



Water Works

SpaEquip's Polly Johnson dives into the latest advances in hydrotherapy.

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American Spa

Ask any spa-savvy person what they think of hydrotherapy and you'll probably get a response of either adoration or aversion. For those lucky spa guests who have experienced great hydrotherapy treatments, the mere suggestion of water therapy elicits a swoon of longing as they grab their swimsuits, ready to hop in. But a good suggestion can result in a bad treatment when conducted incorrectly—or worse, without heart.

Of Man and Water



The Hana Hydrotherapy Room at the Maui Spa & Wellness Center includes a swiss and a deluge shower.

Man's love affair with water stems from its therapeutic benefits. Even without knowing the science behind it, we instinctively understand that water's silky character will seduce our minds, soothe our aching muscles, and increase our circulation.

Expertise related to hydrotherapy has been chronicled by many aficionados over the past 1,000 years or so, but the benefits were more alleged than proven. It appears that the scientific evidence proving its worth wasn't documented until just 30 years ago. Recently, a 2006 survey of research in *Annals of the Rheumatic Diseases* studied the effectiveness of

hydrotherapy and focused on research related to the cost-effectiveness of hydrotherapy versus other forms of treatment. In naturopathic medicine, hydrotherapy—specifically the use of alternating hot and cold water—is well-established as an effective way to cause changes in blood and lymphatic circulation. This heals at the cellular, tissue, organic, and systemic levels of the body. A series of cold and hot treatments can be prescribed to manage pain, improve sleep, and speed recovery from all kinds of illnesses. In its simplest form, hydrotherapy is quite commonly used by anyone who has taken a hot bath to relax or a cold shower to wake up.

To start, the simple immersion of the body into water creates a feeling of weightlessness and reduces the heart's workload by 10 to 20 percent. Then, warm water alone does most of the work to get the heart pumping (increasing circulation) and dilating blood vessels, which lessens the resistance to blood flow (reducing blood pressure). The increased circulation also spurs the lymphatic system to further cleanse the body of toxins so it can function better.



Sanijet produces a range of pipeless hydrotherapy tubs including the Cierra, the Bali, and the Swasana.



A popular treatment at the Aquatic Center at Canyon Ranch (Tucson, AZ) is the Rejuvenating Waters session.

The ultimate hydrotherapy treatment includes underwater massage by a highly skilled hydrotherapist. Philippe Therene, medical and spa division manager of SpaEquip, was one of the first to import European hydrotherapy tubs to the U.S. in 1987. "The human body is mostly water, so when the body is suspended in water, it is especially receptive to deep massage," says Therene. "Using the tub's integrated jet-hose, a trained therapist can deliver an exceptionally deep massage. The therapist can also focus on cellulite-prone areas, which benefits clients by increasing circulation in those zones and even offers short-term water weight loss."

Signature Scenarios

The most successful spas offering hydrotherapy treatments create signature spa treatments with the tub session incorporated into the service. The most popular protocols include a treatment circuit starting with a full-body exfoliation, followed by a tub treatment with underwater massage, and completed with a full-body massage. "Success for hydrotherapy in any spa comes only with a solid commitment by both management and the therapist," says Therene.

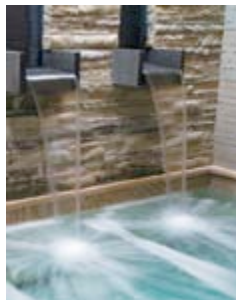
"It's a real challenge to communicate to your guests what a treatment does and why it works," says Mindy Terry, spa consultant and owner of Creative Spa Concepts. "You have to make it worth talking about, then talk about it in your menu and in your marketing materials and be sure to give your receptionist a great treatment so he or she will promote it." Whether it is a guided bathing circuit of hot and cold plunge pools or simply the addition of a steam room, Terry believes water therapy is successful when it is integrated into the spa's fundamental concept. "When the body is relaxed, it is more receptive to everything," she says. "Any spa treatment will be more effective and more valued by your guests when they've already been lulled into spa mode. As a value-added amenity, a bath or a luxurious shower can serve to enhance other treatments and encourage guests to plan longer visits."



Defining Hydrotherapy

With this thought in mind, I strongly suggest you consider leaving the term hydrotherapy out of your menu. At the Golden Door Spa at the Boulders Resort (Carefree, AZ), the very successful signature Turquoise Wrap (\$170, 50 minutes; \$210, 80 minutes) includes "a turquoise hydromassage," and the Lavender Masque (\$150, 50 minutes; \$195, 80 minutes) comes with a lavender and salt mineral bath. These uniquely worded experiences are designed to get clients and staff alike raving about these enticing services.

Delivering the Spirit of the Experience



I am often asked, "What is the best spa treatment you've ever received?" While I have my favorites, the Rejuvenating Waters (\$295, 100 minutes) session available at Canyon Ranch (Tucson, AZ), which includes a full underwater massage, which hydrotherapist Kevin Barry delivers using both hands and feet, is certainly at the top of my list. The success of this treatment begins and ends with Barry. He is an extraordinary therapist because he cares so deeply about helping each guest discover a life-changing experience. "Each treatment is, in and of itself, an experience," he says. "The attitude of the provider is the most important thing."

Large-Scale Water Therapies

The thermae mineral pool at Allegria Spa at the Hyatt Beaver Creek Resort and Spa (Beaver Creek, CO) stimulates a natural spring.

Water-based therapies aren't limited to tubs, tables, and the hands of the staff. Recent trends in spa design include large unattended wet amenity areas more often associated with the grand spas of Europe. One notable, newly opened spa featuring significant wet amenities is Qua Baths & Spa at Caesars Palace (Las Vegas)

where Qua's Roman Baths create vibrant gathering spaces that highlight the healing power of water. It includes the city's first Arctic Ice Room, where guests can unwind after heated treatments and use ice chips to exfoliate and invigorate while crisp 55 degree air refreshes the lungs. This spa illustrates the use of both hot and cold treatments that should be used precisely in that order—hot then cold. Educating clients on how to partake in these areas is important to preserve the spa's reputation.



American Leisure's Aqua Grotto (pictured here as a rendering) also serves as an ideal hydro-focused place to socialize.



Currently in construction are several projects featuring the Aqua Grotto, a water circuit that doubles as a social area, from American Leisure, a company that provides consulting, design, marketing, and operations services for lifestyle facilities, spas, and fitness centers. "Watsu pools, hammams, waterfalls, saunas—we've featured all these individual elements in past projects," says Steve Kass, CEO of American Leisure. "But the Aqua Grotto provides a sense of place, one that encourages bathers to experience and enjoy a series of water and thermal elements and to interact with each other at the same time."

Around the World with

With the Aqua Grotto, a high-end, urban condominium development may not even need a swimming pool. "Most people prefer bathing to swimming," continues Kass.

"Swimming pools are expensive to build and operate and may require lifeguards on staff. We're inviting people to experience the healing power of water on a daily basis if they wish, with no need to travel. With lounges and treatment areas adjacent to the Aqua Grotto circuit, we're bringing these water elements right to the people in an environment that encourages socializing. Our concept brings it out of the locker room." A facility like this requires a commitment of both money and square footage but can go a long way towards differentiating your spa from the competition.



Qua Bath & Spa at Caesar's Palace (Las Vegas) features a circuit of Roman Baths.



Hydrotherapy Resources

What's so intriguing to me is how hydrotherapy has evolved in tandem with the American consumer of spa services. About 10 years ago, hydrotherapy was included in all new spas of significance because so many developers perceived its great marketing appeal. Sadly, spa managers of that time were tasked with selling the service as a stand-alone treatment, a practice that has clearly damaged the reputation

of a perfectly good therapy.

Today, American spa-goers are more sophisticated, more demanding, and smart enough to know where to spend their precious time and money. They've had a few hit-or-miss experiences over the years and they are seeking more hits. If you, as a spa owner or manager, are asked to revisit the concept of hydrotherapy and wet amenity areas, I challenge you to think before "taking the plunge." This time around, please make a clear commitment to making all your water therapies truly therapeutic. Dedicate time to training, and don't let any of your therapists go near the water unless they are deeply committed to making the experience a once-in-a-lifetime memory for each guest.

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