

# VOGUE

FEB

**SPRING**  
**WHAT'S**  
**MODERN**  
**NOW?**

**THE**  
**LOOK**  
**FOR**  
**LESS**

**HOW**  
**RUNWAY**  
**BECOMES**  
**REALITY**

**PRINCE OF**  
**COOL**  
Marc Jacobs

**SHE'S BACK!**  
Bridget Jones,  
Part II

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**ROCKS**  
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# a spa is boorn



#### THE STAR TREATMENT

South-of-Fourteenth Street girls Lucie de la Falaise and her daughter, Ella, discuss which services they'll be taking today. No wish is too capricious at Bliss 57. (Exception: Puppy and tot, regrettably, cannot be indulged.) OPPOSITE: Marcia Kilgore (CENTER) and her staff set to work. Details, stores, see In This Issue.

Sittings Editor:  
Phyllis Posnick



Bliss used to be just the hippest, most exclusive spa in downtown New York. But following a multimillion-dollar deal, reports Rebecca Johnson, it's going uptown (and cross-country). Photographed by Joseph Cultice.

**I** sometimes think there are no new ideas in the world, only new ways of packaging old ones. The Gap didn't revolutionize khakis; it revolutionized the selling of khakis. The Internet hasn't created new products; it has created new ways of delivering old products. But while the world has been busy conglomeratizing, globalizing, and supersizing, the spa industry has steadfastly resisted the trend. Until Marcia. Faithful readers of these pages will recognize the ubiquitous Marcia Kilgore, founder of the impossible-to-get-into, whimsically designed, and totally charming downtown New York City spa Bliss.

Last year, Bliss, which has been slowly, silently expanding, like a patch of kudzu on a Mississippi road, had its biggest growth spurt yet. Luxury-goods-maker LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) is reportedly spending \$30 million to buy 70 percent of the company; what LVMH—which owns Celine, Christian Dior, and Givenchy—saw in Bliss was not one spa on lower Broadway but hundreds of Blisses. The juggernaut began in December with the opening of Bliss on Fifty-seventh Street between Madison and Fifth avenues, a corner of the world where ladies without lipstick are as rare as wild turkeys in Central Park. Next stop? London. Then the West Coast or Chicago. After that . . . the world.

Why spas? Why now? And why Bliss? Kilgore has her theories: "No one at any point in history has had to put up with as much stress as we do. I mean, just look at all the information coming at us at all times. It's not normal. It's hard to adjust. People need somewhere to *stop*." Preferably in a Bliss chair. It was while spending time uptown, negotiating her deal with LVMH, that Kilgore began to look around at all the East Side women. She noticed two things: These women were *dressed*, and they were *busy*. Kilgore was familiar with the type partly because she had in fact become one. "It's hard to find the hour and a half it takes to get a pedicure," the 31-year-old multimillionaire laments.

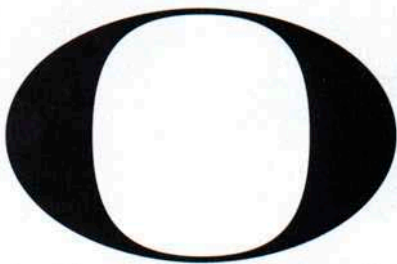
What if, she mused, you could give these women one-stop pampering without skimping on the luxuries? (It would be like taking your car in to change the oil and deciding to get your brakes done at the same time, thereby cutting the total errand time in half.) And while you're at it, why not line the walls of the waiting room in Ultrasuede, throw in a few Mongolian lamb's-wool ottomans, keep the trademark Bliss "featherwall," a visually ingenious Lucite slab dotted with suspended white feathers (Damien Hirst Lite)? The result is uptown Bliss, a chic haven of over-the-top pampering where you can get a simultaneous facial, manicure, and pedicure. Of course, at Bliss the old standbys aren't named nearly so prosaically—witness "Rosy Toes," the "Herbie," et cetera. In Kilgore's trademark "Ginger Rub" the body is sprinkled with fresh grated ginger and essential oils, wrapped in Mylar and a warm blanket, and cooked for 20 minutes, all as prelude to a plain old vanilla massage (they call it "Blissage" here, of course). Like I said, there are no new ideas in this world, only new ways of packaging old ones.

The next question is: Why Marcia? That one is easy. Born to a middle-class family in Canada, where her biggest initial ambition was "not to have to worry about my electric bill," Kilgore was a competition bodybuilder in high school who began working three part-time jobs at the tender age of twelve.

Beauty runs in the family—her sister, Jodi, is a onetime fashion model who was briefly the "Princess" in the Princess Marcia Borghese advertising campaign. Jodi was, however, lonely in New York and sent for her sister, saying she would pay her tuition at Columbia if Marcia would come to Manhattan.

No sooner had Marcia arrived than her sister discovered that unfortunate American tradition of taxes, and the dream of Columbia disappeared. If Marcia's life were a movie, this would be the scene where she was alone, penniless, on a dark, rainy street, wondering, What is to become of me? But if she ever experienced such a moment, it didn't last. If there is one thing Kilgore knows how to do, it's work. And if there's one personality trait she's got going for her, it's optimism.

"She is the hardest worker I've ever seen and the most unflaggingly cheerful," says photographer's agent Leslie Simitch, a longtime Kilgore client and one of the many behind-the-scenes fashion-industry people who helped Bliss's rise by recommending it to people in the glamour world. Kilgore became a personal trainer, worked as her sister's maid by day, and took classes at NYU business school by night. One summer, when many of her patrons were in the Hamptons, she decided to take a skin-care course at Christine Valmy, mostly so she could treat her own acne. Thus were the seeds of Bliss planted.



ne reason nobody has successfully franchised a groovy line of national spas before now is that spas need a spokeswoman, somebody like Estée Lauder or Helena Rubinstein,

the old grandes dames of the beauty industry who could make you *believe*. With her china doll-white skin, bobbed hair, pencil-thin eyebrows, and voluptuous red lips, Kilgore looks like a latter-day version of those women, but the minute she opens her mouth, the impression flies out the window. Kilgore's favorite words are all synonyms for good: *awesome*, *amazing*, and *out of control*. She may look like one of the beautiful people in her Azzedine Alaïa shirt and Helmut Lang pants, but she's more cheerleader than chilly, and it is the interplay between cool and cornball, goof and aloof, that makes Bliss, a spa that does big volume in Crème de la Mer (\$1,000 for a 16.5-ounce tub), so delightful. "We try not to take everything so seriously," she explains.

As I was receiving a famous Kilgore facial (I know—I have a hard job, but somebody's got to do it), I thought of another reason people love Kilgore. She was examining my skin under a bright light and asked what I use for moisturizer. I explained I use a topical drug prescribed by a dermatologist to diminish rosacea, a reddish flush that many Northern European types get as they age. "You don't have rosacea," she said. "You have sensitive skin—just be happy it's not yellow. Red makes you look healthy." No fewer than three medical doctors have told me I have rosacea, so I don't believe her for a second, but for just a few minutes Kilgore made me happy. I don't have rosacea, I thought to myself, I'm just sensitive. In this day and age, when most aestheticians simply tell you what's wrong with you and then sell you a product to fix it, Kilgore goes out of her way to compliment her clients, to make them feel good about themselves, and *that* (along with the fact that she doesn't force patrons to listen to Enya) is the real key to her success. □

A woman is shown from the chest up, standing in a shower. She has her eyes closed and her hands raised towards a large, circular rainfall showerhead. Water is cascading down from the showerhead. The shower walls are covered in small, square mosaic tiles. The lighting is dramatic, with a strong light source from above creating a bright glow on the woman's face and the showerhead, while the rest of the scene is in deep shadow.

**REACH FOR THE LIGHT**

Bliss 57, designed by architectural firm UT, has nine treatment rooms, including a wet room, where the new hot salt rub will be offered. The spa also has a concierge on staff, who will run emergency errands for guests. In this story: hair, Nicolas Jurnjack for Garren New York; makeup, Fulvia Farolfi.

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