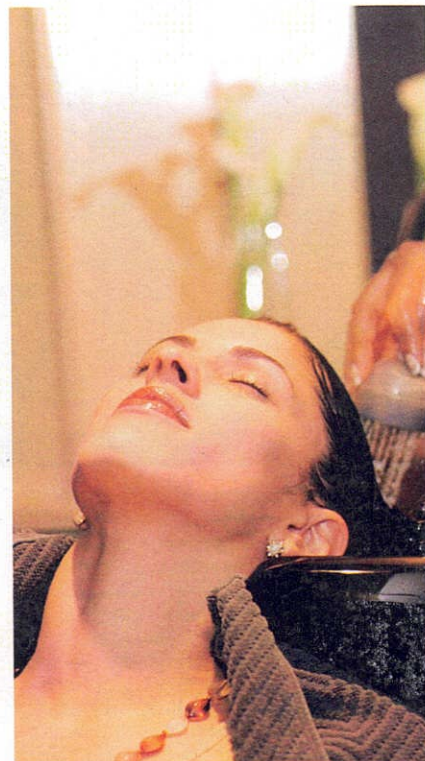
Yet another double-duty idea, called Bubbles & Blowouts, emerged from one woman's personal agenda. It happened to be that of Jennifer Greenspan, public relations manager at The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach, who invented the very service she herself sought. As a result, every Thursday between 6 and 9 p.m. a shampoo, blow-dry and styling, along with champagne, fresh fruit and imported cheeses, are offered for \$50, plus gratuity.

"Working at The Ritz-Carlton, I have to maintain a certain look while balancing a busy schedule," Greenspan says. "Bubbles & Blowouts was a way to



Here and right: The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach, indulges guests with its Bubbles & Blowouts package.

Isles Beach, opened in December 2006. At 20,000 square feet (including 11 treatment rooms and a relaxation room overlooking not only the ocean but a private heated jet pool), Espa sets an example for the future. Guests are asked to arrive for their treatments an hour early in order to begin the "journey" to the treatment itself, initiated with a cool, scented



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get my weekly blowout and relax with girlfriends. It costs the same as a blow-dry or happy hour, but you get both."

The \$50 price tag bundles in another benefit: The Ritz-Carlton cachet. Free valet parking, Ritz-Carlton service and elegance and a treatment by a Paris-trained Carita stylist (heads up: the Carita sisters were the ones behind Brigitte Bardot's ponytail and Catherine Deneuve's flip) has worth. Plus, the champagne's actually French.

Hotels today are hotbeds (heated marble, of course) of spa trends. *The New York Times* recently cited the consulting firm PricewaterhouseCoopers' finding that one fifth of top-tier, nonresort hotels already include spas, and nearly half of such hotels under construction have spas planned. Not only are spa treatments in greater demand—as more people include them as a factor in a balanced, healthy lifestyle—but analysts have also found spas are a way to keep guests, and therefore dollars, in the hotel.

The first U.S. location of the U.K.-based luxury spa Espa, at Acqualina, A Rosewood Resort, in Sunny

towel and a shot of a pure-fruit smoothie.

"We want guests to start calm and refreshed, with something light and digestible to eat," spa director Vivianne Garcia-Tuñon says. Before and after treatments, the relaxation room offers Tea Forté teas, dried-fruit and nut mixes, exotic fruits and lemon-lavender cookies. "Many guests spend the entire day, and we encourage that. We offer snacks that are harmonious and healthy."

The spa also serves a light lunch in the private pool area prepared by Acqualina executive chef Ted Peters and featuring four small "compartments" of light fare: an open tuna tea sandwich, heirloom-tomato gazpacho, sea bass or seared chicken, and *frisee* salad. For those desiring lighter fare, there is melon bisque or muesli with almond milk. The enclosed space keeps guests in the spa environment and state of mind, and the food—light, fresh and nurturing—works as a supplementary treatment, fortifying the body.

Spa V at the Hotel Victor offers Double Satisfaction couples' massage treatments, followed by a private lunch (Greek salad, fruit plate) served in a recov-

ery room with curtained beds. Menus in the guest suites, meanwhile, include cocktail-scented bath "fizzies" accompanied by the cocktail itself (apleitini, mai tai or *mojito*, for example). Happy-endings-hour, anyone?

Agua Spa at the Delano doubles up the benefits of soy for its Lavender & Vanilla Soy Immersion bath therapy. While relaxing in a deep tub of warm water, soymilk and lavender essential oil, guests sip a glass of chilled vanilla soymilk. A vegan version of the classic milk bath (a favorite of Cleopatra's), the treatment spreads soy's hydrating properties inside and out. Feel free to believe the same holds true for the Deluxe Ice Cream Pedicure: a bowl of chocolate or vanilla ice cream and a choice of either flavor for your "scoop" of bath salts in the foot soak. If not, it sure tastes good.

If all this sounds too froufrou for men, that's changing, too. The PricewaterhouseCoopers study revealed that 31 percent of spa visitors these days are men, with the most popular service being massage. SpaTerre at the Ocean Key Resort in Key West is one of the organizations pushing this cause, having offered a Tough Guys Spa Package in the past. The Volcanic Earth Clay Ritual encourages men to "play in the dirt" before a Balinese massage. And the soak in a Japanese tub comes with beer and a cigar. "The Tough Guys experience at Ocean Key Resort's SpaTerre reaches out to men who otherwise would be considered spa-phobic," general manager Matt Trahan says. "We've created a very manly experience with beer and cigars to get them in the door. However, the spa experiences win these guys over. Even tough guys like to be pampered." ■