



Ancient Customization

By J. Elaine Spear

Ayurveda, an ancient holistic healing system, was designed to help people live long, healthy, well-balanced lives.

The term “ayurveda” comes from Sanskrit and can be loosely translated as “the science of life” or “knowledge of life.” While researchers confirm that the practice of ayurveda is more than 5,000 years old, the contemporary form of ayurveda is largely based on several sacred Indian texts that were written between 1500 BC and 400 AD. While the basic intent of this science is to prevent illness by keeping the mind, body and spirit in balance, many estheticians are discovering that the holistic approach of ayurvedic esthetics speaks to today’s overstressed clients by delivering dramatic results in a short time.

“I honestly believe that the skincare industry thought that ayurveda would be the flavor of the month. ‘Oh, how cute. Got it! Good-bye,’” says Melanie Sachs, co-owner of Diamond Way Ayurveda in San Luis Obispo, California. “Now it’s apparent that more spas than ever before are offering ayurvedic services. Even so, ayurveda isn’t for everyone. We see this when we participate in trade shows. Some people walk past our booth as though it’s nothing more than a hole in the universe, while others dive in like we’re the oasis they’ve been searching for all day.”

Integrating Ayurveda

According to Carina Chatlani, president and CEO of Body Bistro in Sherman Oaks, California, “Estheticians who are attracted to ayurveda typically share a unique set of characteristics: They’re inquisitive, educated and well traveled. They’ve also been exposed to the benefits of natural health care and want to share their experiences and/or beliefs with clients. Ayurveda estheti-

rodhara treatment. Jennifer’s Spa in Portland, Oregon, now features a Shirobhyanga Scalp Treatment that combines the use of warm oils and *abyhanga* (massage), as well as *padabyanga*, a foot massage using *abyhanga*-style strokes and clarified butter infused with herbs.

“We’re featuring the new Assana Yoga Facial that works with various facial muscles, as well as *marma* points (energy points similar to chakras) on the face, neck, scalp and shoulders to release energy blockages,” says Chatlani. “Estheticians instruct their clients in special breathing techniques and ask them to do certain yoga movements with their facial muscles. We’ve just begun teaching this protocol at our training center.”

In terms of skincare clients, ayurveda piques the interest of both Generation Y and Baby Boomers, the prime demographics for most day spas. It also addresses the craze for customization that’s permeating every part of our society, ranging from how our food is served to our entire day spa experience. Feathering ayurveda neatly into this long-term trend, Universal Companies, Abingdon, Virginia, has recently made customization easier by releasing a new ayurvedic body wrap system and three ayurvedic masks especially formulated for each of the three *doshas*. (For more on *doshas*, see “Dosha-Inspired Skin Care” on page 36.)

“During your clients’ ayurvedic treatments, you’re not only helping them select products or receive services, you’re also taking them on a personal journey of self-discovery by engaging them in many things beyond a skincare regimen,” explains Sachs. “For example, if someone has very dry skin, ayurveda teaches that a key reason for dryness is stress. Rather than just talking about an



Courtesy Diamond Way Ayurveda

An ayurvedically balanced cleanser prepares the skin for further dosha-specific treatment.

cians are rarely satisfied with being in the middle of the pack. They want to stand out and be recognized as well educated in a special field and to share their expertise with clients.”

In true American style, ayurvedic esthetics continues to evolve in day spas, with new twists to ancient skincare services constantly being added to day spa menus. For instance, some medical spas have found that ayurvedic facials are an excellent adjunct to more aggressive skincare treatments like microdermabrasion because they can quickly calm the skin. Eva Mileski, industry educator and owner of the Shirodhara Day Spa in Salt Lake City, has created the Shirodhara Facial, a combination of ayurvedic techniques, including elements of the warm oil *shi-*



A key aspect of the ayurvedic philosophy is the importance of stress reduction in attaining overall health.

extra-rich moisturizer, you should also suggest things like relaxation techniques, a shirodhara treatment and perhaps foods that will help balance your client's constitution."

"Ayurvedic skin care blends in well

with today's day spa culture because the most important role of ayurveda in a spa is stress reduction," agrees Pratima Raichur, ND, president and founder of the Pratima Ayurvedic Skin Care Clinic and Bindi and PRATIMA

DOSHA-INSPIRED SKIN CARE

Just as everyone has a unique set of fingerprints and DNA, ayurveda teaches that each person has a distinct pattern of energy that's a blend of three subtle energies or *doshas*: *kapha*, *pitta* and *vata*. "Kapha gives you physical form; pitta is all of the metabolic processes that allow life to continue; and vata is your life breath," explains Melanie Sachs, co-owner of Diamond Way Ayurveda in San Luis Obispo, California. "Most people have one or two dominant doshas, but you must remember that all three are vital to life. Dosha imbalance can be brought on by stress, unhappiness or poor lifestyle choices."

Sachs explains the effect of doshas on skin this way:

"Vata is responsible for all movements in the body including blood circulation, heartbeat, breathing, the movement of thoughts in our minds. When vata is out of balance, it produces dry skin.

"Pitta governs the metabolic system including digestion, absorption and body temperature. When pitta is out of balance, it produces sensitive skin—especially to sun—oily t-zone, acne and/or rashes.

"Kapha gives our body form and is responsible for lubricating all tissues. It's responsible for healing. When kapha is out of balance, it produces thick, oily, sluggish, dull skin with large pores."

skincare lines in New York City. “The skin is a reflection of our inner being, and what’s happening inside of us is reflected on our skin. When we reduce stress and have peace of mind, the body will follow and heal itself. This can be achieved through proper exercise and nutrition, and external treatments like those done in a spa setting.”

Simple Translation

TRAINING RESOURCES

“One of the most crucial keys to successfully marketing ayurvedic skincare services is understanding the principles that define ayurveda and understanding the techniques,” says Gabrielle Perret-Johnson, vice president and director of education for Essensa in New York City. “Your estheticians must be capable of analyzing a client’s dosha, and implementing the appropriate protocol. At our Spa Academy, we offer a one-day class on the Essensa Vedic Facial that allows estheticians to analyze and understand the skin type of each dosha. If they want more in-depth education on ayurveda, though, they should take a thorough training course.” For a comprehensive list of schools listed by state, access www.ayurlight.com/pages/schools.htm. We’ve also listed a few other training tools:

Videos

The Art and Practice of Shiro Dhara and Ayurvedic Beauty Care, both by M. Sachs. Available at www.diamondwayayurveda.com.

Ayurvedic Facial & Shirodhara Treatment by Eva Mileski. Available at www.videoshelf.com.

Books

Absolute Beauty by Pratima Raichur, ND, a comprehensive ayurvedic skincare guide for American women. Available at www.bindi.com.

Ayurvedic Beauty Care by Melanie Sachs, a guide to ayurvedic lifestyle and beauty methods for the spa and home. Available at www.diamondwayayurveda.com.

When you picture ayurveda, you might envision a New Age disciple on the fringe of Western beliefs. In truth, there are many spas that are extremely successful with ayurveda and doing business smack-dab in Middle America. “If you don’t embroider your ayurvedic services with too much foreign language and avoid the temptation to sell the mys-

tique, you can encourage a large segment of your clientele to reap the benefits of ayurvedic esthetics,” advises Sachs.

A case in point is Valley Paramedical Skin and Health Care in Modesto, California, a farming community associated more closely with 4H Clubs and the local *Modesto Bee* newspaper than Eastern mysticism. This holistic spa partners with a successful yoga center (Yoga Health Institute, owned by Richard L. Parenti) and offers ayurvedic skin care and body treatments in addition to Western modalities.

“I present ayurveda principles to our clients in ways that are both understandable and familiar,” explains owner and medical esthetician Lucy Parker. “I refer to ayurveda, for instance, with the trademarked phrase Whole Body Health, and doshas as body constitutions. I also emphasize bringing the mind/body/emotion back into balance, rather than just addressing specific complaints. For instance, at our spa, we base our skincare services on a person’s body constitution and use guided imagery and yoga breathing techniques during their services to help them get the most out of their treatments. Equally important, every single thing we incorporate into our center, we practice ourselves. We firmly embrace the wise adage, ‘You cannot lead where you do not go.’ It’s the secret of our success, both personally and professionally.”

“We’ve offered ayurvedic services since 2000,” says Rosemary Weiner, owner of the Brass Rose Spa in Blairstown, New Jersey. “Because it was still a new concept in our area, we did a lot of pre-publicity before officially adding these services to our menu. We started our campaign in June and began offering services in November. While our skincare staff was away being trained in ayurvedic esthetics, for



Courtesy Diamond Way Ayurveda

Estheticians learning ayurvedic technique must become familiar with the location of the marma points.

“Ayurveda is all about discovering the unique needs of the individual.”

instance, we included tidbits in our newsletter about so-and-so receiving training in ayurvedic skin and body care, telling clients to look for new and exciting offerings on our menu in the months to come. We also provided snippets of information about ayurveda in subsequent newsletters and in key areas of our spa. Once we established our protocols, we created a special display for our Body Bistro products with more information about the philosophy and benefits of this ancient science, as well as the services that would soon be on our menu. From the very beginning, we presented the relaxation/spiritual/renewal aspects of all of our ayurvedic treatments as antidotes to our clients' busy lifestyles.”

Weiner reports that just prior to officially launching her spa's ayurvedic mind/body services, she hosted an invitation-only Shangri-La Sunday event. “We sent invitations to clients via e-mail and celebrated the launch of our ayurvedic services by serving food and wine, watching Indian dancers perform, and doing only ayurvedic services on that special day,” she relates. “It was a sellout! Initially, our

ayurvedic menu included only Ayurveda Face Rejuvenation, Face/Body Rejuvenation, Shirodhara, Purva Karma, Mind/Body Experience and Tibetan Eye Treatment. The entire program proved to be so successful, though, that we added our Ayurvedic Dosha Energizing Facial and two new body treatments in 2003. To date, our most requested ayurvedic skincare service is our Dosha Facial. We position this treatment as a baseline skincare service that's appropriate for all skin/dosha types because it's completely customized to each client's needs.”

Individualized Treatments

“Ayurveda really is all about discovering the unique needs of the individual,” comments Alison Howland, manager of Spa Development for Aveda, based in Minneapolis, Minnesota. “It's also a perfect match for creating ‘Brand Me,’ a strong trend among today's consumers who want things to be tailored to their individual needs. Each wants to be valued as an important, one-of-a-kind client at your spa. Aveda does this in many ways, including inviting all clients to take a sensory journey to choose their own essential oil blend for their treatments.”

“When anything is custom-made for you, you automatically see that product or service as being more attractive and valuable,” says Dawn Tardif, D.Ay., owner of BodiScience in Peabody, Massachusetts. “Knowing how powerful this can be, once we determine the client's dosha we strive to customize everything he or she experiences from that point on, right down to the type of bedding we use for the treatment table.”

Tardif has found that catering to a client's dosha is key to a successful service, both in terms of results and retail sales. In addition to using dosha-specific treatment products, here's how

“Kaphas typically want to know the heritage behind any retail product.”



Courtesy Body Bistro

Natural herbs play a prominent part in ayurvedic products like Body Bistro.

she tailors her clients' ayurvedic skin-care experiences:

- **Vata.** “Clients with a *vata* constitution love to be kept warm and definitely need calming. We give them a warm belly pillow, use soft jersey-like sheets in soothing colors, play music with a single instrument like a harp or flute, and serve dosha-specific tea. Clients with a *vata* constitution usually prefer moderate pressure during the facial massage. They're also most receptive to purchasing retail if they're able to browse through all your product offerings—no matter how many you may carry—and smell and touch every product that piques their interest.”
- **Pitta.** “We serve clients with a *pitta* constitution cooling drinks and drape the facial table with cotton sheets. We play music that's both precise and a little fast-paced, and set the thermostat at a slightly cooler temperature. During the facial, our therapists are trained to touch a *pitta* client with intention. If you don't do this, your service will fall short of their expectations. Unlike *vata* types, who like to experience products, *pittas* prefer discussing your retail offerings, and want to learn all the 'whats and whys' of any recommended product.”
- **Kapha.** “Clients with a *kapha* constitution want the luxurious 300-thread silky sheets, and usually comment on them the moment they lie down on the table. *Kapha* types need to experience a more vigorous touch to promote better circulation and elimination of metabolic waste, and prefer a moderate room temperature. We serve our *kapha* clients a little heavier tea like licorice, or something more stimulating like peppermint. *Kaphas* typically want to know the heritage behind any retail product. It's impor-

tant to tell them why the product is wrapped in a beautiful silk cloth, for instance, and how the women in Tibet blessed the earth before the herbs were harvested. When you do these things, they'll see logic behind buying your products.”

“The more popular ayurveda becomes, the more people are trying to do this or that ayurvedic service without seeking the knowledge that's needed to deliver an authentic treatment,” says Raichur. “This is truly setting up your spa for failure. It takes real intention to connect with your clients. You have to put your full mind to what you're doing, and know why you're performing every movement and step. Likewise, being focused on doing ayurvedic services just for the money can also make you fail. It takes time, dedication and love to deliver an authentic ayurvedic experience.” ♦

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