

PALATIAL PAMPERING

Texas' dreamiest destination spa unwraps exclusive \$1,000 Swiss facial for 25th anniversary

By Stephanie Allmon Merry

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A red light mask is part of the \$1,050 Regal by Valmont facial. Photo courtesy of Lake Austin Spa Resort



When the **Lake Austin Spa Resort** went shopping for a 25th-anniversary gift for guests, it aimed higher than traditional silver and picked treatments that incorporated gold, diamonds, and caviar. As a result, the dreamy destination spa now offers some of the most opulent, exclusive, and — at upwards of \$1,000 — most expensive facials in the world.

In anticipation of its milestone anniversary in 2022, the [Lake Austin Spa Resort's LakeHouse Spa](#) partnered with Swiss luxury skincare brand [Valmont](#) to introduce the new facials, which are as cutting-edge as they are indulgent.

Creme de la creme among them is [The Regal by Valmont](#), which costs a jaw-dropping \$1,050. The Regal was designed in Switzerland exclusively for LakeHouse Spa, and Austin is the only place in the world to get it.

“It’s definitely a once-in-a-lifetime experience for a lot of people,” says Becky Bence, Lake Austin Spa Resort lead esthetician. “And it’s definitely worth it.”

The 135-minute facial begins with the high-tech deep cleanse of the HydroFacial and proceeds with seven masks, including four collagen masks, a papaya enzyme, and a medical-grade LED light mask. Every single product from Valmont’s ultra luxe “masterpiece collection” called [l’Elixir des Glaciers](#) is used; some products are made with an uber anti-aging essence of gold sturgeon fish. All are applied using a Valmont signature “butterfly” motion that helps to lift and sculpt the face.

What puts the Regal over the top, though, are 35 minutes of choreographed massage, including a 500-year-old technique called [“kobido,”](#) developed for the empress of Japan. Touted as a “surgical facelift as a massage,” Bence says, kobido was once reserved only for nobility and the empress, then later handed down from masters to disciples.

So rarified is the Regal facial, that just six of the 21 LakeHouse Spa estheticians are trained to perform it. They learned at a weeklong “bootcamp” conducted by two Valmont experts who flew in to Austin from Switzerland.

“It was kind of like the Navy Seal program of facials,” Bence says. “It was kind of like being handed down something from a true master.”

The \$1K price tag hasn’t kept people away. Since the Regal was introduced several months ago, guests have come from all over the world — and from all corners of Texas — to experience what the spa calls “the ultimate in anti-aging perfection and cellular renewal.” (After all \$1,000 is still far less than an actual facelift or even regular nick-tuck-plump-ups by a cosmetic surgeon.)

Why reach all the way to Switzerland for the palatial new treatments? After emerging from COVID shutdowns, Bence says, LakeHouse Spa personnel “auditioned” just about every single skincare line out there. The estheticians voted, and Valmont won.

“We wanted to add something really special, something luxurious but yet something out-of-this-world amazing that truly benefited the skin,” Bence says. “Something almost to replace Botox and fillers ...that gave you basically a natural face-lift without being invasive but still being relaxing.”

In addition to the Regal, other new Valmont facials introduced in this 25th anniversary year include:

- The 150-minute **Gold & Diamond Trifecta Facial** that involves three massages, four masks, infra-red LED, and a hydrogel mask with micronized gold and diamonds, which costs \$990.
- The **Golden Aura Rose & Caviar Facial**, a 100-minute treatment that incorporates marine products containing caviar extract and Diamond Collagen, costing \$790.
- **Energy of the Glaciers**, a 90-minute facial that features rare ingredients from Switzerland and deep, structural massage of the face, stimulating muscles to tone and lift; \$750.
- **Luminosity of Ice Facial**, a 90-minute treatment described as a “toxin-flushing, facial reflexology-inspired facial” that uses a cocktail of seven plants organically cultivated at high altitudes; \$650.

The spa also has a complete menu of non-Valmont [facials](#) and dozens of other signature treatments.

Luxe but laid back

Lake Austin Spa Resort’s Dallas-based co-owner, Mike McAdams, says the new facials are indicative of how high the spa wanted to aim for its 25th anniversary.

“Our guest demands a luxurious, more refined experience, and Valmont helps us deliver on that objective,” he says.

And yet, Lake Austin Spa Resort remains a place where robed guests can emerge from a \$1,000 facial and step over geckos skittering along the sidewalk while a speedboat whizzes by pumping Beyonce through the speakers. It's upscale but unpretentious, luxurious but laid-back — almost like “spa camp.”

“We never wanted to create the ‘zen’ spa with stark lines and absence of color – we aimed to create just the opposite,” McAdams says. “Your surroundings absolutely have an impact on how your wellness journey can unfold and influence your daily life. The colors and textures that surround you mimic the vibe of the Texas Hill Country and pay homage to nature.”

The top-rated spa and resort is a far cry now from the place McAdams purchased on January 1, 1997. Located along the shores of scenic Lake Austin in the Texas Hill Country, the property had lived previous lives as a fishing camp, nudist enclave, rodeo ranch, and diet camp.

McAdams — at the time a commercial real estate developer for Dallas-based Trammell Crow — experienced a personal work-life-balance crisis that's wholly relatable in today's post-pandemic, "great-resignation" world two-and-a-half decades later.

“I was living on a plane, traveling a lot. It was high stress, and high energy and I loved it,” he says. “In 1984, I found a place that changed my life — the Ashram in Calabasas, California. It was a true bootcamp, with physical activities and dietary restrictions that were very intense... This experience forced me to come down from my hectic lifestyle of traveling, eating, drinking, and not exercising.”

After adopting healthier habits in his own life, he and an LSU fraternity brother, Billy Rucks, seized an opportunity to buy and transform the Lake Austin Spa Resort; they still co-own it today. “It was a diamond in the rough,” McAdams says.

More 25th anniversary offerings

One of the biggest challenges running the spa the last 25 years (besides navigating a global pandemic), McAdams says, has been continually evolving in an industry dominated by fleeting fads and headline-grabbing gimmicks.

“The changes in the last 25 years in the spa industry have been monumental,” McAdams says. “The global wellness industry is now a [\\$4.5 trillion economy](#), with ‘spa’ being one small part of the bubble. We are all seekers looking for ways to look and feel our best, and I think the growth is due to a demand in wanting to take our health into our own hands.”

One of the resort’s newest touts (proudly stated on their [home page](#)) is that they’re Texas’ only destination spa on a lake. Recently they’ve introduced a full range of water activities, including a water taxi that transports guests to the spa and back.

“When we bought Lake Austin Spa Resort in 1997, our guests would put a toe in the water — but we’ve also evolved and now understand the power of being near a moving body of water and how it affects your health, happiness, and even alleviates depression,” McAdams says.

Along with the new fancy facials and lake programming, the resort has also added new classes and activities and upgraded amenities for its 25th anniversary. Befitting its location in the “live music capital of the world,” Austin-area musicians now entertain guests nightly around s’mores pits. There’s new artwork around the campus, too.

“My favorite part of celebrating our 25th anniversary this year has been to watch a very special piece of commissioned art be installed in the first few months of the year,” McAdams says. “A local Austin artist created a 64-foot long, 400-square foot abstract mural of stone, glass, and tile designed to honor our magnificent natural location on Lake Austin.

“Within the creation, I wanted to honor all of the amazing past and present people who helped get to where we are today. Their names are included in this mural, discreetly placed within this homage to nature. Because of these special people, Lake Austin Spa Resort has enjoyed many wonderful accolades through the years.”

To mark its 25th anniversary, Lake Austin Spa Resort is offering 25 percent off stays of at least two nights or more, through January 31, 2023. Reservations must be booked by October 31. Some packages include generous spa credits, but sadly, the \$1,050 Regal facial is not 25 percent off. Find more information at www.lakeaustin.com.