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www.spabusiness.com 2023 4 No 80

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PHOTO: MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE

Mohonk Mountain House spa refresh

A couple of years ago, while watching the hit series *Upload*, I saw a futuristic version of heaven on earth and recognised it immediately. That virtual 'heaven' was Mohonk Mountain House, the very real Victorian-era resort 90 minutes from New York City. Recently, I learned that its spa had been refreshed and I was curious – how do you improve a natural paradise?

Nature has always guided Mohonk Mountain House. Founded in 1869 by Albert K Smiley – a lover of the outdoors who led guests on meandering trails – Mohonk, still family-owned and now run by the fifth generation, has managed to stay true to its founder's mission. That 154-year-old mission? To provide opportunities for recreation and renewal of body, mind and spirit in a beautiful setting.

In 2005, this National Historic Landmark resort and Historic Hotel of America debuted its 30,000sq ft, three-level spa wing at a cost of US$14 million (€12.8 million, £11 million). "It was designed to bring the outside in, to complement and extend opportunities for guests to enjoy nature," Nina Smiley, director of mindfulness programming, shared with me at that time. And it did just that in spades.

PHOTO: MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE

Nina Smiley leads mindfulness sessions

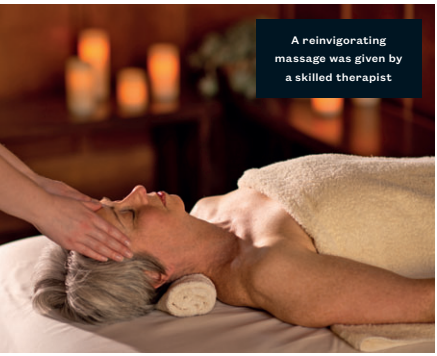

PHOTO: MOHONK MOUNTAIN HOUSE

A reinvigorating massage was given by a skilled therapist

OUTDOOR SANCTUARY

When I came back to see the spa's stunning new Lakeview Summerhouse and subtle refresh, I was touched by nature in marvellous new ways.

Architect Robert Henry, a regular Mohonk visitor for more than 30 years, worked in collaboration with its Rustic Crew to craft the pavilion in keeping with the property's other 120 historic summerhouses. "You have the perfect person to respect and honour nature," says Barbara Stirewalt, vice president and general manager. "Robert gave us some really good insights. Combine that with our Rustic Crew's awareness of what nature was going to do to the structure over time and you have a wonderful conglomeration."

The 240sq ft Lakeview Summerhouse, set on a cliff overlooking the majestic glacial lake, is constructed from local wood and serves as an outdoor sanctuary where guests can connect with the healing power of

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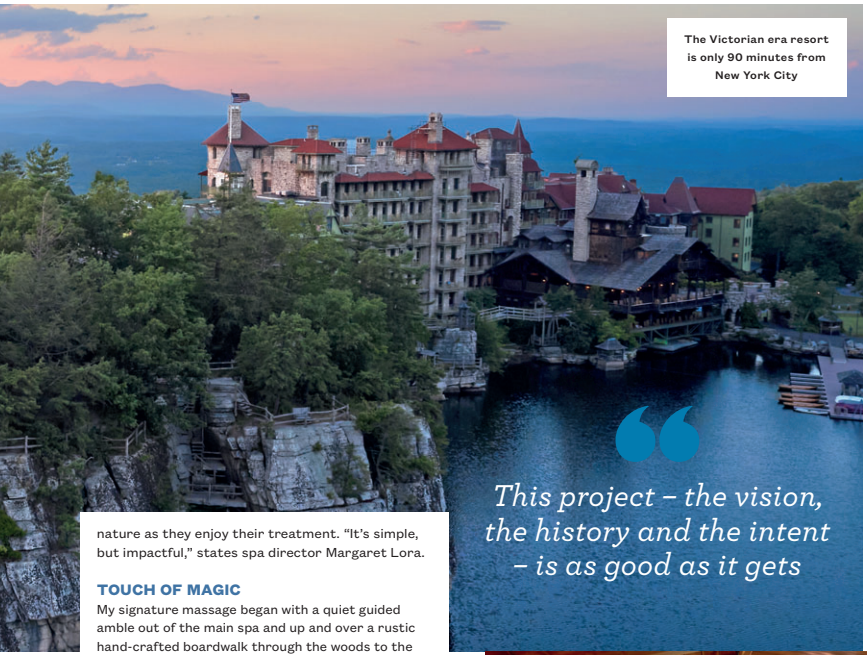

The Victorian era resort is only 90 minutes from New York City

> *This project – the vision, the history and the intent – is as good as it gets*

nature as they enjoy their treatment. "It's simple, but impactful," states spa director Margaret Lora.

TOUCH OF MAGIC

My signature massage began with a quiet guided amble out of the main spa and up and over a rustic hand-crafted boardwalk through the woods to the new pavilion. The views are breathtaking and being given extra time outside while I had a hydrating hand treatment helped me get into the rhythm of nature.

Inside the open-air summerhouse, sheer billowing drapes add a touch of magic. I loved the private-label oil used in this treatment. Created by Tara, it's a luscious combination of cedarwood, fir and bergamot notes. The massage left me feeling both relaxed and reinvigorated by the skilled hands of the therapist and the fresh mountain air that circulated throughout.

Smiley, a Princeton-trained psychologist, also leads mindfulness sessions in the summerhouse. Joining her on a forest bathing wander she quoted Lao Tzu: "Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished".

SUBTLE REFRESH

And speaking of accomplished, the refresh to the main spa is just right and includes an update of furniture, fixtures and textiles. Working closely with Lora, Henry has chosen an organic earth-tone palette and lots of natural wood and stone features. I loved the Calacatta green tile that adorns the walls of the showers and steamrooms, the green marble countertops and the flooring – a green Vermont slate tile.

Earthy tones and fresh furniture enhance the 2005 spa wing

PHOTO: MARIA LAMONTAGNE

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Billowing drapes in the open-air pavilion add a touch of magic, says Bemis

PHOTO: BROOM MOUNTAIN RESORT

"Another impact that Robert made is really thinking through the guest experience from start to finish. That led to us paying a lot of attention to the treatment room hallway," enthuses Lora, adding that it's an area that's neglected quite often, but it's the first thing a guest sees. I was particularly pleased to find that the spa's custom lily pond carpet which I fondly remembered from my past visits has not been done away with.

PHOTO: ROBERT HENRY ASSOCIATES

Robert Henry oversaw the spa refresh

PHOTO: BROOM MOUNTAIN RESORT

The Lakeview Summerhouse is a purpose-built addition

SALON OVERHAUL

Additionally, the salon has been completely transformed. Of special note are three pedicure stations that have been "lifted almost like stadium seating to get a clear view of the beautiful lake". Men's and women's changing rooms have been refurbished with showers and steamrooms completely gutted and rebuilt.

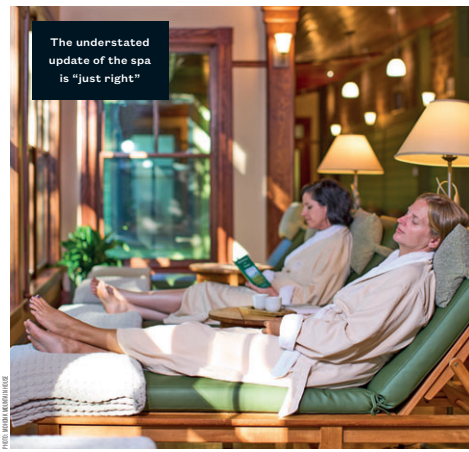
The iconic rocking chairs on the verandas and in the solarium have been reupholstered in lush green velvet and updated stone and wood refreshment stations feature throughout.

On top of this, a new treatment room showcases both a steam and cold rain shower for contrast bathing therapies.

I was pleasantly surprised to see Pietro Simone is now a supplier and enjoyed its Repair and Restore Facial with a unique cotton thread exfoliation and dry facial massage. Other product lines include Eminence, Naturopathica, Seed to Skin, Swissline by Derma Lab, Om 4 Men, Innersense and Dazzle Dry nailcare. There's also a Tara Well Bar that is quite popular with guests.

While Stirewalt doesn't disclose the cost of this latest project, she does tell me that millions are invested annually in the upkeep and improvement of the historic property. And that investment is clearly evident.

"Enhancing nature is what it is all about," Henry concludes. "This project – the vision, the history and the intent – is as good as it gets. In wellness design, nature is salve and you need to be humble and learn from it." ●



The understated update of the spa is "just right"

PHOTO: BROOM MOUNTAIN RESORT

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