



International Institute of *Modern Butlers*

THE NEW RENAISSANCE SPA – OF SPA BUTLERS AND BUTLER SPAS

Nearly two-thirds of affluent travelers surveyed in a Pepperdine study last summer stated they set their sites primarily on being pampered-luxury and premium service being key elements-when deciding where to stay while away from home.

This is good news for those hotels and resorts with spas that have invested in the latest industry concept of spa butlers, introduced a few months ago to the spa and hospitality industries in HotelExec.com and the latest issues of Spa Business and Spa Management magazines). For spa guests, the total immersion experience made possible by the fusion of these two service pinnacles creates a lasting impression. Why? Because the model handles the key drawback with every spa experience, which invariably ends abruptly as a guest leaves the spa to return to his or her suite. For hotel/resort/spa management, the Renaissance Spa model represents the next generation of hospitality experience and somewhere to go when you have already traveled as far as the road leads in pampering guests.

This symbiotic liaison between spa and butler programs makes the butler service an extension of the spa experience, wherein butlers providing their usual high-end service on the hotel side are then trained further in the methodologies in play at their spa, with the goal of continuing the spa environment in the guest's own suite.

From the guest's perspective, she (or he) occupies a serene/mellow/invigorated world after being pampered, prodded, plucked, sweated and doused in the spa. It's a destination and transformation she seeks when she thinks about and ultimately walks into a spa-and more often than not reaches. Yet the world that greets her as the spa doors swing shut behind her runs on different agreements: people rush around, lost in thought, stressed. When she reaches her suite, it seems lifeless, out of synch and unsympathetic to her new state. If she is experiencing a catharsis, detoxification, or crisis, or if she just wants to have a sounding board or a ready ear, she is on her own.

Now imagine a butler who knows how guests can react to their spa experience and how to assist them with understanding and empathy. Knowing a guest's spa program, he can converse about the guest's experiences with good reality, should the guest so desire, and can also take actions to enhance that program, be they therapeutic baths, showers, or simply a much needed glass of pure water to preempt dehydration.

The spa butler acts as the main point of contact before, during and after the guest's stay. Translated into the real world, this program means the butler asks and cares about the guest's goal in coming to the spa, giving accurate and convincing explanations of treatments to the guest (and for that important bottom line, upselling). He ensures the guest's room reflects the guest's needs and wants, such as providing Pilates mats, preempting allergic responses, and smudging or applying aroma mists (Smudging is the Native American practice of burning sage and/or cedar to eliminate odors and so purify a space. In this case, the idea is not just to eliminate



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unpleasant smells, but also synthetically derived fragrances that are sometimes employed inside guest suites).

The spa butler supports the guest by being a sounding board and conversing with understanding and empathy. He introduces the guest to the people, places and services she will be experiencing at the spa. He smoothes the preparations for each spa experience and helps her through the ramifications of each spa treatment with follow-on services that help her land gracefully from her spa experience.

This means, for instance, the spa butler being on the lookout for indicators of physiological shifts occurring in the guest that may require action by the butler to help settle the guest where he or she is experiencing discomfort. Some key indicators are:

- Emotional tone changing
- Rapid eyelid fluttering
- A shift from shallow to deep breaths
- Being spaced-out as opposed to being aware of the environment
- Twitching
- A shift in energy flow, such as from much motion to lethargy
- Change in skin temperature or color.

Generally, the body is a self-regulating mechanism that will bring about optimal functioning when provided an environment of support to do so-which defines what is required basically of the spa butler.

Often, the butler can act without seeking permission or agreement, because he can see what is happening to the guest and knows what to do. An offer of a drink of refreshing water, for instance, to a guest who is obviously somewhat dehydrated, doesn't require words or permission.

More than a Number

On the spa side, a recurring complaint is addressed in this butler/spa collaboration by cross training spa personnel on the butler mindset: the complaint being the tendency for therapists to treat guest, especially irregulars, as a commodity. The main focus of the training being giving the spa personnel the ability to be in the moment, able to be there fully for the guest, communicating when the guest desires it (how many therapists chatter endlessly when the guest would rather savor the moment?) in a way that enhances the guest experience, rather than principally entertaining the practitioner.

The subsidiary focus is on achieving the same level of grace as, and service mindset of, the butler. In dealing with guests, the butler maintains an attitude of respectful curiosity, conducting himself (or herself) professionally in a way that never compromises a guest's dignity or privacy. The spa guest may well be impressionable to



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the suggestions of the spa butler. He, therefore, has an ethical obligation to maintain integrity, tell the truth, and create and uphold an environment of trust and confidentiality so as bring about a safe space for a guest that allows him or her to focus on fixing his or her world. This is not new news to the spa industry and the many therapists who adhere to these principles, but staying in the moment and following through with every guest can be a challenge. This spa-side element is by far the shortest to bring about, taking a few days, rather than the weeks it takes to train butlers first as butlers and then as spa butlers.

The Physical Component

The ultimate spa experience will be blemished, despite the best efforts of spa butlers and “butler spas,” where consumables and suite design are out of kilter with the goals of the spa and its guests. Chloramines and fluorides in the water, mite and insect excreta, dust and allergens in the air are counterproductive. So are the use of MSG in the kitchen, neurotoxic sweeteners such as aspartame, and other chemical food additives, such as preservatives, coloring, pesticides, fertilizers, and irradiated and genetically modified foods. As for PCPs (personal care products), the contents of the most expensive and exclusive, which generally tend to be provided in high-end settings, read like a chemical laboratory experiment, with spa guests among the guinea pigs.

A mere handful of the 60,000 chemicals in our air, water and food supply have been tested for their impact on the human body. It is impossible to test the effect of the almost infinite combinations of these chemicals. This makes the exponential growth of chemicals in our lives a giant experiment over the last half-century that may be behind the alarming increases in diseases, obesity, etc. Whether or not they are, an increasing number of individuals are not willing to take the risk and are looking for and even insisting upon pure spaces and ingredients.

Not all spa guests will be concerned about these points, but as spa guests are concerned about their health and long-term physique, the likelihood is that many are aware of the chemical onslaught in the environment and would prefer to find in their spa and its hotel/resort, a sanctuary. For those who may not be concerned currently, a leadership position adopted by the spa hotel/resort may well stand them in good stead with their guests in later years. But in any case, having the option available for organic food, stevia for non-sugar sweeteners and the likes of a rich cup of Teechino as a coffee substitute, for instance, for those who are concerned, can only win friends. Cleansing the air with ozonators and ionizers, and the water with top-of-the-line filtration systems, will not find any complainers among the skeptical, and plenty of support from believers. High-quality PCPs that contain natural ingredients do exist and likewise could be offered those who care.

Lastly, the guest suite needs to be made spa friendly, whether by Feng Shui methodology or other design, so as to move it beyond the prosaic and into the realm of the ethereal, the calming, the nurturing.

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The second presidential suite in Miami's Mandarin Oriental takes just such an approach, creating a "luxury spa haven for total pampering pleasure. It's most unique and outstanding feature is a spa 'serenity room,' a one-of-a-kind sanctuary offering the ultimate in-suite spa experience. A tranquil Zen-like environment with warm color tones, bamboo accents and Mexican river stones accented by Spanish marble tile and a breathtaking view of Biscayne Bay. The spa serenity room features Japanese-style Tatami mats, an infinity-edge soaking bath with color therapy lighting and tear drop ceiling fountain and relaxation area ... and ESPA spa amenities, salts, body and bath oils."

Although this room was created for in-suite spa services, maybe it would be a good idea for all rooms catering to spa guests to be designed with the same thoughtfulness in mind?

Pampering is the name of the game and the Renaissance Spa concept is the new way to attract these travelers (and locals) to your hotel or resort.

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