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By Katherine Stewart

Down to the Last Drop

Efforts to conserve water in the spa don't have to mean a cutback in relaxation—or results.

SOME EXPERTS SAY THAT THE GLOBAL CONFLICTS of the 21st century won't be about oil; instead, they'll revolve around water. In that case, they may well begin in a spa. With their whirlpool baths, specialty showers and other wet treatments, most spas are flagrant users—some even say squanderers—of this precious resource. “Tubs hold about 40 to 60 gallons of water, and some vichy showers use more than 10 gallons per minute,” says Tony Longhurst, principal at the Sustainable Hospitality Group (sustainablehg.com), an outfit that works with spas and resort properties to develop strategies for water conservation.

But perhaps because spa owners and directors are notoriously eco-friendly, water conservation is the wave of the future in this industry. “Fortunately, the number of spas using their resources in more sustainable ways is on the rise,” Longhurst says.

Trendsetters include El Monte Sagrado Living Resort and Spa (elmontesagrado.com) in Taos, New Mexico. It boasts on-site disinfection technologies, storm-water retention ponds and a

comprehensive recycling system. Some large-scale corporate entities are also taking steps to conserve: Water-saving initiatives at the worldwide Fairmont Hotels & Resorts (fairmont.com) include drought-resistant landscaping; laundry systems that implement water-saving ozone technologies; harvesting rainwater; and low-flow showerheads that inject oxygen into the water stream. “We're always looking for new and innovative ways to green our operations without compromising the guest experience,” says Sarah Dayboll, manager of environmental affairs for Fairmont Raffles Hotels International.

Here's how several day spas have used these methods to conserve water without scrimping on the quality of their services.

Turning Down the Spigot

When Marie Patterson and Erik Pampalone moved to Pampalone's hometown of Chatsworth, California, they were committed to creating a business that would nurture their community

while leaving behind the smallest environmental footprint possible. Their mission, they decided, was to open Naya Fresh Body Spa (nayafresh.com)—a lavish yet ethical place for healing and wellness.

Water conservation was at the top of their to-do list. Taking over what had been a dental office, they replaced galvanized plumbing from the 1940s with copper pipes and new joints to eliminate potential leaks. Small-diameter tubing was installed to simultaneously restrict





Cacti and certain flower species provide a healthy looking landscape while using a minimal amount of water.

water flow and increase pressure, leading to a greater sensation of flow in spite of lower overall water usage. New sink fixtures also reduced the risk of leaks. To save energy, Patterson and Pampalone installed a hot water heater that only turns on each morning an hour before the spa opens and shuts off after it closes.

Landscaping in dry Southern California tends to consume precious water, so they make use of drought-resistant, desert plants on Naya Fresh's property. A sprinkler system delivering twice-weekly mistings is set on a

of that, and you can't tell that there isn't much water coming through. While you're not actually consuming a lot, you feel like you're getting deluged," Patterson says. "It's in keeping with the purpose of our spa: to create the feeling of indulgence in a sustainable context."

And Nowhere to Drink

With a home on the sun-spangled Orange County coast, the St. Regis at Monarch Beach (stregismb.com) in Dana Point, California, epitomizes high-life luxury. But in this

"It's in keeping with the purpose of our spa: to create the feeling of indulgence in a sustainable context."

timer for 7 a.m.—the coolest part of the day—to minimize water that's lost through evaporation.

For wet treatments, the twosome arranged for their 16-jet body, rain and handheld showers to run off a single water line. The system is low-flow yet high-pressure. "The steam shower fogs up nicely because

wildfire-prone region, few residents take water for granted. That's why Spa Gaucin director Valory Reed made a commitment three years ago to increase the spa's H₂O efficiency. "In California, water is not a guarantee," she says. "The ownership of the resort is conservation-minded, and they challenged us to look at

Naya Fresh Body Spa reduced water usage by increasing pressure and running all showers off one water line.

our water usage and see if we could do better.”

Reed started with classic emblems of spa overindulgence: hydrotubs. “Those suckers were huge, and they took forever to fill up,” she says. Out they went, and Reed redesigned some of the spa’s popular soaking experiences, such as the Red Wine Bath (20 min./\$55), for more efficient tubs.

Next, Reed trained her sights on the vichy showers. “They were installed for that classic spa experience, but they too were water-guzzlers,” she says. Guests who seek treatments with a water component are now directed toward offerings such as the Chardonnay Sugar Scrub (60 min./\$175), which includes a languorous rinse in a steam shower that lasts several minutes yet does not require an hour’s worth of water flow.

Finally, Reed changed the way drinking water is offered throughout the spa. She replaced bottled water with five-gallon purified dispensers so guests take only the amount they require. Fresh red grapes, offered throughout the spa, also quench thirst—and offer an antioxidant boost.



At first, Reed wondered whether her guests would object. “Fortunately, it hasn’t gone that way at all,” she says. “We told people we removed those features because of our greening efforts, and they were all for it. Nobody’s been upset, which shows that it was the right move for the environment as well as our business.”

Hydro-Creativity

Four years ago, Jaime Schrabecck wasn’t aiming to become a trendsetter in water

An Oasis in the Spa

Hydrotherapy, the use of water as a healing treatment in the spa, is a popular add-on in European facilities. The benefits include relaxation, detoxification and healing, according to the International Spa Association (ISPA, experienceispa.com). However, with the current trend toward water conservation, it might not gain much momentum in the United States over the next few years.

But you can incorporate elements of hydrotherapy without adding any additional water waste to your service menu. They include:

- the use of saunas and steam rooms.
- mineral baths that are naturally rich in salt and iodine.
- herbal bath oils, such as eucalyptus, lavender, rosemary, juniper and chamomile.
- body wraps and masks that use seaweed or algae.