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ForbesLife

SUMMER SUNRISE



**SOUTHPORT 30
COASTAL
CRUISERS
CAESAREA:
DIVING ISRAEL'S
ANCIENT RUINS
WHO MAKES
THE WORLD'S
BRASSIEST
MUSTARD?
PATIO GEAR
WITH
PERSONALITY
COLLECTING
VINTAGE
GOLF CLUBS**



An elegant interior stairway leads to the private spa suite at ESPA.

range from the Bulgari properties in Bali (see *ForbesLife*, December 2006) and Milan to the Peninsulas in Bangkok and Hong Kong and five Mandarin Oriental spas in the U.K. and U.S. And a splashy debut this is: ESPA features 20,000 square feet, 11 treatment rooms with ocean views, five suites, an outdoor terrace with a spa pool and a heated jet pool with Roman waterfall, for starters. Like other ESPA-designed properties, the Acqualina spa flows beautifully, in gentle fountains of water, in warm and muted lighting, in the floors of teak and quartzite tile and walls of slate and tinted mosaics. The space is large but not cavernous, each hallway leads where you expect it to lead. The vibe is sophisticated but not at all precious,

consistent with that of the resort itself. (ESPA is open to Acqualina residents, guests and nonguests alike, but you'll never notice the foot traffic.) It's Miami all grown up, but not grown old.

Unique to the company is a concept called ESPA Time, in which clients simply book two or more hours. Escorted to a treatment room and cosseted with a delightful soak in a foot bath, the client is asked how he or she is feeling at the moment—relaxed? hungover? fed up with

the kids? annoyed at having to answer questions?—and based on the responses, the spa therapist determines which services are appropriate. It's a nifty idea, and one more spas should adopt: Most spas force a client to commit to a service when booking—days, sometimes weeks ahead of time—bad luck if, say, she wrenches her back the day before a facial.

I was diagnosed as someone who, while able to sleep practically standing up, was holding in tension. My ESPA Time involved a body exfoliation, warm shower, body wrap, another warm shower and finally a stimulating massage. Nothing terribly unusual about that, but its presentation was—the therapist neither spoke too much nor too little, and answered questions about the products used in a straightforward manner; no spa speak here. And, she had great hands. (ESPA's employee training is famous for its rigor.) The back-and-forth to the shower wasn't ideal, but because of the sizable room and the low lighting, I didn't feel my mood much disturbed. Afterward, I glided back to the women's spa area and spent time rotating between the sauna, steam room, "Ice Fountains" and "Experience Showers" with both warm and cool mists—sort of an ecosystem sampler.

Earlier my companion, a spa rookie, was led to his first treatment wearing a robe, flip-flops and a trepidatious half-smile. He'd chosen to take a small bite of ESPA Time with an à la carte treatment

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off the spa menu, the "back, face and scalp massage." Afterward, he stumbled his way to the beach; haltingly, he mentioned that his therapist had (correctly) pointed out that he held much of his tension in his jaw; the resulting massage forced such relaxation that basic conversation required significant effort. The church of spa had won another convert. •

Acqualina, a Rosewood Resort, (305) 918-8000, www.acqualinaresort.com.

Spas by Lorraine Cademartori

Southern Comforts

ESPA at Acqualina, a Rosewood Resort, joins the top tier of American hotel spas.

South Florida tries hard to be all things to all people. Miami Beach boasts a manic, cosmopolitan nightlife, inventive plastic surgery and a glorious beach that has become a spring-break destination for high-strung collegians. Farther up the coast, Palm Beach continues to define stuffy Big Money. In the midst of this demographic stew lies the relatively new town of Sunny Isles Beach, formerly part of North Miami Beach, which like other villages nearby boasts an ambience resplendent in its sheer ordinariness: Strip malls, high-rises and decidedly unchic motel properties stand cheek by jowl. The demographic is more varied—the shops of Bal Harbour, a.k.a. Rodeo Drive-by-the-Sea, are a safe car ride's distance away—the teenagers are few and the only music in spring belongs to birds. It's close to a perfect setting for the region's best spa, ESPA at Acqualina.

Opened last December, Acqualina marks the debut of ESPA-branded spas in the U.S. (11 ESPA's have opened internationally since 1993). Founded by industry doyenne Susan Harmsworth, ESPA also functions as a spa design consultancy as well as product manufacturer, and its clients



A (treatment) room with a view at Acqualina