

Time Out

New York

The obsessive guide to
impulsive entertainment
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Ahhh, spas!

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THE SPA AROUND THE CORNER You're sure to be the center of attention in Prema Nolita's single treatment room.



SPA CHECK: THE NEXT GENERATION

AN OLD FAVE AND A NOLITA "INDIE" HEAD THE BEST NEW SPAS

BY MILENA DAMJANOV PHOTOGRAPH BY PATRIK RYTIKANGAS

The competition to humor the vanity of New Yorkers is fiercer than ever. (Who's ever seriously suggested that this generation doesn't have it good?) Of the five that we've chosen this year as the best new spas on the block, one woos clients with time-saving simultaneous treatments, a second offers the convenience of an adjacent dermatologist's office, and a third has fully stocked shelves of the most sought-after Australian skin-care line. What's a guy or gal in need of the latest in facials or backrubs to do? Read on: Each of these spanking-new spas is as different as you and me.

BLISS 57

This two-month-old uptown sister of Soho's hippest spa is the ultimate in tony retreats. It's housed inside the sparkling new LVMH

building (last year, the luxury conglomerate Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton bought Bliss), where the tenant list includes the Christian Dior boutique and the offices of glamorpuss label Celine. Tucked away on the third floor, the sleekly designed Bliss 57 takes indulgence to a new level, offering multiple services at once—to cut down on the time that your necessary coddling requires. Want a manicure in tandem with your facial? Done. How about an underarm wax as well? No problem. Just prepare to plop down—and max out—the plastic.

TREATMENTS After checking in, I changed into a robe and slippers in a narrow dressing room equipped with woodsy-smelling cedar closets and luxe showers (sorry guys, there aren't any men's locker rooms at the uptown spa). In the small but chic 'n' groovy robe zone, customers relax and wait for their appointments to begin—a pleasure, since this

room is more brightly lit than the one at the older branch—and it's supplied with better reading material (I want to flip through *Vogue*, not an art book, while I wait for my facial). On the other hand, just like the downtown spa, Bliss 57 has a fab snack bar stocked with cold lemonade, blondies, cheese, bagels—you name it. After stuffing my face, I was walked to a tranquil treatment room where two women went to work: one on my face, another on my hands and feet. While the facialist administered Bliss's popular triple-oxygen facial treatment (\$140, and yes, it left my skin clear and glowing), a manicurist pampered my hands and feet with a warm-wax wrap manicure and pedicure (\$100). The facialist even waxed my eyebrows (\$15-\$30 extra), giving me a "rich girl" arch that I've never been able to master on my own. The uptown Bliss is definitely an improvement on the downtown mecca. If only I could learn to disregard the swarm of the spa's adoring fans in the reception area.

BEST FOR Women who get as high from the scent of a Decleor deep-cleansing mask as they do from smelling Louis Vuitton leather.

ELLA BACHÉ

You've maybe never heard of Ella Baché, but this small, four-month-old Garment District spa has already made a name overseas. Not only is the Ella Baché skin-care line huge in Australia (where's it's compared to Estée Lauder) but the company also owns a posh spa on Paris's Rue de la Paix, right next door to Cartier. Who knew?

TREATMENTS Most facialists believe that "extraction"—spa code for blackhead-picking—is an essential part of the process. But that's not the case at Ella Baché. "We don't do extractions—unless the face is screaming for it," explains a spokesperson. After undressing in one of the three small treatment rooms here and switching into a humongous robe, I lay back on a clean bed and let the facialist do her work. She gently cleansed my face and slathered on a pungent, thyme-infused scrub that, once dry, rubbed off like dried glue. All in all, the entire treatment did a fine job of refreshing my face. Next, the facialist ushered me into a neighboring room for my massage. A gentle giant named George expressed concern over a creak in the wooden massage table as he administered a soothing acupressure massage (\$75, one hour): Back, legs, feet, arms, hands—all of mine were rubbed and pressed until I nearly fell asleep.

BEST FOR Garment District divas drained from pushing rolling racks.

HELENA RUBINSTEIN

If there's one new spa that's really done its homework, it's Helena Rubinstein; this 11-month-old haven has thought of all the amenities a savvy spa-goer could possibly ask for. Located a floor below HR's street-level Beauty Gallery, which sells makeup and skin-care products, the spa is a quiet, plush oasis. Here, you change into a soft robe behind privacy curtains in the locker room and

await your treatments in a sleek lounge made cozy with magazines, cookies and ice water. To prepare for reentry into the real world, take a steam shower or sample from the skin-care and perfume trays in the bathroom.

TREATMENTS A deep-tissue massage (\$100 for 60 minutes) came first. I disrobed, pretending not to care that the massage therapist was still in the room. The glass door of the treatment room wasn't thick enough to keep me from overhearing a loud-mouthed woman in the lounge. Still, my massage relaxed me, and I was glad that it incorporated moisturizer instead of the oily stuff typical of most rubdowns. After that, I waited for my next treatment, the signature facial (\$95), in the lounge area, where sister models Frankie and Missy Rayder were sitting pretty. An aesthetician finally led me to another room where, before my facial, she dipped my hands into a tub of hot paraffin and covered them with plastic wrap and warming mitts. The treatment was thorough and would have been a pleasant ending to an almost perfect spa experience but for one serious lapse: The overzealous facialist pressed hard enough during the extraction that she left a raw, red mark on the tip of my nose. Thankfully, the product push I got at the end was a bit more subtle: As I was paying, the receptionist silently handed me a small paper bag filled with trial-size containers of the skin-care products suggested to me during my facial.

BEST FOR The Soho shopping crowd. Who doesn't need a rubdown after spending a grand at Kirna Zabête?

MEZZANINE SPA AT THE SOHO INTEGRATIVE CENTER

Like a spate of other dermatologists last year, Dr. Laurie Polis came up with a great idea: to open a spa inside a doctor's office. This way, clients can get not only facials but also the added services of a medical pro who can remove moles, treat eczema and, of course, paralyze those wrinkle-causing face-muscles with Botox. The Mezzanine Spa, which isn't yet fully up and running (but will be come March), overlooks the dermatology offices—but you'll soon forget the clinical backdrop. When completed, the floor will include four facial rooms, two wet rooms (for rinse-requiring services such as the volcanic mud treatment) and one space devoted to Ayurveda, the 5,000-year-old Indian medicine that is currently in vogue. Like the city's more posh spas, the Mezzanine offers both men's and women's locker rooms, and guests get to keep their spa slippers as a souvenir.

TREATMENTS Heavy construction prevented me from visiting, but I did duck into the doctor's office a floor below to try the face-smoothing Diamond Peel (\$200), one of the spa's soon-to-be-available services. During the peel, the first layer of my skin was removed by a suctionlike device that sweeps microcrystals across the face. It felt like someone had taken a nail file to my epidermis—and for the rest of the day, I felt like I had a bad case of windburn—but the results were worth it. My little lines and big pores were diminished im-

mediately (and my face wasn't nearly as red as it felt). If I could afford to (a series of six treatments is recommended for the full effect), I would become a Diamond Peel addict.

BEST FOR The skin-obsessed betty who stares at her pores for hours in a well-lit room.

PREMA NOLITA

Last November, a shop opened in Nolita that doesn't sell hip clothing or trendy food. Instead, it sells "wellness." Owned by beauty biz veteran Celeste Induddi and her two partners, Prema Nolita may be the tiniest spa in the city (this place is to spas what indie is to rock & roll). In the front of the shop, shelves display cult skin-care lines Jurlique and Anne Semonin. The back of the tiny place houses a single treatment room, and the menu offers what Induddi calls "treatments you don't see too often"—a list disproportionate to the space itself. (A larger location down the street is already under consideration.)

TREATMENTS As I watched all types of cool creatures amble past the storefront, my scheduled appointment time came and went while the staff prepared the room for my visit. This is the downside to having just one treatment room; on the other hand, I had the

whole spa to myself. For my one-hour facial (\$90), Georgia, my technician, used Australian-made Jurlique products, which smell of lavender and are entirely organic. The treatment included lots of face-wrapping and mist-spraying, and at one point it began to feel like a whole lot of voodoo—albeit *pleasant* voodoo. Worried about hurting me or leaving a scar, Georgia avoided picking too much at my pores; as a result, the treatment ended up being extra relaxing. Next up: an unusual rubdown called a Thai massage (\$125). As I lay on a mat on the floor, Gabrielle, the masseuse, used her entire body to press and stretch my muscles, an experience that seemed to blend yoga with sports therapy. Oddly, the massage required that I remain dressed (I was asked to bring along comfortable clothing), but it lasted longer than most (Gabrielle said that a 90-minute massage was considered cursory in Thailand, where a rub can last up to six hours). I left Prema Nolita a limp, smiling rag doll.

BEST FOR Those who prefer the indie things in life: movies, rock, spas.

FOR VENUE LOCATIONS AND HOURS, SEE CHECK OUT, PAGE 35.

UPTOWN GIRL Kick back and relax at Bliss 57, a new branch of the popular downtown spa.

