

# 805 LIVING

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Water, Water,  
EVERYWHERE

# Mind/Body/Soul

By Maryann Hammers



## LIQUID SERENITY

Spas get back to basics with water-based treatments.

**SINCE ANCIENT ROMANS DALLIED IN BATHHOUSES**, water has been an integral part of spa treatments. The word “spa” derives from the phrase *sanitas per aquas*. Translation: “health through waters.” Over the years, the term spa began to refer to natural mineral pools and hot springs. In fact, one of the world’s most famous healing hot springs is in Belgium, in a town named Spa.

Because few things are as relaxing and stress-reducing as the sound, sight, and feel of water, this column highlights spas that offer healing soaks, scrubs, and other H<sub>2</sub>O-based treatments.

**WATER, WATER EVERYWHERE** At the Four Seasons Hotel Westlake Village ([fourseasons.com/westlakevillage](http://fourseasons.com/westlakevillage)), chaise lounges are angled along a trickling wall fountain; a bright red bridge spans a serene indoor stream; while outside, a pagoda overlooks a peaceful pond, and boulders from the River Kwai line serene paths. A bubbling whirlpool looks out to a private patio, and the cabana-ringed lap pool provides an inviting space to sip a Perrier.

The spa’s wet rooms deserve special mention just because they are so darn pretty—drenched in natural light, opening out to an enclosed tropical garden blooming with orchids and birds of paradise. A Vichy shower, with a delicious cascade of warm water, feels like a tropical rainfall, and seaweed-based hydrotherapy treatments, such as the thalassotherapy jetted bath or sea-kelp scrub, are lovely add-ons. For the ultimate indulgence, guests can reserve a spa suite (rates by the day or half-day) with plunge pool in a private courtyard, huge deep-soaking tub, and Swiss shower with overhead rainfall.

The spa has just revamped its treatment menu and now offers super-hydrating Ling products. The ginseng herbal facial is the ultimate skin quencher, with warm steam, replenishing toner, oxygen-infused anti-aging moisturizer, and a moisture mask. The result is a fresh-as-spring-rain complexion.

**A BATH WITH A VIEW** With its primo location on Montecito’s Butterfly Beach, the Four Seasons Resort The Biltmore Santa Barbara ([fourseasons.com/santabarbara](http://fourseasons.com/santabarbara)) is a natural for those seeking liquid serenity. The private beach club with poolside spa treatments is indulgent, but the spa itself raises the bar on baths with a menu of soaking rituals in a private suite with oceanfront terrace. Choose from jasmine, rose, and red-wine baths (served with a glass of vino); “Aromapothecary” baths with a customized blend of fragrant essential oils; vitamin C- and E-infused baths; and therapeutic soaks with jade and ginseng.

Baths are followed by a wrap, scalp massage, and moisturizing lotion, while French doors open to allow refreshing

ocean breezes and the sound of crashing waves to waft through. Then it's time to cuddle up in a plush robe and sip some cucumber water while enjoying the view.

**FEET FIRST** The Aqua Detox Foot Spa at Bellezza Vita ([bellezzavita.com](http://bellezzavita.com)), a Summerland day spa, is an ionic footbath that supposedly stimulates the lymphatic system to purge toxins out of the body through pores in the feet. Feet are soaked in a tub to which an electrode array has been added; the water turns black, brown, or greenish, sometimes with foam or floating flecks.

Skeptics say that the science surrounding the treatment is dubious, and that the water changes colors due to saltwater's effect on electrodes. Despite the doubters, many who've tried the treatment swear the soaks have reduced swelling and helped them feel healthier, lighter, and sprightlier.

Whether one believes the health claims or not, there's no disputing that a warm saltwater foot soak, perhaps combined with an ocean-view pedicure, hydrating mineral wrap, or moisturizing rose-and-olive-oil scrub, followed by a Swiss shower, is bound to make a person feel pretty darn good.

**WATER AND WINE** With its picturesque vineyards framed by rolling oak-studded hills, Paso Robles is best known for its fast-growing wine country. But the town was first famous for its hot springs, dating back to the Franciscan friars and Mission period. One of the town's early developers, Drury James (uncle to outlaw Jesse James), envisioned Paso Robles as a health resort, with underground hot sulfur springs, a fine hotel, and a luxurious bathhouse as the main attractions.

That vision continues at River Oaks Hot Springs Spa, where \$12 mineral-rich soaks are still the best bargain around. Surrounded by the serene landscape, guests lounge in hillside cedar tubs under the stars in bubbling 117-degree springwater.

For those who are so busy tasting wine that they forget to make it to River Oaks, spa rooms in the Jesse James Building at Paso Robles Inn offer jetted tubs with mineral water pumped directly from the town's famous hot springs.

**OH, OJAI** After its latest renovation, the spa at the Ojai Valley Inn & Spa ([ojairesort.com](http://ojairesort.com)) sports a clean, linear look with an appealing fireplace lounge. The spa's new Café Verde beckons with blue-glass mosaic-topped bistro tables around a trickling fountain in a sunny courtyard.

Despite all that's new, thankfully the spa continues to offer its signature "O" treatment. Though it's listed under the massage menu and incorporates the stress-relieving, healing aspects of shiatsu, it feels more like a nurturing, primal return to the womb. The treatment takes place in a secluded three-foot-deep blue-tiled pool heated to body temperature. Under an oversized umbrella and surrounded by rosemary plants and blooming rose bushes, the guest is invited to lie back in the water, eyes closed, and effortlessly float with the assistance of buoyant head and leg supports. Meanwhile, a therapist massages shoulders, cradles the body, gently stretches limbs, applies acupressure to trigger points, and rocks the head. When it's over, most people will feel so relaxed they'll need a few minutes to emerge from the warm watery embrace and come back to earth. ■



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