

## SPA TRENDS



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*Forming the links to positive change.*

# Couples Escape to the Spa

BY ROBERT C. CASS

**C**ouples services at the spa are fast becoming the retreat of choice for the frantic partners who can only escape for a short window of time.

In the past few years one of the hottest trends in the spa market has been the creation of rooms and spaces where together partners can feel free to enjoy a few moments of solitude to relax and unwind from the pressures of life.

## THEY COME FROM EVERYWHERE

Is the spirit of political correctness the term "Couples room or service" needs to be stretched a little and it may be bigger than you are thinking of. It starts as a couple in the traditional sense of the word, two people in a relationship. The most common market asking for treatments is man-woman. At Novo/Sanctuary Day Spa ([www.novospa.ca](http://www.novospa.ca)) in Toronto's trendy Yorkville district this is their primary market. This alluring room is designed with a relaxing seating area and a couples steam and colour light therapy shower. "Since we opened our doors the couples rooms has been our number one seller," says Novo creator Nora Londono. "The vast majority are men and women."

The market of couple's services has naturally expanded to same sex couples. Outside the city at the quaint and classy Millcroft Inn ([www.millcroft.com](http://www.millcroft.com)) the couple's room gets a workout on weekends. "It is a great problem to have but we are constantly having to tell our weekends guests we cannot accommodate them because the room is full," smiles Spa Director Jennifer

Stemmler. "We have a terrific demand from our overnight guests whether they are man/woman or same sex couples. They love the privacy and sanctity of our couple's room. In the summer they can even go directly outside and sit on their private deck and enjoy the fresh country air." So popular in fact, that the Millcroft Inn is looking at expanding and adding another couple's room to their inventory to satisfy the demand.

"Couples" also refers to a "couple of sisters", and a "couple of friends". Another group who frequents the couple's rooms and makes going to the spa together a bonding experience is mothers and daughters. All of these markets are migrating to capture the spirit of togetherness couples treatments can create.

## GROWING BIGGER

Traditionally couples were only able to get "couples massages" as spas only built a room big enough to hold two massage tables. Well this concept has long passed. Spas are now competing to build them bigger and better. In Barrie, Ontario, Spyce Spa & Salon ([www.spycespa.com](http://www.spycespa.com)) owner Debi Board wanted to make her "Couples Suite" as one of her signature spaces. "I wanted to create a space where two people could flee everyday life and enjoy peace and serenity together". To do this Board had a couples hot tub, oversize glass shower, fireplace, and sitting area all built into the space. When asked if it has been as success Board replied, "Since day one it has been the busiest part of the spa. Our guests love it."

These bigger rooms allow couples to experience a variety of spa services such as facials, scrubs, wraps and massages. Some spas are even developing signature spa treatments designed just for couples. At Spyce Board commissioned custom products to be developed to capture the couples experience. Her signature "Boreh Spice Journey" was designed for her couples room to include a scrub, wrap, colour therapy steam shower, yogurt bath and massage all in one treatment without ever having to leave the room.

Even the treatments themselves can involve the couple. In Costa Rica at the Tabacon Grand Spa & Thermal Resort ([www.tabacon.com](http://www.tabacon.com)) you can enjoy a couple's wrap in a private hut in the jungle. When it is time for the mud to come off you are discreetly escorted to a secluded two person hot springs tub, also in the jungle, where the couple is left for a few moments to help each other off with the mud.

A few select retailers are now offering "couples products". It is a lovely way for the couples to take home a part of the experience as well for the spa operator to expand their retail offering.

Overall these treatments allow spas to become very creative when designing their menu and often it is the couples treatments that can become the spas most sought after service. ■



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### EFFICIENCIES OF SPACE

From an efficiency point of view a couple's room seems a no-brainer. A modest spa room will by 10 ft. X 10 ft. space and is able to generate one service at a time. In contrast a couple's room can fit into a space only 50% larger i.e. 15 ft. X 10 ft. and generate double the revenue. Combine that with that fact it will only cost an additional 10-15% more to build it makes the argument a strong one.

However, when the desire to expand from a "room" to a "suite" the no-brainer may require some more thought. The necessity of space required for fireplaces, hot tubs, seating areas, couple's showers, multiple bathrooms, steam rooms, saunas etc. lounges, patios, and the like can become a drain on money and when unused a very expensive empty space.

### WHY ISN'T EVERYONE SCRAMBLING TO DO THEM?

*The couple's movement is not sweeping across all the spa doorsteps.*

A couple of years ago the calls seemed to be coming in to take up the charge and add a couple's room at the five star Langdon Hall Country House Hotel & Spa ([www.langdonhall.ca](http://www.langdonhall.ca)). "We converted an available space close to the spa to a couple's room because we thought there was a demand," explained Alison White Spa Director, "but it just really never took off". A short time later the space was renovated to take on other uses. It is worthy to note that Langdon Hall has just announced plans to create a grand Spa & Wellness centre in the next 18 months and a new and improved couple's suite will be part of it. "We are really excited about it", added White.

At the much heralded Ste. Anne's Country Inn & Spa ([www.steannes.com](http://www.steannes.com)) in Coburg, Ontario, long time spa owner and operator Jim Corcoran has a luke warm view on the couple's scene. "We have a room dedicated to couples massage that is moderately popular" states Corcoran, "In our experience the extra people in the room (the extra therapist and client) can interrupt the smooth flow of energy between therapist and the client".

Corcoran adds that, "I do not see it being asked for all that much by seasoned spa goers, it is more for newcomers."

### PLAN TO MEET THE CHALLENGES

For the most part the couples are bringing in positive cash flow and positive experiences but that does not mean it is not without its challenges.

With this expanded space comes greater need to insure it is booked. Most operators focus on trying to fill the room with two clients and will only accept single service treatments as a last resort. This also means having two service providers available all the time to perform the service. Since spas work to be efficient and not have too many staff "waiting" for walk-ins" this can render the room unusable due to lack of staff availability.

Care needs to be taken when designing the space as managing the North American based cross-gender issues between therapist and client is delicate. Soakers or hot tubs can be a wonderful experience but the process of the client entering and exiting the tub outside the view of the therapist needs to be contemplated. As well as consideration for privacy for the "couple" that is not romantically involved.

Décor can play a key role in providing a warm and inviting experience for the couples. Soft and comfortable furniture, flexible lighting and nurturing colors can help. They are looking for a special experience and want to be captivated.



Creating an experience around the room and the services will enhance the appeal. Offering champagne and chocolates, mood music and rose petals floating in the water, can make put your suite over the top.

Charging for couples has a wide range of options. Some locations charge a premium for services provided in the suite. Others charge a rental rate for the room over and above the cost of the service.

Therapists also need to be keenly aware of different dynamics that enter the room when there are two therapists and two clients together. The relationship between the therapist and their client, between the clients, and then between the therapists. In order to provide a quality treatment the service providers will need to manage these dynamics in a skilled and professional manner. As noted by Ste. Anne's Corcoran, "There are often insecurities that people have about their partner getting a massage so they come together to alleviate that tension. But it still comes into the room."

The simple fact of how two therapists move around the room needs to be coordinated so they do not get in each others way and distract the clients in the process.

At the end of the day the couple's services is an opportunity for spa goers to experience the spa in a different way. Not only a good revenue generator for the spa operator but a terrific way for couples to relax, reconnect and escape the burdens of every day life.

Need helping starting or expanding your spa? Contact Spaformation at [help@spaformation.com](mailto:help@spaformation.com) ■