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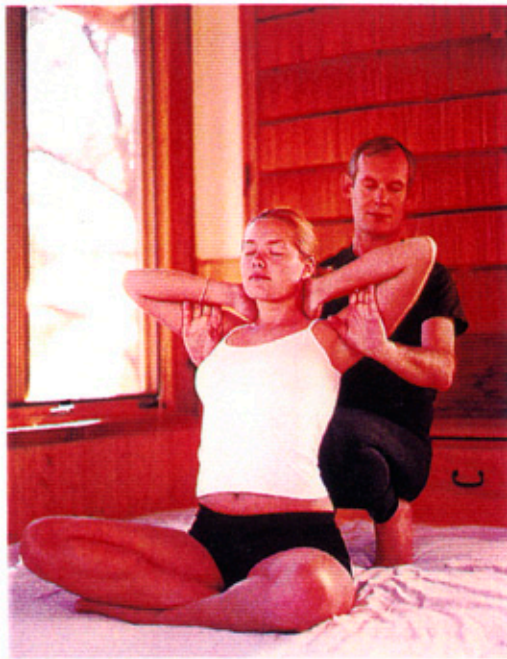


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We'd gaze through the tall pines while we soaked in our outdoor tub; sometimes snowflakes fell softly on us as we sat in the steaming water.

Twenty years ago, when I was still a visitor to Santa Fe, the buzz was all about the then-new Ten Thousand Waves spa. "Let's go for a hot tub!" someone would suggest on a chilly winter's night, and off we'd go, up toward the ski basin. We'd turn off the road far short of the summit, park the car, then hike up the hillside path to the Japanese-style entrance. There we checked in, showered, wrapped ourselves in thin kimonos, then walked shivering down a stone path that led us to our private little spa. We immersed ourselves in a wooden tub of blissfully hot water, took a turn or two in the sauna, and relaxed on the smooth wooden deck in between. On clear, cold nights we'd gaze through the tall pines at Orion while we soaked in our outdoor tub. But it was even better on cloudy nights, when snowflakes fell softly on us as we sat in the steaming hot water.

It always seemed as though time had stood still, but after an hour we'd slip on our robes and walk back along the little path, pausing in the lobby to have a drink of spring water, gradually returning our senses to those of the world. It was blissful 20 years ago, and it turns out it is even better today.



Ten Thousand Waves masseur James Peckham, above, moves a guest through Thai massage; a path to hot tubs, right.

Ten Thousand Waves has grown into a full-fledged day spa that now offers a range of treatments. In addition to the hot tubs and saunas in the woods, there is a complex labyrinth of pools, bungalows, and treatment and steam rooms that can accommodate one or as many as 22 guests. One body-temperature pool even has a waterfall. Today there are eight cabins, each with its own particular charm. All but one have kitchens, and all have fireplaces and private balconies or courtyards. Architecturally, they seem to be a comfortable blend of Japanese and Southwestern, in a clean, minimalist style. A winter visitor can book a cabin, drive up the road to Taos, ski for the day, then return to be ever-so-gently simmered, pummeled, massaged, scrubbed, and shined, without even having to go into town.

Visitors to Santa Fe tend to put a trip to Ten Thousand Waves at the top of their list. My friends will call to announce their arrival and say, "We're here, but first we're going to get a massage at Ten Thousand Waves. Then we'll make plans." Currently, hot-and-cold stone massages seem to be everyone's favorite. Guests who know the ropes book their massages with Peggy Grady, a gifted masseuse who can transform a physical massage into a spiritual experience.

I decided it was about time to treat myself to some spa time. When I called for an appointment, the receptionist recommended a Thai massage, "because it's interactive, not just lying on a table and being worked on." Actually, lying passively on a table while someone dug into the iron-band-like muscles in my shoulders sounded pretty appealing, but I had just reread M. Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled*, so I decided to try the Thai massage. I am profoundly unathletic, and a recent ankle sprain had made exercise harder than usual, so I really needed a thorough stretching. The picture in the brochure made this treatment look strenuous, but it turned out it wasn't. It was like doing yoga stretches with someone else moving your limbs. After 60 minutes with James Peckham, a talented, sensitive



Every room and cabin has an elegant aesthetic; I left feeling pampered after spending the day in this beautiful setting.



A handcrafted sauna bucket with ladle, left; the luxurious nightingale facial, right.

practitioner, I walked out feeling taller, more energized, and even ready to exercise.

I also booked an appointment for a nightingale facial, which has been used by geishas and Kabuki actors for centuries to preserve their flawless complexions. For this special facial, the sterilized droppings of Japanese nightingales are hand-ground into a fine powder. The powder is mixed into a paste, then smoothed onto the face. I know people who love and swear by this potion, but I'm not so sure I noticed much of a difference in my skin. It certainly felt great to be indulged this way, though.

There is a relaxed, friendly atmosphere that feels real, and the place isn't obsessively trying to create a seamless, slick atmosphere. Every room and cabin has an elegant aesthetic, seen in the craftsmanship of the woodwork and furniture. The care in the details shows. Besides moderating its energy consumption, the spa works at creating a whole, sustainable system. For the spa's water treatment, all the gray water drains into a specially created cattail-filled wetland. These plants naturally cleanse the water, which is then used to irrigate the beautifully landscaped surroundings.

I left feeling pampered and calm after spending the day in this beautiful setting. And as I headed for my car, I thought that next time I'd stay overnight. Then I could extend this lovely state of being and simply float down the path to one of the little cabins in the woods.

I found a very different experience about an hour north of Santa Fe at an old-fashioned spa resort, Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs. These magical natural hot springs have been used for hundreds of years. On a mesa above the mineral pools are the remains of a 14th-century Posi-Owenge Pueblo. No doubt Native Americans bathed in these curative waters. Today, seven outdoor pools, which are fed by artesian springs, hug the rock cliff walls. The mineral content of the water is determined by the composition of the rock that the heated water passes through on its way to the earth's surface. These individual pools are characterized by a predominance of iron, arsenic (the most healing, I was told), soda, and sodium. Lithia, claimed to be a natural remedy for depression, is offered as a beneficial drink.

After the guided experience of my visit to Ten Thousand Waves, I felt a *(continued on page 106)*

The private Imperial Ofuro Tub at Ten Thousand Waves, left, offers guests a shower, sauna