

Body of Work

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MY, HOW TIMES HAVE CHANGED.

The last time I waited in line to pay for a haircut, I was behind a young dancer in warm-ups scheduling his next underarm wax. A lawyer determined to look her best at her wedding didn't want to drop 10 pounds, she wanted to SmartPeel off her acne scars. Over dinner with an old friend, I envied his Botox-smooth forehead.

'Spasitively a revolution.

Sure, you can still get a manicure at a day spa. You can get a facial, a massage, a shampoo, a salt scrub, a seaweed wrap, a sports pedicure. But while you're there, why not eliminate those annoying bodily toxins and bloating, fade the sun spots, ease that migraine-inducing neck pain, lose some hair or even gain some hair?

Modern day spas are to beauty salons as Dean & DeLuca stores are to convenience marts. Part medical center, part mental health clinic and part makeover course, they offer head-to-toe services that range from the simplest pedicure to postoperative therapy, chronic pain management, even cosmetic surgery lite—Botox injections, micro-dermabrasion (like SmartPeel), post-liposuction body firming, laser hair removal and collagen enhancements. In the past 15 years, the number of day spas in the United States has gone from a couple of dozen to what various industry associations estimate at between 4,000 and 4,500, with nearly as many more salons offering substantial spa services. In the Washington area alone, what was a mere handful of spas even in the mid-'90s has grown to perhaps 100, with new locations opening all the time.

But this seeming boomer boom in spas is no mere vanity press. It's part of a much broader cultural shift in this country, and it can be summed up in what might be called the new spa mantra: Beauty is not only skin deep. In fact, it's not even shallow. It is a lifestyle choice—an assertive attitude toward physical and emotional health—and more and more doctors and psychologists and management gurus are jumping on the bandwagon.

Welcome to the Age of Wellness.

"Wellness" is the 21st century spin on health. It's a proactive attitude toward living well, as well as living long. Cutting-edge day spas aren't just about feeling better, they're about being better: stronger, more balanced, more relaxed, more prepared, more powerful. They are spiritual fitness centers, the 'yin' to the workout "yang." Wellness is the 21st-century

Getting Under Your Skin

By Eve Zibart

PHOTOS BY MARK FINKENSAEDT



Tracy Grant gives Katie McClure a back treatment at Aveda Spa & Salon in Bethesda.

recasting of holistic medicine treating the mind and body simultaneously.

Thanks to this much broader definition of wellness, day spas increasingly attract younger customers of all racial and ethnic backgrounds and of both sexes. Skin treatments are marketed not just as damage control but as prevention. The word "cellulite," which once drove thousands of frantic housewives to jiggle belts and mail-order creams, is now so unPC it's almost verboten. Now spas promise toxin balancing, "lymphatic drainage" or the even more impressive "lymphobiology," "lower body firming masks" (well, maybe cellulite isn't completely forgotten) and artificial tanners to imitate the effects of that alluring but dangerous sun. Back facials, full-body exfoliation, paraffin treatments, hot oil, herbal wraps and mud masques are old hat; these days you can get a sun spot lasered off during your lunch hour.

And waxing, of course. Thanks to the edgy gossip of "Sex and the City" and Cosmopolitan, the hottest spa service by far is the Brazilian bikini wax, a depilation of the sort once required only of swimsuit models and professional dancers—the stripper's strip, so to speak. (And we're not just talking women here, either.) With its pick-your-pleasure blend of healthfulness and hedonism, beauty and tranquility, prevention and restoration, the modern day spa is a uniquely American creation.

FACE TIME

One of the spa delights men are discovering is the facial: Though famously reluctant to have the first one, they are just as famously fast to schedule follow-ups.

Men's and women's facial treatments are basically the same, despite the different causes of skin irritation—"extreme" razor-shaving, for instance. A few spas define the gentleman's facial differently, such as Andre Chreky downtown, which mentions a "full-lather power wash" that sounds more like it belongs on a car. (The Tysons Corner Ritz Carlton day spa also has a "gentleman's bath," which is mint-infused and comes with Cognac and a cigar, while the lady's version is scented with tea roses and includes a split of Champagne. Close, but no cigar.) Some spas offer facials designed to deal with teenagers' typical blemishes, though, again, the procedure is similar.

But popular as it is, the simple cleansing facial where the aesthetician uses warm towels to open the pores, brushes a little dry skin off the top and massages fragrant moisturizers (or oil neutralizers) into the skin is beginning to sound passe. "Women are more impatient," says Judith Kolitsas, co-owner of the

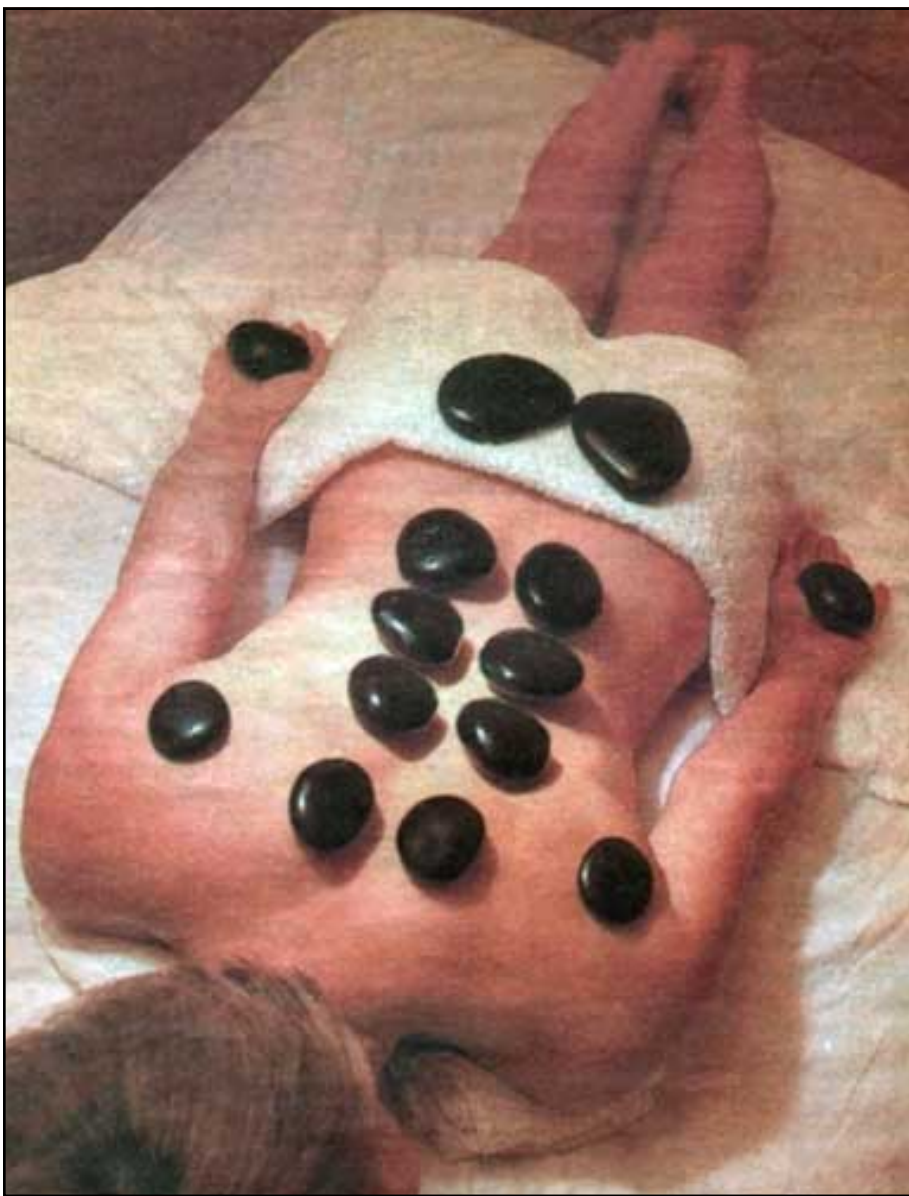
Celadon salon and spa downtown. "They want anti-aging treatments in their facials and soothing fragrances at the same time. Men just want to chill out."

At Blue Mercury in Georgetown, the most straightforward facial on the menu is the "modern facial," which is described as "basic cleansing, manual exfoliation, extractions, treatment mask and oxygen therapy." The "fusion facial," described as the spa's most popular, combines the modern facial plus a glycolic peel and a vitamin oxygen blast; and the "power facial"—what mover and shaker could resist?—combines the modern facial with a micro-dermabrasion treatment and a vitamin oxygen blast "for total refinement and a total glow." Time, 50 minutes; price tag, \$220.

According to the Watergate Salon, the oxygen mist there is infused with vitamins A, C and E, plus other minerals (90 minutes, \$90). The Hair Port in Sterling has a "microcurrent face-lift facial" that uses "pulsating microcurrents to stimulate and lift selected areas of the face and breast," along with a "product penetration" that is presumably more benign than it sounds.

Until recently, men who wanted facials just headed for the coed spas or the more elaborate health clubs; but on Feb. 25, Washingtonians Michael Gilman and Pirooz Sarshar will open the Grooming Lounge, a newfangled take on the old-fashioned barbershop that also offers select shaving, skin and body preparations, massages, business manicures, "quick-fix facial cleansing" ("hot towels and cleansers leave you and your mug refreshed and revitalized"), waxing and discreet temple touch-ups, plus shoe shines, GQ, Details and three TV screens. The Web site is a great resource in itself, offering advice to the razor-burned, the nasally hirsute and the "hair-impaired."

One of the techniques that spas have taken out of the hands of dermatologists is micro-dermabrasion, which is, as its sounds, a method of removing the damaged surface of the skin to encourage the growth of new, healthier and younger looking tissue. Various materials, including aluminum oxide and herbal grains, are used by different manufacturers, but basically the machine emits a focused stream of tiny crystals that scours the top layer of skin. As older tissue is removed, new skin growth speeds up, and after a series of six to 10 treatments, a new surface has emerged



Stacy Kuhnby tries the hot-stone treatment at Shapes Salon & Day Spa in Fairfax Station.

that, in theory at least, displays fewer acne scars, fine lines, sun or hormonal discoloration, acne or even chicken pox scars. Then, three or four months later, you start over (or have a monthly touch-up).

Micro-dermabrasion is not only for the face, incidentally: Blue Mercury's menu offers treatments to the neck, chest, shoulders, back, hands, feet, even the bikini area, for from \$50 to \$145 a session. However, micro-dermabrasion is not a permanent fix, and like most high-tech spa treatments, not inexpensive: Celadon, for example, charges \$150 per treatment or \$750 for a series of six.

FULL-BODIED TREATMENTS

Many "body treatments" are essentially full-body facials: pore-opening heat, cleansing, exfoliation, moisturizing, massage. Even the masques are similar—seaweeds and algae, enzyme and vitamin creams, mud, etc.

A "back facial" isn't the contortionist's special it sounds like; it's a frontal facial in reverse, including the squeezing of pimples

or blocked pores. This may be one of the spa offerings that is mostly comforting, as opposed to cosmetic or therapeutic, but it does leave the skin on your back, in that famous phrase, smooth as a baby's behind; so if you spend a lot of time in cutaway exercise togs or have a strapless-gown event or peeling-tan itch in your future, you might consider it.

One of the most decadent developments in spa techniques is the edible body treatment. Though they haven't hit Washington yet, caviar facials are egging women on in Palm Beach, Las Vegas, Hollywood, New York, Chicago, Memphis, Honolulu, San Francisco and even Houston. The Lansdowne Resort in Leesburg has a champagne and roses facial. (It's Champagne yeast, but you also get a glass of bubbly.) At the Hotel Hershey in Hershey, Pa., the treatments, not surprisingly, include a cocoa butter scrub, a "Chocolate Fondue" body wrap and, going Cleopatra one better, a foaming chocolate milk bath.

Green tea, suddenly super-hot for its

antioxidant properties, is showing up in scrubs, wraps, lotions and even fragrances. Eminence, a Hungarian manufacturer of organic skin care products, has designed what the Celadon menu refers to as "mouth-watering" treatments including an apple and paprika exfoliation, one with parsley and cucumber, and one full-body banquet called "Nirvana" that involves two hours of pumpkin-orange, carrot, honey, sour cherry and honeydew potions (\$180).

Body scrubs used to be primarily salts, usually "Dead Sea salts" (of which there have been so many marketed that the sea must now look like the Grand Canyon) or Moor mud. Nowadays the mud may be "volcanic," also presumably high in minerals; the body masque concocted from camomile, peppermint, rose, aloe or hay flower. The newest scrub ingredient is sugar, an increasingly popular exfoliant that eliminates the small-scratch stinging and irritation salts can cause. (The Sugar House in Alexandria predates the trend, but it is available there.) A liquid with some grains still in it, like undercooked fudge, it is applied over a slick moisturizer, brushed or rubbed over the body and then hosed off. (This is not the same "sugar" used in some spas to remove hair; that is a mixture of sugar, lemon juice and water.)

At the Four Seasons Hotel in Georgetown, one of the newest body treatments—and one of the most transporting in town—is the Balinese Rice and Spice Scrub, which was made famous at the Four Seasons' resort spa in Sayan, Bali, and was taught to Rebecca Hierholzer by employees from the resort. The spices, which include cloves, ginger, turmeric, rice powder and temu lewak, a naturally astringent plant from Indonesia, are blended into a body masque that is traditionally applied in the cooler rainy season to pump up the circulation. It's followed by a yogurt massage, leaving the skin smelling like fine Asian food.

The Four Seasons spa also offers a Balinese Coconilla treatment that makes you remember how it smelled to loll about the pool slathered in tropical tanning oils: It's a scrub of shredded coconut and vanilla beans in coconut milk, followed by a coconut milk massage.

HERE'S THE RUB

America's first spa, as promoters point out, was Berkeley Springs, W. Va., site of a warm (74 degrees) mineral spring that was, even more patriotically, the First Father's

spa. George Washington's own hot springs pool, in the heart of what was then straightforwardly called the Town of Bath, is still visible in Berkeley Springs State Park. Taking the waters, both internally and externally, is still the town's major attraction; and the park, which actually houses two sets of baths, is one of four spas within sight of one another with a fifth, Coolfont Resort, on the hilltop above.

The state-run Roman Bath House, which dates to 1815, is fun in a nostalgic sort of way; its nine restored "tubs"—really 750-gallon walk-in wading pools—are more than large enough for couples to share. But Frankie Tan's Atasia Spa is first among equals: Long before the phrase "Thai massage" hit the fashion magazines, Tan, who worked for several years at the Country Inn's Renaissance Spa before opening Atasia, was a cult figure among area spagoers. By his estimate, he's performed close to 14,000 massages since coming to Berkeley Springs in 1988.

Tan, a Malaysian-born ethnic Chinese trained in Thailand, mixes traditional methods with such modern pleasures as whirlpool baths (filled with the mineral-spring water) and hot stones, those extra-smooth egg-sized pieces of basalt that began migrating from indoor fountains to massage rooms a couple of years ago. As he presses into the small of the back, stroking with the heels of his hands up the spine, he breathes in a deep, yogic rhythm that focuses his energies. Gradually you begin to breathe with him, visualizing your muscles from his hands, not from your weight; feeling out resistance and actual soreness and the sort of habitual tension that most of us carry constantly.

Self-awareness is essential to a really successful massage experience, so that you can tune into that tension, to isolate it in your imagination, and begin to "unknot" and unlearn the habit. It is also, paradoxically, the best way to learn to forget yourself: The one sure way to make massage ineffectual is to try to assist the therapist by lifting your head or holding limbs up instead of relaxing your weight into his hands—a hard habit to unlearn. (It should probably be the uniform T-shirt of massage professionals: "Don't help.")

I may still be a skeptic about some spa services—I have absolutely no interest in ear candling—but when it comes to massage, I am a true believer. I have been known to drive to Berkeley Springs for an



Celadon owner Judith Kolitsas gives customer Louis Jones a chest wax.

appointment with Frankie Tan and turn around and drive back; and I have a 90-minute deep-tissue appointment with Aveda's Vanessa Gilbertson every month. For me it's both physical and mental therapy: I suffered a neck injury some years ago and spent quite a lot of time trying out therapists and massage styles to find the most effective version.

The range of massage techniques takes some time to explore, but the primary distinction is pressure. The lightest touch on the massage-o-meter is what in this country is generally called Swedish massage, which is designed to be primarily relaxing and provide moderate relief for tired muscles. Sometimes called "therapeutic massage," it is also the sort most often recommended for those suffering from arthritis or inflammatory discomforts. Most aromatherapy massage is Swedish with aromatic oils, as at Aveda; you can select different scents each time to suit your mood. Shiatsu, on the other hand, is the sadomasochist, the Scorpio, of the massage family. You either love it or you hate it. Or both at once, actually.

Shiatsu is a Japanese technique that involves putting pressure—intense

pressure—on particular points in order to open up "meridians" of energy in the body and/or to eliminate unhealthy blockages. At the Sports Club/L.A. Splash spa in the Ritz Carlton Hotel on 22nd Street, the receptionist recommends loosening you up in advance with a 20-minute soak in the Soft Pack, which feels a little like a personal Michelin Man suit. In fact it's a water-filled blanket, not firm (or chilly) like a water bed but warm and clearly fluid. You're gradually lowered into it so that it comes up around you—it's like being immersed in Jell-O. It's also a great relief for people with hip pain, as it's as nearly weightless as it's possible to be outside a NASA training facility.

You don't have to mix this with the shiatsu, of course, but if you do, understand that the point is to beat knotted-up muscles at their own game—to force them to subside—so that the "chi" or life energy can return. In other words, the bath is softening you up for the kill. It is uncomfortable—well, painful, at least in part—but it can be extremely effective and oddly addictive. Shiatsu, and most fairly deep massage, is most effective when you employ deep breathing at the climax of each particular pressure—like giving birth,

only you're pushing out tension. You will find that a deep inhalation does ease the strain; the oxygen strengthens the muscles in the right way and probably speeds up those essential endorphins into your brain, too.

Traditional Thai massage often involves more bending or kneading; for instance, the practitioner may bend your knee, fold it toward your abdomen and lean against it or apply weight to your foot or use his own arm or knee in order to stretch the lower back. (It's been referred to as "the lazy guy's yoga," because the pro does the stretching for you—and because it's sometimes performed on a floor mat rather than a table.) Craniosacral massage is a concentration more than a technique; it targets the upper spine, neck and base of the skull, and uses light to moderate pressure and some rocking and gentle stretching. It does ease chronic neck pain, and anecdotal evidence claims it also helps migraines and even insomnia.

"Deep tissue" work is not as intense as shiatsu, but far more than Swedish. "Amma" massage, which is less common, is a Korean technique that is a little like shiatsu lite, a mix of acupressure and deep tissue work. Sports massage is also a deep-tissue technique, but one that focuses on longer muscle fibers, such as those in the arms and legs, and on the areas such as shoulders and lower back that may be particularly stressed by strenuous exercise. Sports massage has been shown to be particularly effective in alleviating the lactic acid buildup that causes severe muscle cramping and pain (which is why many Washington area massage therapists volunteer to provide "first aid" treatments at the finish line of the Marine Corps Marathon).

Incidentally, Washingtonians are quite lucky: Massage therapists in this area tend to be very good, partly because there are highly regarded massage schools in the District and Baltimore; and because all three jurisdictions, and West Virginia as well, are among those requiring therapists to be licensed.

When I mentioned the most effective type of massage, I meant for myself. All spa treatments—and oxygen facials, too—are strictly a matter of personal preference. Just ask spa staffers what's involved before trying out any new therapy, and then go for it. Wellness is what you make it.

A Stone's Throw from Nirvana

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On the Move

A Stone's Throw From Nirvana

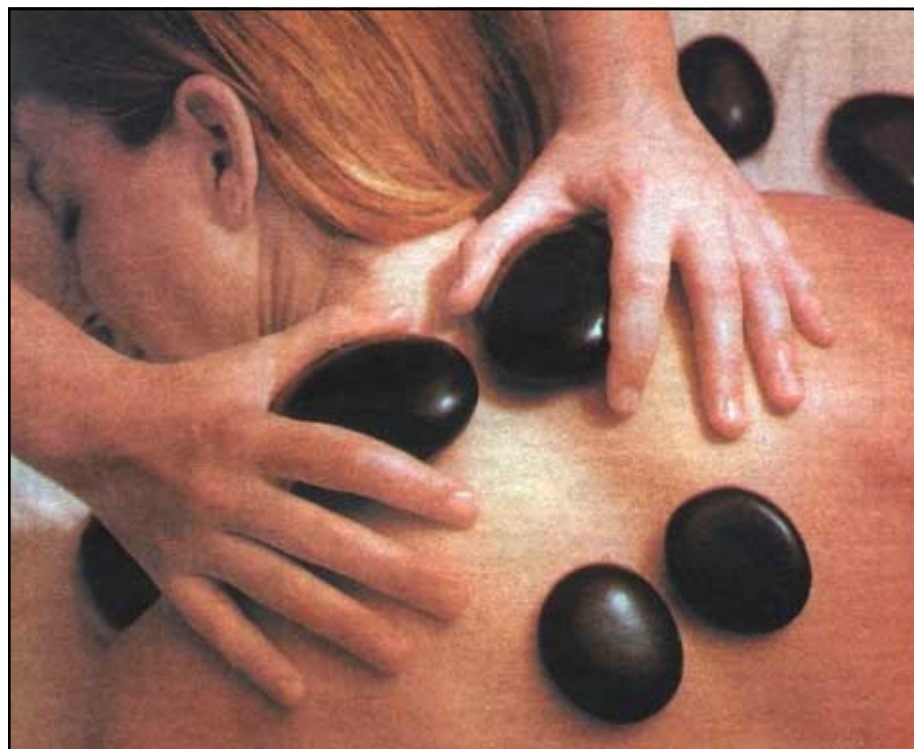
By KAREN-LEE RYAN
Special to the Washington Post

WHO SAYS being caught between a rock and a hard place is a bad thing? Getting a rubdown with heated stones may not sound relaxing, but “hot rock” massage is the hottest trend in massage—and at local day spas. The original heated stone massage, called La Stone Therapy, was pioneered by massage therapist Mary Hannigan of Tucson, Ariz., in 1993. The technique combines hot black basalt (lava) stones and cold marble stones with traditional massage techniques to create deep relaxation and rejuvenation. The warm stones penetrate and relax the muscles while the cool stones detoxify.

The treatment took off in the Southwest and California before migrating East. Now it seems every area day spa is offering a massage on the rocks: hot stones at Aveda, desert stones at Elizabeth Arden, sacred stones at Serenity, the list goes on. I decide to try Shapes Salon & Day Spa in Fairfax Station. It's one of a handful of nearby spas offering the original LaStone Therapy, which requires special certification of its practitioners and is the primary treatment touting both hot and cold stones.

After answering a brief health questionnaire and surrendering my clothes for a robe, I meet my licensed massage therapist and aesthetician, Melissa Sparta. She leads me to a treatment room, where she directs me to remove the robe, lie facedown on a heated massage table and cover up with a warm electric blanket. Next to the table, an interesting mix of rounded black stones stew in an 18-quart steamer.

She reviews the questionnaire, asks about my massage history and reports that she'll likely use a combination of hot



BY MARK FINKENSTAEDET FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

A client receives a hot rock treatment at Shapes Salon & Day Spa in Fairfax Station.

and cold stones. “Everybody loves the hot stones,” she says. “Some people like the cold stones and others don't. They're therapeutic because they help detoxify the muscles.”

Given that I'm sandwiched by heated blankets, hot rocks hold the most appeal, but I figure my tight muscles are in professional hands, and she'll figure out the best way to unknot them. She places a warm, saucer-size stone on the small of my back (atop the blanket) and a smaller one in each of my palms. I feel more relaxed already.

She makes her first strokes with the hot stones on my back. It feels like warm liquid flowing down either side of my spine, back up and across my shoulder blades. The lightly oiled stones glide across my skin, muscles easing with every stroke. After a few more motions, she seamlessly swaps the cooling stones in my palms with the ones she has just used to release my back muscles. Soon, a new pair of hot stones sail down my spine, and the process begins anew.

My upper body has melted into the massage table by the time she shifts to my legs. As she works my hamstrings, she

subtly tucks warm stones along the outer edge of my thighs, while keeping ever-warm stones in my palms.

I feel only semiconscious when she removes the rock from my back and guides me to turn face-up. I manage to flop over, and she places a trio of hot stones on my blanketed stomach—below, on and above my navel. A fourth one goes on my sternum, and a fifth stone, on the center of my forehead, makes my ankles tingle. I may be a melted mass, I think, but I haven't lost all of my senses, yet. A final rock is tucked under the nape of my neck, and I snuggle over it.

The second half of the massage begins with rocks rolling along my shoulders and neck, knots dissolving with the stones' pressure. I think my LaStone treatment can't get any better—until I feel a hot stone rolling on the arch of my foot. The sensation is somewhat, er, stimulating, and then comes the topper: A stone slides between each of my toes. While it doesn't tickle, a chuckle involuntarily escapes from my mouth. Despite limp muscles, my body feels energized.

After the lava stones take their final turns along my thighs, Melissa removes

the rocks stowed around me and retrieves the final pair from my palms. When she lifts the stones (I had long since forgotten) from my belly, I sense my body lifting off the table with them. I'm sure I could fly if only I could move my arms. She plucks the final stone from my forehead and asks howl feel at the conclusion of my LaStone Therapy. “Awesome,” is all I can mutter.

Feeling less stable than Jell-O, I jiggle back to the changing room. I notice my face is flushed, overwhelmed by heat and oxygen. My whole body feels warm from the inside out. Then I realize Melissa never used the cold stones.

“Your muscles responded well to the heat, so I decided to stick with the hot stones,” she explains, adding that the treatment varies from client to client. To get certified in LaStone, she spent three months training with hot rocks and cold marbles after attending a week-long LaStone class.

Walking to the car, I feel two inches taller than when I arrived. I'm awash in an overall sense of calm, coupled with rejuvenation. Those feelings last well into the next day, making me curious about the other “hot rock” treatments.

Several weeks later, I head to Serenity Day Spa for a Sacred Stone massage. The bodywork is much the same as LaStone, but a few of my favorite touches are missing—the ever-changing warm rocks in my palms, the laying of stones along the edge of my body, the ankle-tingling rock on my forehead.

And while my muscles are mush by the time it ends, I don't have that Frosty-in-the-greenhouse feeling I got from LaStone. On the flip side, the Sacred Stone treatment included an outstanding scalp massage and a soothing bed of heated stones that revitalized my back muscles.

The bottom line? For my pampering dollars—the average price is \$90 for about an hour—I'll take hot rocks over a traditional massage any day. So if you're looking for something new in massage, don't leave any stone unturned.