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New Yorkers find a sense of peace at Ajune: The Center for Beauty Synergy in a design by Robert D. Henry Architects

By Julie Raimondi

Over a hundred blocks north of the tragedy of the World Trade Center lies a respite from the chaos of lower Manhattan. Ajune: The Center for Beauty Synergy, designed by Robert D. Henry Architects on the Upper East Side, welcomes clients looking for an escape from their lives—if for only an hour. The spa was developed by renowned plastic surgeon Dr. Mauro Romita under the defining principle of integrated, individualized continuum of care for the body. Inside the 4,100-sq. ft. space, retail counters stocked with eye shadow mingle with a nurse's office where patients discuss nutrition, and behind which clients rest languidly in scented "sanctuaries" during deep tissue massages. It is this mix of treatment programs—aesthetic, nutritional/wellness, clinical, and medical—cohabiting in one beautifully designed space that draws clients seeking everything from 16 types of facials to collagen injections.

Dr. Romita, who has over 20 years of experience as a plastic surgeon, wanted to give his patients a more comprehensive approach to retarding the aging process. It's a concept he calls "sequential intervention," which means using preventative therapies before the first telltale signs of aging appear. Ajune offers those services in a space reminiscent of Romita's own Fifth Avenue office where "the theme is about tranquility, relaxation, and calm," he says. "I did not want a particular style or a glitzy or trendy space, but instead dignified elegance." Romita was also careful to ask for an interior that did not feel too clinical while maintaining a high standard of efficiency and clean lines.

New York City-based Robert D. Henry Architects was impressed with the doctor's vision. "We had similar taste, and he's very open-minded to architecture," explains associate Nicole Migeon. The designers also understood the difference between a spa that has to maintain a covertly medicinal undercurrent and the typical lounge-like feel common in other spas. "This was not going to be big fluffy sofas covered in velvet," Migeon points out, but it also could not have the cold, clinical feel of a hospital either. The solution was all about the presentation of a sensuous journey.

The entry positions clients in the skin care retail area (opposite) where custom cabinetry appears to float below a bronze-painted ceiling and above polished concrete floors. A green-glass wall planted in mosaic glass tiles (above) is etched with Ajune's mantra and separates the retail space from treatment rooms.



Treatment rooms, or "sanctuaries" (above), use greens and golds for the mosaic shower tiles, hand-painted walls, and tile floors. The "Hall of Whispers" (opposite) is carpeted to absorb sound and scented to relax clients upon entry.



Project Summary



The designers customized the space from floor to ceiling, and most of the door handles in between, giving the minimal design a warming, personal touch. In the street-front retail space, lighting “blocks” float above tables and desks located in recesses surrounded by mosaic tiles in the floor. Two separate areas, one for skin care and one for makeup, rest on opposite sides. “It is a narrow space but there is relief behind the glass,” Migeon points out. Floor-to-ceiling glass panels and a polished concrete floor that extends to the exterior of the spa provide a sense of depth and expanse.

The active retail space, referred to as the “Informational Forest,” is filled with luxurious textures. “We wanted to use softer materials like white ash and greener glass,” explains Migeon. As the procession continues, clients are led to the next layer of the space, a reception/information center. This area is cordoned off with glass to separate it from the makeup stations where visitors wait to speak with a certified nurse about possible treatments.

The final layer of Ajune lies behind green-glass double doors as patients enter the treatment areas through the aromatically scented “Hall of Whispers.” The change in tone is not jarring, but still dramatic as hushed voices usher clients through the sanctuaries for massages, facials, and other beatification and relaxation treatments. Carpet covers the long, glowing hallway that is shrouded floor to ceiling in white, gathered fabric, culminating in a gentle waterfall at its end. While some rooms reserved for more medicinal procedures give the impression of being slightly clinical, they are, at their cores, inviting and calming. Other rooms solely used for massage and relaxation treatments are filled with scented candles, mosaic-tiled showers, and warm golds and greens.

Clients might come to Ajune for the skin-smoothing effects of a glycolic facial or the deep relaxation of a Shiatsu massage, but if Dr. Romita makes his point, these small steps will help them counteract the effects of time, environment, poor diet, and stress. That’s at least worth a trip to the Upper East Side. ■

Who

Project: Ajune Medi-Spa. **Client:** Ajune Day Spa; Dr. Mauro C. Romita, director. **Architect:** Robert D. Henry Architects; Robert D. Henry, Nicole Migeon, Adam Koffler, Daniela Reboucas. **General contractor:** Sweet Construction. **Photographer:** Dan Bibb.

What

Wallcoverings: Oceanside Glasstile. **Paint:** Eva Buchmuller. **Flooring:** Richmond Ceramic Tile. **Carpet:** Shaw. **Custom lighting:** Designed by Robert D. Henry Architects, fabricated by GL Lites On. **Door hardware, metal work:** Designed by Robert D. Henry Architects, fabricated by Startup Metals. **Architectural woodworking:** Designed by Robert D. Henry Architects, fabricated by The Interiors Group. **Exterior signage:** Designed by Robert D. Henry Architects, fabricated by Kaltech Architectural Signage.

Where

Location: New York, NY. **Total floor area:** 4,100 sq. ft. **No. of floors:** Two. **Total staff size:** 25. **Cost/sq. ft.:** \$350.