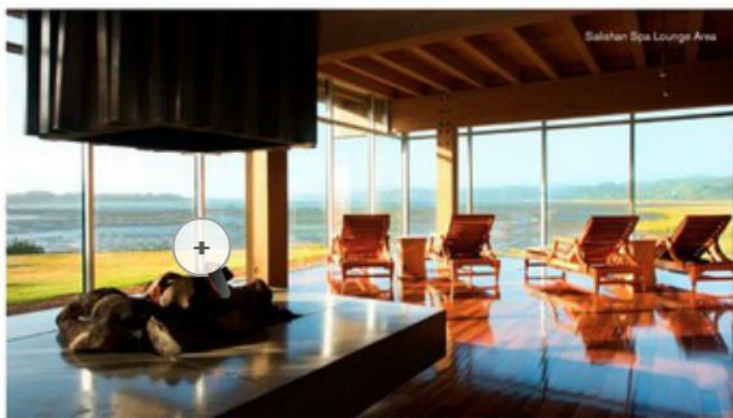


organic spa

MAGAZINE

health



Salehan Spa Lounge Area



Four Seasons Lushan, Hubei, China Spa Pool



Four Seasons Hong Kong

In the woman-dominated world of spa, Cary Collier, a laconic Texan, and Doug Chambers, a California lawyer, stand out. But not just for the obvious reason.

The dynamic duo are cofounders of Blu Spas, Inc., one of the top spa consultancies in the world. They have worked on over 400 projects in 38 countries, with a focus on wellness, spa, hospitality and fitness, and have pioneered a series of “firsts” in the industry. At the heart of their work lies a strong commitment to authenticity, sustainability, innovation and mind/body synergy. “One of our mantras has been to create a sensory sanctuary,” says Collier, “which means giving thoughtful consideration to each nuance impacting the guests’ experience, including the visuals and texture from design, water, landscape, aromas and sound.”

That may sound serious, but these guys are really fun, and their work—from Four Seasons Jimbaran Bay in Bali to Loma de Vida at La Cantera Hill Country Resort, San Antonio to Cliff House Resort & Spa, Cape Neddick, ME—reflects an elegant wit and playfulness that is part

of their secret sauce. “We feel that spas today should be more accessible, fun and social; they should deliver memorable moments,” explains Chambers, “with a good balance between communal and private experiences.” We sat down with the Blu Spa guys to gain some insight.

OSM: Where did you meet?

DC: We met October 1997 at the International Spa Association (ISPA) convention in Banff, Canada.

CC: I made a last-minute trip to Banff from Bali. Bali clothes were all I had. I wore a sarong to help meet people and to spread the word that on the other side of planet, spas in Asia were amazingly awesome.

Why did you decide to join forces?

DC: Cary was the consultant on a spa project in San Francisco and contacted me to discuss integrating the Yamaguchi Salon concept into this spa. From our first meeting with the developer, we recognized that there was a good balance of complementary skills between us. Recognizing the blossoming opportunity for spas, particularly in the hospitality

industry, we thought there would be an advantage to joining our skills to deliver a “left brain/right brain” approach to spa consultancy.

What does a spa consultant do?

DC: Great question, because it calls into focus the diverse tasks sometimes considered to be a part of spa consultancy and specialization that often happens organically. Some spa consultants have unique niches leveraging their strengths, such as operational expertise or extraordinary product knowledge or crafting signature service protocols.

Cary and I sometimes describe our role as being air traffic control for all the various disciplines involved in creating a spa. Our role is to be nimble enough to anticipate the needs of the various project team members and respond by delivering the information and details they need to advance their tasks. We draw upon our experience from other projects around the world for inspiration to originate or adapt ideas to create a concept or innovations that will give each project a unique identity.



Loma de Vida at La Cantera Women & Solarium



Four Seasons Resort and Spa, The Ritz-Carlton, New York



Loma de Vida at La Cantera Spa, Cantera

CC: If you can't write, lack confidence in envisioning spaces and thinking geometrically, then spa consulting may not be your thing. Having a knack for creating collaboration and orchestrating details is certainly helpful. If you screw up, then own it and get solutions out there to fix it—and, no whining. Be cheerful, decent and kind.

What were you doing before this?

DC: I was practicing law in Southern California, specializing in business and real estate law and was involved in the planning and expansion of the Yamaguchi Salon & Spa concept there.

CC: I was a gym owner and personal trainer at the spa at the Hotel Crescent Court, in Dallas, TX. I met my wife, Kim (Kim Collier, founder of Jamu Spa Rituals), who was on the massage staff there and gave me my first massage ever.

What is involved in making a spa sustainable?

BOTH: Determination, persistence and stamina. All of the resources are out there to meet whatever level of sustainability is contemplated. The numbers are out there to back up the

"why" and "benefits" of sustainability planning. Clear commitment from the beginning is paramount.

What makes you guys so good at it?

CC: I (along with my wife, Kim) have been fortunate to live and work in Hong Kong, Java, Bali, Carmel and now Whitefish, MT, plus lots of travel to wondrous places. These adventures have been and remain a part of my ongoing karmic punch bowl to collaborate on the creation of memorable spaces.

How do you bring wellness into it?

DC: Wellness can be introduced in the design and construction through the systems and materials. It can be integrated through the products used in treatments and retail offerings. Service programming is ripe for a wide range of wellness directions. How we bring wellness into a project is largely defined by the specific concept direction for the project, the targeted market and the owner/developer's commitment to full integration.

Most exciting recent developments in the spa industry?

DC: Technologies that have the

potential to dramatically impact nearly every phase of the industry, including refining the ways in which services can be personalized, harvesting a broad range of data to dial-in specific wellness goal strategies and improving operational efficiencies.

It's also exciting to see the surge of interest in thermal and water therapies; although there's a very long tradition for these, in the past several months there's been a flood of research validating the benefits of these heat and water circuits.

CC: Panelized construction methods such as cross-laminated timber (CLT) are the next evolution for the design and construction of sustainable spaces.

What are your most recent favorite spa projects?

BOTH: Loma de Vida at la Cantera Hill Country Resort, San Antonio; Four Seasons Kyoto; Cliff House Resort & Spa, Cape Neddick, MN.