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St. Augustine Sanctuary

A new Fountain of Youth is unveiled in the Oldest City.

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The year was 1513. Explorer Don Juan Ponce de Leon set sail from his native Spain in search of a magical water source believed to keep those who drank from it eternally young. By April, de Leon and crew reached the Atlantic coast of the New World, making landfall near what is now St. Augustine, and discovered a freshwater spring, which they believed to be the famed Fountain of Youth. Today, the Fountain of Youth National Archaeological Park located just off San Marco Avenue in the Oldest City commemorates de Leon's historic voyage and discovery by allowing guests to sip from the waters of eternal youth.

While the story of Ponce de Leon and the Fountain of Youth makes for great copy and a successful, if not a little cheesy, tourist attraction, historians have disputed its validity for years. As it turns out, they were right. St. Augustine's real Fountain of Youth was only recently discovered about 14 miles west of the city at World Golf Village.

Located within an upscale courtyard community at the King & Bear, the PGA Tour Spa at Laterra is a true source of rejuvenation and renewal in the Oldest City. The 9,000-square-foot facility, which opened to the public in December, combines the latest in treatments and therapies, as well as fitness and wellness programs, with the contemporary setting of Laterra and the Old World charm of St. Augustine to create a luxurious spa experience.

This connection between Ponce de Leon's Fountain of Youth and the restorative powers of Laterra was not lost on the spa's interior architects and designers, Robert D. Henry Architects

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(RDHA). The New York City-based firm, known for such high-profile projects as Trump Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Ajune in New York City and Cobella Akqa in London, as well as the Spa at Amelia Island Plantation, paid homage to Spanish architecture, St. Augustine's "healing" waters and the mystery of Ponce de Leon, albeit subtly, in the spa's interior design.

"We were certainly inspired by St. Augustine and researched its history as we were designing the interior," says Nicole Migeon, an architect with RDHA who served as project manager for the spa. "We were also influenced by the building's exterior and its strong Spanish architecture."

Guests enter the spa through a wide breezeway filled with rattan furniture and potted palms, while old photographs of St. Augustine reproduced as mosaics adorn the surrounding walls. Within the spa, the atmosphere takes on a decidedly more intimate feel. Just inside its front door, directly across from the resort check-in, sits the retail/reception area where guests can browse high-end hair and body products from Sonya Dakar, Babor, Pharmacopia and Simply Organic or relax on banquettes covered in red suede by American Silk. The creamy Calcutta Vision marble used as flooring and dark Wenge wood from Zaire covering the walls create a dramatic contrast and set the tone for the spa experience.

"[Laterra] has a very distinct feel. It's not designed like traditional resort-style spas," says Laterra Spa director Ashley Szemes. "Not everything is [bathed] in white light. It's definitely got a darker, more masculine feel to it." Not surprising since Laterra is not only affiliated with the PGA Tour but is the first such facility to bear the Tour name.

While the dark wood, sturdy marble and strong lines were employed to make male spa guests feel more comfortable, the elegant elements also work to relax female guests, particu-

larly as they leave the reception area and begin their journey toward rejuvenation. Just beyond the laminated glass door with custom-designed hardware in blackened stainless steel, guests are ushered into a marble corridor dubbed the Hall of Whispers, where the relaxation process begins, though on a mostly subconscious level.

"When most people come to a spa, they're usually full of energy and stressed out. What we want to do is create an atmosphere where they're going to feel relaxed, which we do by controlling lighting and space," says Migeon. "Once you walk through that door, the lighting becomes softer and more glowing. The room is narrower. The height of the ceiling is also compressed [from 9'6" in the reception area to 7'2" in the hall]. All of these elements working together create a cozier, more relaxing atmosphere."

Also working to create a soothing atmosphere is a floor-to-ceiling water feature at the end of the hall. The cascading water enclosed by glass alludes to

the healing properties of water and adds a relaxing aural aspect to the initial spa experience.

This subliminal message of relaxation is carried through to the men's and women's dressing rooms situated on opposite sides of the hallway. Spacious, yet cozy, each opens up to a waiting room with comfy chairs in crisp white and a display of colorful magazines. While the dark wood dominates this section, the more interior areas, such as the locker and changing rooms, are brightened up with paint (Sand Dunes by Benjamin Moore), custom vase-lights filled with earthy reeds and Jerusalem Gold limestone on the countertops in the restroom and on the floors and walls in the showers and steam room.

The move toward the light continues as guests enter the spa's treatment area, another unusual design element of Laterra, according to Szemes. "Instead of the layout being boxy like at other spas, our rooms are all arranged around a circular lounge in the center, where guests can also await their treatments," she says. "The treatment rooms are also all unique in their size, shape and décor."

Framed by a transparent cream-colored curtain by Creggio and sisal tech carpet in tobacco, the circular lounge features furniture by Ralph Pucci International, focus candles and the spa's most dramatic water feature, a custom fountain where sheets of water cascade from the ceiling into a satin stainless basin in the center of the room.

Ringing the lounge are the spa's 11 treatment rooms, including a hydrotherapy room, couples' treatment room and the Garden Sanctuary, a 15' x 24' area that features a recessed garden in the limestone tiled floor, filled with marble rocks and preserved grass and opening onto an open-air terrace.

Just off the terrace sits Laterra's signature space, an outdoor garden inspired by formal Japanese gardens with a zero-edge reflecting pool lined with river stone filled with koi fish. Three floating cabanas constructed from cedar serve as an exotic outdoor massage room. Beyond the cabanas, a hot tub allows guests to soak it all in.

And pampering guests is what Laterra is all about. In addition to a full range of spa services (massages, facials and body treatments), including those specifically designed for golfers, Laterra offers salon services (haircuts and styling, manicures and pedicures). Spa guests also have access to an infinity pool in the resort's lush courtyard and an on-site fitness center—all of which comes about 500 years too late for Ponce de Leon. d

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EXTERIOR ARCHITECTURE: Rink Design Partnership, Jacksonville

INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN: Robert D. Henry Architects, New York