



The Greening of the Spa Industry

The spa industry has a real opportunity to enter a new paradigm and stage of its lifecycle. The green movement has hit the retail counter with the success of companies like Aveda, Kneipp, Origins, Pevonia and Physiadermie, yet many spa environments are lagging behind. Although some spas around the world are taking on eco-friendly initiatives within their facilities, those that are incorporating "green" are still the exception rather than the norm.

BY MICK MATHEUSIK

Spas that are embracing the environment know it is not just a passing fad, but a new reality that the industry must adapt to or be prepared to flounder. Gone are the days of "conspicuous consumption." Consumers are seeking more rewarding, personal development, healthful and sustainable experiences. By recognizing that true ecological sustainability is not a cost to spa operations, but rather a source of profits and real competitive advantage, spas should be well poised to serve this growing consumer market – those characterized by the trendy new acronym LOHAS (Lifestyles Of Health And Sustainability).

Catering to this relatively new consumer requires a new vision and a new way of doing business. It promotes collaboration among once disparate industries that now have a common goal to cater to the needs of the environmentally aware consumer by providing healthy and sustainable products, services and experiences. LOHAS represents a \$226.8 billion marketplace in the United States; global estimates are near \$540 billion. This group is comprised of educated consumers who make social, health and environmentally conscientious purchasing and investment decisions.

Canadian sociologist Paul Ray has coined the term "cultural creatives" to describe one-third of North American adults who have created their own culture based on their values. By having a strong regard for preservation, ecological sustainability, resource renewal, personal and spiritual

growth, holistic health, harmony and social justice, the reinvented spa of the new millennium must see and count itself as being part of this culture.

Why Should Spas Go Green?

Despite the promotion of environmentally sound practices by advocates, many spas currently see little need for this approach. At least four major misconceptions discourage spa operators from embracing environmentally responsible spa products, operations and services. They think:

- 1) "I can't have a financially viable operation if I'm concerned with environmental and social issues."
- 2) "I don't have enough information about environmental options."
- 3) "I don't have time to research the environmental performance of spas."
- 4) "If most other spas or ISPA are not formally addressing this movement, why should I tackle it?"

Dispelling these myths is not easy. However, the reality is an exploding market has emerged fueling the desire for healthy and ecologically friendly alternatives. Serving this new market holds tremendous potential for the spa industry. As well as making strong economic sense, going green will reduce the enormous waste that is generated daily in the spa industry, thus adding to global healing and thereby to the industry's very survival.

Here are some other benefits of "doing well by doing good" in terms of going green:

- Increased profits. LOHAS and similar consumers are willing to pay up to 20 percent more for natural products with healthy benefits that are environmentally friendly, according to the *LOHAS Journal* and the Global Cosmetic Industry.
- Reduced capital costs. This can be achieved through efficient environmental design, using both natural and recycled materials, optimal building placement and design.
- Reduced operating costs. By incorporating smart energy and environmental design, reduced water demand, lower maintenance requirements and a reduction in waste is often the result. As an example, the

Oaks at Ojai initiated an extensive recycling program in 1991 that helped to reduce waste and added to the community's recycling efforts.

- A way to differentiate. By making products such as oils of rose hip and chamomile on their property, Pat and Juanita Corbett, owners of the Hills Guest Ranch & Spa in British Columbia, Canada, not only reduce costs associated with packaging and importing manufactured goods made elsewhere, they also add to their own spa's healing services and reputation.
- Improved corporate image. The January 2001 issue of *American Demographics* reported that 83 percent of consumers say they have a more positive image of a company that supports a cause they care about. The environment has consistently been one of the top three concerns that consumers say they most want businesses to bear in mind.
- Reduced liability risks and employee absenteeism. According to the Rocky Mountain Institute, productivity losses of 6-16 percent, including absenteeism and quality of work, are often the result of poor energy and building design.
- Staying ahead of new regulations. Germany has legislated manufacturers to accept responsibility and costs associated with taking back, recycling and disposing of their own packages. Some European countries have reduced income tax rates for green companies and imposed higher rates for environmentally destructive activities. In North America, "green taxes" are being considered by some government authorities.
- Supports teamwork and friendly competition. By implementing an environmental incentive program among its operations, the Fairmont Hotels & Resorts Green Partnership Program generated continued support and enthusiasm after a seven-year volunteer program. This hotel and spa chain is reported to have the most comprehensive environmental program in the North American hotel industry.
- Guest satisfaction. Increasingly studies reveal that many consumers are demanding products and services that are free from chemical impurities,

biodegradable, allergy free and not tested on animals. These consumers are not going away and will continue to comprise a greater share of the total market.

- Lessens the impact on the environment. By reducing pollution, the waste of energy and natural resources, the impact on landfills, ozone depletion, the risk of global warming and deterioration of our own personal health are all reduced. In brief, Deborah Szekely's depiction of the future (as she stated at the 2002 ISPA Conference) "of the increasing erosion of the quality of life" can be reversed.
- "Greening" reinforces ISPA's vision and mission. As Szekely said at last year's Conference and again during a recent telephone interview, ISPA should be the leader in encouraging spas to go green as it directly relates to the essence of both its vision and mission.

How Can Spas Go Green?

Examples of how spas can go green are many and diverse, ranging from easy-to-do to very elaborate. While it is impossible to mention all the excellent examples that are already being practiced by the spa industry

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Eco-friendly Educational Resources

US Green Building Council's LEED (Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design) Green Building Reference Guide and Rating System. www.usgbc.org

"The Green Partnership Guide - A Practical Guide to Greening Your Hotel" by Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. www.fairmont.com

"The Natural Step for Business" by Brian Nattrass & Mary Altomare. www.naturalstep.org

CERES: Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economics. www.ceres.org

Real Goods - promotes and inspires an environmentally healthy and sustainable future through its products, publications and educational demonstrations. It is the oldest and largest catalog firm devoted to the sale and service of renewable energy products. Founder John Schaefer is also reported to have pioneered the concept of socially conscious and environmentally responsible business. www.realgoods.com

Green Hotels Association - a group whose purpose is to bring together hotels interested in environmental issues. www.greenhotels.com

Center for a New American Dream - a site to help people consume responsibly. www.newdream.org

LOHAS Journal - online information on the LOHAS market. www.lohasjournal.com

The International Ecotourism Society - an international membership organization dedicated to disseminating information about ecotourism. www.ecotourism.org

Oceans Blue Foundation - a Canadian environmental charity that was created in 1996 to help conserve coastal environments, internationally, through environmentally responsible tourism. It is the first organization in North America to focus on developing and promoting best practices and standards for all sectors of the tourism industry. www.oceansblue.org



The building placement and design of Eco-rejuvenation Spa at Driftwood Farms, in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, was carefully nestled to preserve existing trees, the natural topography and sensitive areas of the coastal site as well as enhance bird habitat. These environmental design criteria will also help to reduce energy and irrigation requirements.

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here, the following list provides ideas on how spas can make "green" improvements:

- Through your spa's marketing materials and communications, you can let guests know that the operation is committed to the golden rule of environmentalism by implementing the "3 Rs": Reduce (eliminate), Reuse (refill) and Recycle (reprocess) in as many areas of the construction, design and operations of the spa environment as possible.
- Contribute to environmental education by offering on-site workshops at your spa as well as contributing to other conservation groups' efforts. The Szekely family donated extensive land tracts adjacent to Rancho La Puerta as a nature reserve and also helped create Las Piedras, Center for Environmental Education, to educate nearby Mexican school children about nature and ecology.
- Examine whether your external design and operations are green by using environmental design and placement techniques to reduce ecological impacts; also use fewer non-degradable substances, more native landscaping (i.e. - requiring less water) such as those used by The Marsh, a Center for Balance & Fitness, in Minnetonka, Minn.
- Look at the internal spaces within the spa by encouraging the selection and purchase of construction material, paint, furniture, fixtures and equipment that minimize environmental impact.
- Use organic spa products, foods and beverages, from the spa's bio-region (those made/grown locally), if possible, to reduce transportation costs and associated impacts. Locally harvested seaweed is used both in the spa therapies and award-winning cuisine at the Sooke Harbour House, situated outside of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. As reported in the ISPA 2002 Spa Industry Study, food- and plant-based treatments have already become very popular in the industry.
- Listen to your guests' suggestions. After learning about the possible extinction of Chilean sea bass from the media as well as their clients, Two Bunch Palms Resort and Spa in Desert Hot Springs, Calif., switched to Mero sea bass. "We felt it was very important to avoid extinction and could not ignore the impact by serving it," said Jill Maya, director of sales & marketing at Two Bunch. And it was worth the effort. "[Our guests] noticed it immediately by responding to us with appreciation letters."
- Select and use biodegradable supplies for spa services and laundry, thus saving on detergents and reducing harmful chemicals. A recent

Shop Green

Here are a few sites for "green" shopping and a variety of earth-friendly alternatives to mainstream products:

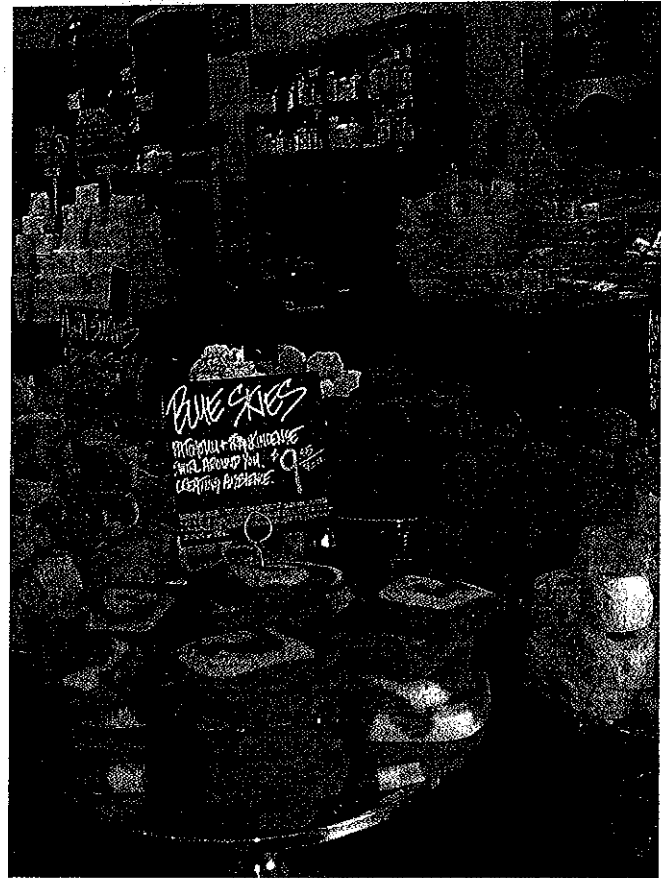
www.GreenMarketplace.com

www.gaiam.com

www.ecomall.com

www.redjellyfish.com

www.international-womens-health.com



Lush specializes in handmade, all-natural, preservative-free, organic body care products. They are displayed like food in a gourmet market setting, with the retail settings featuring little or no packaging both for the products and store displays.

Roper Starch Green Gauge Report revealed that more than half of Americans (53 percent) say they have purchased a product because the advertising or label said that it was environmentally safe or biodegradable.

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Recycling Web Sites:

- For a list of recycling companies in your area, visit Global Recycling Network at www.gm.com.
- For recycling and pollution prevention in your area, visit www.1800cleanup.org.
- For information on secondary or recyclable commodities, by-products, contact Recycler's World at www.recycle.net or Eco-Cycle at www.ecocycle.org.

Eco-labeling & Certification:

- Global Ecolabeling Network—www.gen.gr.jp— is a nonprofit association of eco-labeling organizations from around the world that certifies products and services with lower environmental impacts.
- Green Seal—www.greenseal.org— is an independent, nonprofit organization that identifies and promotes products and services that cause less toxic pollution and waste, conserve resources and habitats and minimize global warming and ozone depletion.

The survey was initially sparked by the challenge raised by Deborah Szekely (founder of Rancho La Puerto) at the 2002 ISPA Conference in Anaheim, Calif. Szekely delivered a fervent message, which was received by a standing ovation from Conference attendees. She convincingly made her point for the importance of greater awareness of these issues and why it is in the spa industry's own best interest to pursue the consumer-driven trend toward becoming more environmentally conscious. ISPA responded by offering several sessions covering this topic at the 2003 Conference.

The TRÉC survey (the source for all of the following statistics) consulted with several hundred ISPA Conference delegates and trade show participants, with more than 230 people completing the survey questionnaire. Interestingly enough, the survey found that 68 percent of respondents already incorporate some form of "green practices" into their spa environment and the products/services they offer, by:

● Reducing the use of throwaway products	50%
● Reducing or eliminating the use of toxic products	46%
● Selecting green products and services	44%
● Using less or alternative packaging	40%
● Reducing water consumption	34%
● Providing environmental education	31%
● Processing and re-using wastewater	23%
● Building or landscape design	21%
● Other	18%

Yet, despite these most encouraging results, verbal feedback showed that the concept of "greening" is still relatively new to the spa industry. There remains considerable uncertainty and a desire to further explore ways as to how it can be more efficiently applied and incorporated into everyday spa business operations. Some underlying concerns were also identified, such as "The fear of killing the goose that lays the golden egg," or that greening might have an adverse or negative impact on the industry's profits.

When survey participants were asked if ISPA should become more involved in the educational process of how spas can actually benefit from "going green," 64.4 percent of respondents were in favor.

And concerning the question, "In what way(s) do you think ISPA should participate in the greening trend?", participants said:

● Provide more educational material	64%
● Give the topic more media attention	62%
● Create a directory of green products	54%
● Create an educational Web site	50%
● Conduct seminars and roundtables	49%
● Form an Environmental Committee or Advisory Committee	49%
● Offer awards to successful operators	47%
● Work with other industry associations	44%
● Do nothing at all	6%

It is becoming more and more evident that consumers are increasingly interested in the world that lies behind the product they buy. Apart from price and quality, they want to know how and where and by whom the product has been produced.

Perhaps not surprisingly, as many as 68 percent of respondents indicated that they thought their customers feel positively about green products and procedures in spas. In relating this to their own business, they felt that greening could provide the following tangible benefits:

● Reduce environmental impacts	63%
● Improve corporate image	57%
● Improve customer satisfaction	48%
● Create competitive edge	40%
● Encourage teamwork	31%
● Stay ahead of regulations	30%
● Increase profits	27%
● Reduce operating costs	22%
● Reduce capital costs	16%

The TREC survey results show that the spa industry generally is aware of the consumer-driven trend toward greening. Spa operators and other spa professionals may do well in adapting and moving with this trend to attain a competitive edge and remain successful in this business over the long run. When properly implemented, any initial costs will likely be more than offset by the resulting benefits and rewards.

Sustainability is about creating more economic and social value by providing technology, services, knowledge and experiences in a harmonized and balanced way. The greening of our industry is part of an already ongoing global transformation. It is not an end in itself as much as it is a journey in which all members of the spa industry need to show increased awareness and participation and play a proactive, conscientious and responsible role, no matter how big or small. By eliminating or minimizing, wherever possible, any negative impacts the spa industry may have on our health, well-being and our natural environment, we will be able to truly embrace and advance the balance of mind, body and spirit. ■

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RESOURCE FINDER

For more detailed information on this topic, read the article "The Greening of the Spa Industry" in the August 2003 issue of *Pulse*. Also, To explore the topic of greening further, ISPA is creating a Greening Task Force and looking for ideas from you. For more information, contact ISPA headquarters by e-mailing ispa@ispastaff.com.