

ANCIENT TRADITIONS MEET MODERN TECHNOLOGY AT EVO SPA.

A Dream Realized

BY LIZ BARRETT

According to late French author Victor Hugo, "There is nothing like a dream to create the future." During the 25 years Gail Ann owned her small skincare salon in Mill Valley, California, she held tight to a dream of expanding the business into a spa that would serve as a temple for body and spirit. "It was my dream to create a spa where people come to experience a place beyond words," says Ann. Her dream of providing a place where clients could receive a lip wax or an acupuncture treatment and experience the same healing energy was realized when Evo Spa opened its doors in April 2004.



The blending of traditional and modern can be seen in Evo's relaxation room.

Ann's journey began with a lifelong interest in health, nutrition and spirituality. Even as she spent her days working as a street artist in San Francisco, her thoughts always returned to wellness. During a routine facial appointment, Ann's esthetician told her about some students studying skin care in Los Angeles. Not many people have a life-changing moment on the treatment table, but in that instant Ann realized what she was born to do. "I always knew that my life's destiny would involve healing and helping people," says Ann. "That day my path was revealed."

She headed to Los Angeles to attend the Christine Valmy International School

for Esthetics and just six months after graduation, in 1979, opened Cheek t' Cheek, a 665-square-foot skincare salon in Northern California's Mill Valley. While others may have thought she was rushing into owning her own business, Ann had



Clients enter the treatment and retail areas through a 19th century door from India.

the knowledge to back up her decision. "I grew up watching my parents run their own jewelry store in Washington, D.C., so I already had business ownership in my blood," she says. Besides, opening Cheek t' Cheek was only a stepping stone on her way toward an even bigger goal.

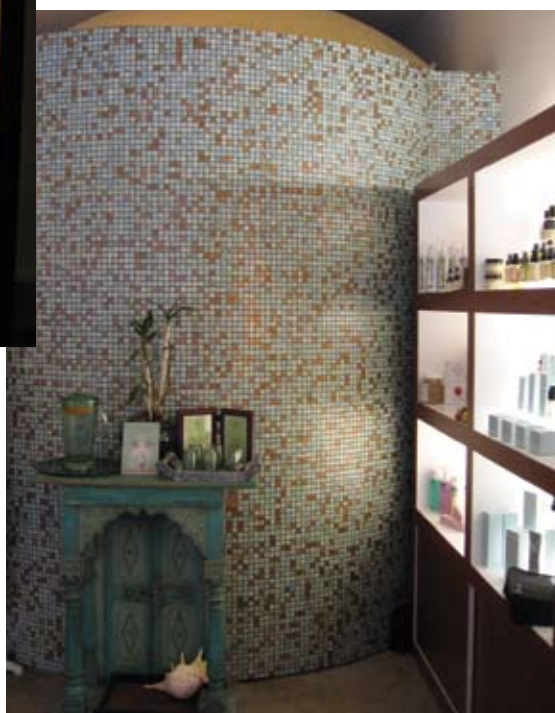
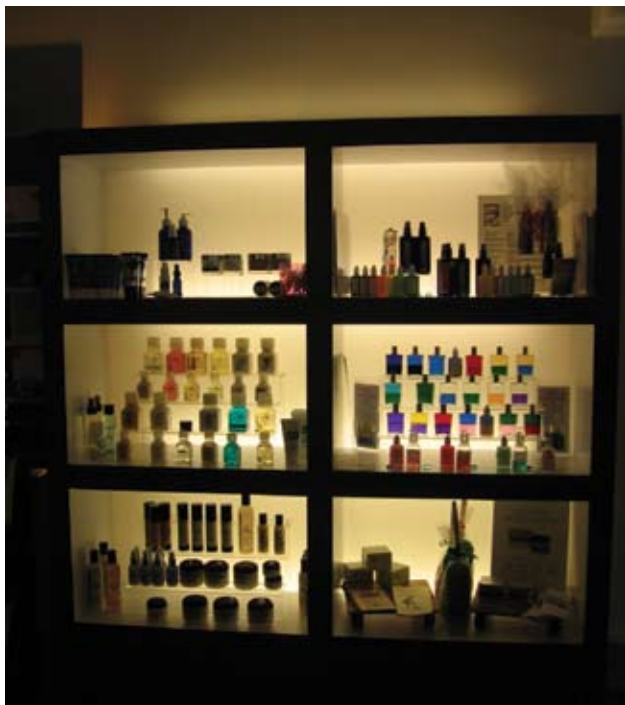
A Vision Becomes Reality

For many years Ann and her co-worker at Cheek t' Cheek, Donna Panagakis, would imagine creating a beautiful spa. "Holding a vision is part of the preparation of manifesting a dream," says Ann. "I spent a lot of years dreaming, so when the shopping center that housed my skincare salon offered me a 2,664-square-foot space, I was ready for it." The question now was, after all the dreaming, hoping and planning, could Ann remain patient throughout the construction?

The build-out of the spa taught Ann about trusting her instincts. "Even when I felt the need to go outside of myself to 'make it happen,' I realized that everything manifests itself in miraculous ways when we're connected to an inner place of knowing." This instinct-driven mentality may have played an important role in enabling Evo's construction to finish on time and without a hitch. Today, the space houses nine treatment rooms,



An artist recreated a 14th century plaster technique on the walls of all the round treatment rooms.



a retail area, a relaxation room, and men's and women's locker rooms.

The spa's concept, planned and developed over years, is a blending of ancient traditions and modern technology. The name Evo, meaning "ancient" and "future" in Italian, was chosen to support the spa's overall image of "traditional meeting modern." Ann stresses that it was vital to work with someone who understood this concept. "Gary Maricich of Garamar Design in Crockett, California, performed all the space planning and design, and translated my vision into a reality—including creating gold-leaf domes to establish the temple atmosphere." Cheryl Cason of Fabulous Homes in Sausalito, California, headed up the construction of the spa and chose custom design touches such as mosaic tiles for the walls.

"Everywhere you see a modern design element, there's an ancient element to ground it," says Ann. Evo's lockers are constructed of modern green glass, while the adjoining showers surround clients with black volcanic tile; the waiting room is largely modern with an antique Asian table set up for tea; an artist was commissioned to recreate a 14th century plaster technique on the walls of the round body treatment rooms; and a 19th century door from India acts as a portal into the treatment

Retail sales at Evo account for 28% of the spa's profits.

and retail areas. "The blending of old and new gives a distinctive feeling to each room," says Ann. "Sometimes I catch myself walking into a room at Evo and thinking, 'Wow, this really feels good!'"

The Drive Toward Details

The experience at Evo is a holistic one. The spa's atmosphere, its products and its treatments each promote an unwavering quest toward beauty and wellness. "It's all in the details," says Ann. "From the coziness of the relaxation room to the softness of the robes and slippers, clients come in for an experience, not just a treatment."

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Ann's attention to detail is also reflected in her dedication to treatment authenticity. She spent 20 years researching the ingredients for the spa's signature treatment, Kaya Kalpa (meaning "body's transformation" in Sanskrit) (90 min./\$210). She describes the treatment as one that a thousand years ago was reserved only for royalty and the most spiritually evolved and wealthy men. The men were put in dark caves for 90 days with no light or stimulation from the outside world while a healer would bring them special herbs to take internally and herbal treatments to apply externally. The result was a transformed and younger-looking body.

After locating an ayurvedic doctor in India to prepare the herbs for the body paste and building a room that provides the unique effect of a cave or cocoon, Ann offers this transformational treatment in 90 minutes instead of 90 days to all men *and* women (royal status not required). Even Ann has voted the Kaya Kalpa treatment as her favorite. "It's such a sacred experience," she says. "The paste is hand-crushed, and you can feel the love and energy that went into it when it's being applied. The scents are absolutely wonderful and when the treatment is over it's as though layers of the world have been lifted away."

The Evo menu includes many other unique treatments that allow everyone to have a favorite, whether it's the Detox Sea Wrap (75 min./\$135) that features Egyptian pressure

A 75-minute makeup lesson at Evo teaches clients how to accentuate their best features.



wrapping or the Marma Point and Tibetan Bowl Foot Massage, offering nirvana for the feet in just 15 minutes (\$25).

However, the most popular treatments at the spa are those that appeal to its major demographic—women between the ages of 30 and 60. These include the Deep Tissue Massage (60 min./\$85, 90 min./\$135); the Orange Blossom Body Polish (60 min./\$95), which uses raw cane sugar, shea butter and orange blossoms to reveal silky smooth skin; and the Epicuren Facial (75 min./\$125). Some prefer the Himalayan Bliss Body Polish (60 min./\$95), during which warm oil is slowly drizzled over the body while aromatic steam fills the air and Himalayan salt is used to exfoliate the skin. In addition to face and body treatments, Evo steps outside the box to offer not-so-standard services such as personalized nutrition plans (\$235), custom fragrance creation (\$175) and acupuncture (90 min./\$95).



Gail Ann (left) with daughter and acupuncturist Neka Pasquale.

With a plethora of treatment offerings for clients to choose from on any given day, Ann felt the need to organize the spa's internal systems to help operations run smoothly. Dedicated managers for the areas handling massage, skin care, body treatments and the front desk keep client appointments and the staff on track.

Spa Facts

Evo Spa

Location: Mill Valley, CA

Owner: Gail Ann

Size: 2,664 square feet (nine treatment rooms, men's/women's locker rooms, relaxation room and retail area)

Number of Employees: 23

Average Service Ticket: \$85

Signature Service: Kaya Kalpa (90 minutes/\$210)

Treatment/Retail Lines:

Epicuren, Éminence, Skinceuticals, Spa Technologies, Jane Iredale, Aromaflovia, TRUE Cosmetics and Evo Spa private-label bath and body products

“We offer extensive employee training to bring out the best in our people.”



The Elite software system helps manage appointments and client history. “We’re always focused on harmony and efficiency and offer an extensive employee training program with high standards to bring out the best in our people,” says Ann. Panagakis stayed on to become Evo’s nutritional consultant, massage manager and detox wellness consultant while Ann’s daughter Neka Pasquale, an acupuncturist, continues to be instrumental in helping her mother mold Evo into a place where beauty and wellness become one. “Neka and I both have a passion to help others and working together at Evo has helped us develop a new respect for one another,” says Ann. With a system in place for staff management, Ann turns her focus to bringing in new and returning clients.

The Continuing Ascension

To keep the Evo Spa name in front of the public, Ann advertises in local magazines and newspapers,

“Bringing the dream and reality together is the biggest challenge of owning a spa.”

and on SpaFinder.com. Word of mouth helps bring in additional clients as does donating to local fundraisers and charities, and maintaining a spa website at www.

evo-spa.com. Ann saw her early efforts pay off when, only a few months after opening, Evo won the classification of Best Facial and Massage in Marin County in

the local *Pacific Sun* newspaper. The awards, chosen by locals, represented a huge vote of confidence for Evo. Ann says it was her proudest moment for the spa.

What's next after you've had your proudest moment? Now that Evo has been open for nearly two years Ann is planning yet another expansion. “We're currently launching our Detoxification Wellness Programs, addressing the need to bring a balance between inner and outer beauty with 4-, 8- and 12-week programs using state-of-the-art Quantum Physics technology coupled with traditional healing practices. Once we get a template running smoothly we'll be expanding the spa to accommodate it.”

Ann also has goals to grow the spa's retail profits. (Retail sales currently bring in around 28% of the spa's income.) Retail and treatment lines include Epicuren, Éminence, Skinceuticals and the spa's private-label line of bath and body products. She's currently rewriting the spa menu to reflect new treatment offerings.

Ann offers the following advice to those thinking of opening a spa: “Really ask yourself, ‘Do I want to own a spa or go to a spa?’ They're definitely two different things. It's crucial to calculate the costs versus income potential. Bringing the dream and reality together is by far the biggest challenge of owning a spa.”

Ann emphasizes that you must also love working with people. “My greatest joy in life is the one-on-one contact I share with my clients,” she says. “It's such a great feeling to know that I'm fulfilling my life's purpose.” ●

Liz Barrett is *DAYS SPA's* associate editor.