

# In The Pink | American Spa Magazine

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July 26, 2010 By: [Julie Keller](#) American Spa

**Though no longer in the blush of youth, an award-winning California spa scores a series of elegant updates that help keep spa-goers consistently coming back for more.**

In Ojai, CA, a charming artsy enclave north of Los Angeles, there is an event that occurs each evening called The Pink Moment. Due to the city's position in the heart of an east-west mountain range, sunset results in a flash of brilliant pink as the rays reflect on the mountains. Tourists are entranced by the colorful vistas, and even the most jaded locals can be seen stopping their cars to take



in the views. But The Pink Moment is just one enticement of this enchanting town. Another is the acclaimed Ojai Valley Inn & Spa and its award-winning Spa Ojai, a magical retreat that has become even more appealing of late, thanks to a head-to-toe refurbishment.

According to spa director Gloria Ah Sam, the elegant update transformed the 13-year-old spa from a heavy Moroccan/Moorish theme into a cleaner, lighter Mediterranean look that leans toward a contemporary Italian design. Among the highlights of the renovation are two full-length water features in the women's relaxation lounge; comfy seating and a flat-screen TV in the men's area; a new seating area in the lobby; a complete update of the second-floor co-ed loggia; and brand-new massage tables and face cradles, cork flooring, cabinetry, countertops, light fixtures, linens, and hot towel cabinets in all of the treatment rooms. Also new this year is the Herb Garden complex, which includes an outdoor pool with luxurious cabanas for alfresco massages and two indoor treatment rooms where guests can indulge in massages and facials while enjoying lush garden views.

The Herb Garden complex, which is filled with fragrant herbs and flowers, and the region overall provide endless inspiration for the spa menu. "We are so fortunate to draw from a wealth of year-round locally grown natural products and plants, including jasmine, lavender, lemons, limes, mint, oranges, pixie tangerines, rose,

rosemary, sage, and rose-geranium,” says Ah Sam. Lavender is used in the spa’s signature Shangri-la (\$290, 1 hour 10 minutes) body treatment, the Fresh Lavender Manicure & Pedicure (\$150, 1 hour 35 minutes), and is the signature oil blend for the Relaxation Massage (\$140, 50 minutes; \$280, 1 hour 10 minutes). The spa also offers Seasonal Body Scrubs (\$145, 50 minutes), which take advantage of the harvest-fresh bounty of the region. One of the most popular services is the Pixie Tangerine & Pomegranate Scrub (\$290, 1 hour 10 minutes). The scrumptious little citrus fruits can only be found in Ojai, and the service includes a tangerine-scented body polish, a hydrating wrap, and a massage with body butter.

Another unique offering is the Kuyam (\$50, 50 minutes), which is named for the local Chumash Indian word for “a place to rest together.” Performed in a special room with heated loungers, the treatment for up to eight men or women per session combines the therapeutic effects of cleansing desert clay, dry heat, inhalation therapy, and a traditional Chumash guided meditation.

Because the town of Ojai and the resort itself have been embracing green living for decades, it is particularly appealing to eco-minded spa-goers, yet another element that makes it stand out in a crowded spa landscape. Most of the products used in services, including Anakiri, Arcona, and the Ojai-based Gaelle Organic Skin Care, are eco-friendly. Ah Sam also has close relationships with all of the companies she works with to maintain the spa’s eco-integrity and overall excellence. “When choosing our partners, we research company integrity, product ingredients, and customer support,” she says.

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Spa Ojai is also distinctive for its charming Artist Cottage & Apothecary. Guests can try their hand at one of the studio classes, which include sessions on everything from glass painting and personal Mandala creation to silverpoint drawing. In the Apothecary, guests can custom blend aromatic oils that they can use in their spa services and to concoct personalized soaps, oils, perfumes, and more. They can also take part in yoga, Pilates, and guided meditation in the Mind/Body studio; enjoy guided hikes and bike rides; and even nosh on healthy culinary options in the on-site Café Verde. "It is this Spa Village concept that sets us apart from other resort spas," says Ah Sam. "We provide the opportunity to weave a unique holistic experience that touches mind, body, and spirit."



While guests from around the globe come to the spa, most are from the southern California region. "Throughout the year, we welcome approximately 78 percent resort guests and 22 percent day guests who reside primarily in the greater Los Angeles area, Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Ojai," says Ah Sam.

To help boost the outside-of-California numbers and to serve the prominent local market, Ah Sam has introduced a variety of promotional programs. Day guests are offered weekday specials throughout the year, and the spa also has a

weekday pass holder program, which allows frequent visiting day guests to enjoy the spa facilities and services. “This program cross promotes with our golf membership with incentives and discounts for participants of either program,” she says. “We also support our golfers through fitness programs, clinics, and a golfer’s mini gym designed to target their specific needs and to help keep them healthy on the course.”

Other promotional activities include marketing and advertising the Spa Village via the resort’s website, through social networking venues, and with newspaper and magazine advertisements, as well as print and website editorials. Email blasts, quarterly mailed newsletters, turndown collateral, and framed poster displays and flyers throughout the property have also proved successful. Also popular are room and spa specials, value-priced spa packages, and wellness events that occur three times a year.

It takes a village of talented professionals to maintain such a range of options. The spa can handle a maximum of 300 guests per day, and to fulfill their needs, Ah Sam employs approximately 80 staff members, including 25 full-time and 10 part-time employees, with the remainder on-call. Ah Sam says she is surrounded by a talented and seasoned group of people, with more than 20 Spa Village associates boasting 10-plus years at Ojai Valley Inn & Spa. Still, she says it is easy to promote and sell all the treatments, “because we are passionate about all of them,” she adds.

Though the recent renovation has been keeping Ah Sam and her team on their toes, she has no intentions of resting on her laurels. In fact, she is committed to maintaining the excellence for which Spa Ojai has long been known. “Connecting with our guests, creating memorable experiences, and delivering extraordinary customer service will sustain and grow our Spa Ojai Village,” she says. “The spa, fitness, and art communities and industries are passion and result driven. We must respond to every guest in the moment, for the moment—this will produce trusting relationships. Balancing consistencies and fresh, innovative ideas is the key to a successful future.”

## **SPA OJAI**

(Ojai, CA)

**OWNERS:** Crown Family

**SPA DIRECTOR:** Gloria Ah Sam

**OPENED:** 1997

### **CLIENT BASE**

75% female, 25% male

**SPACE:** 31,000 square feet; 28 treatment rooms **COST OF SPA:** \$13 million

**OFFERINGS:** aromatherapy, Ayurveda, body treatments, couples’ treatments, facials, fitness, guided meditation, hand and foot treatments, injectables, makeup

application, massage, nailcare, nutrition consultation, outdoor treatments, Pilates, prenatal services, Qi gong, reflexology, salon services, scalp treatments, sweat lodge, tai chi, watsu, waxing, yoga

**SIGNATURE SERVICE:** Kuyam (\$50, 50 minutes) and Essence in Balance (\$260, 3 hours), which includes the creation of a signature massage oil blend in the Apothecary and a massage

**MOST EXPENSIVE OFFERING:** Shangri-la Package (\$550, 4 hours), which includes a Body Treatment, a Classic Massage, a Customized Facial, a Hand & Feet Luxury Treatment, and a spa cuisine lunch

**PRODUCT LINES:** Anakiri, Arcona, Carita, Gaelle Organic Skin Care

**EQUIPMENT:** Cintas Spa Uniforms, Collins, Comphy Co., Garfield, Kashwére, Living Earth Crafts, OKA b., Silhouet-Tone, SMS Software, Technogym, Telegraph Hill, The Madison Collection, Woodway

**ARCHITECT:** Bill Mahan (Santa Barbara, CA)

**SPA CONSULTANT:** Sylvia Sepielli, Sylvia Planni