

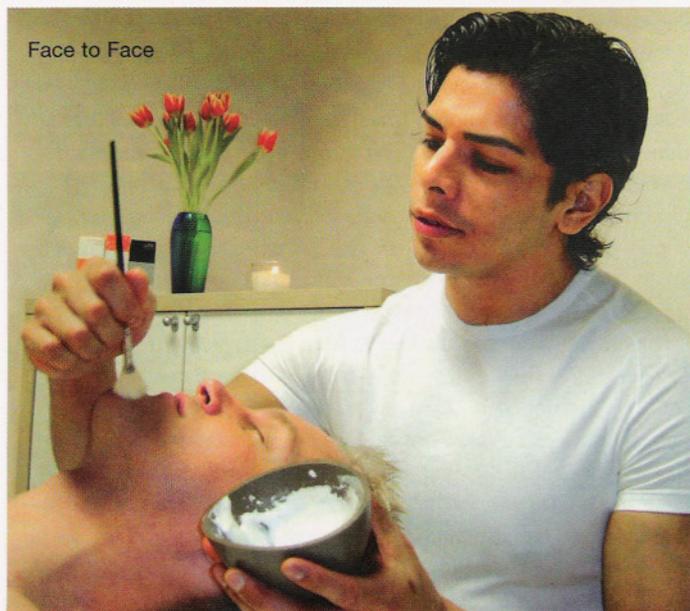
ing your shoes for spa sandals on a tea tray upon arrival, to a well-placed orchid on every pillow or table, to an extra pile of rolled soft towels just where you need them. Immaculate facilities, especially the pre-treatment men's and women's "wet rooms," set the Mandarin apart. Located on the 35th floor of the Time Warner Building in Manhattan, the spa consistently creates a sense of ritual and ceremony. Tibetan bells chime at the commencement and end of treatments, a foot bathing ritual marks the beginning of your visit, and with your therapist you sample and choose which E'SPA products suit your mood and needs best. I wait in the communal tea lounge with its wide views of the Hudson River before beginning the "Gentlemen's Retreat" half day of pampering. For four hours I am spoiled by three terrific treatments. First, an expert kneading in my deep tissue sports massage (with hot stones added); a blissful European-style facial is augmented by leg massages, stretches, and more hot stones; a grand finale of deeply relaxing foot reflexology is wonderfully therapeutic since my nearly-flat arches had been killing me. The combined effect is sublime. The "Gentleman's Retreat" package is \$655.

www.mandarinoriental.com

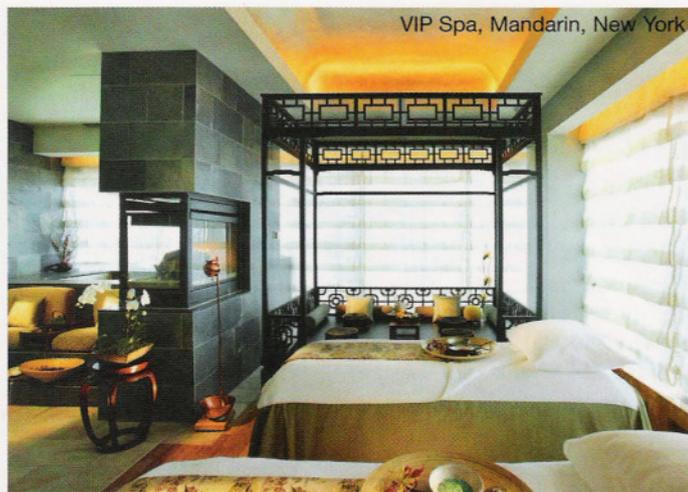
—Andrew Mersmann

FACE TO FACE NYC NEW YORK, NEW YORK

Just like bespoke tailoring provides unique, one-of-a-kind, upscale clothing, bespoke beauty and bespoke bodywork are the next logical steps for spa-goers. Each of us has different skin, different aches and pains, and different comfort levels with spa treatments, so why would a "Pick one from column A, one from column B" spa experience be satisfying? This is precisely the bliss-seeking conundrum addressed by Enrique Ramirez, the one-man-band, multi-disciplinary therapist at **Face to Face NYC**. Gorgeous Enrique does it all from careful and studious massage in an array of techniques, to elaborate skincare work like microdermabrasion, with sunless tanning, reflexology, and waxing thrown in. This is one-stop spa shopping, and the beautiful thing is you needn't get passed from one practitioner to the next, Enrique works with you to plan exactly what you want out of an appointment, then does it all. As a gay man whose private salon/studio is in the Flatiron District, Enrique has a huge gay following, but maintains a diverse returning client base. The waiting area, a peaceful haven from 19th Street below, has multiple products on display. Enrique favors Yon Ka products from Paris, but as one of New York's very few licensed male estheticians, he determines what is best for each client. The treatment room is cozy with a



Face to Face



VIP Spa, Mandarin, New York

multi-position table. My oil massage is great with particular attention paid to my back and feet, but Enrique really hits the heights when he starts one of the most elaborate facials I've ever received. My feet are first put in a paraffin dip, then a parade of products and techniques begins. After an intense but gentle cleansing and scrub, Enrique paints on an alpha hydroxy acid mask. Afterward, the steamer comes out and, this being the gritty summer in the city, I put up with some mild extractions. A seaweed mask is intensely cooling and soothing and leads up to the grand finale of a ticklish, nourishing oxygen mist. Enrique calls this the "Glow Zone Facial" for reasons evidenced by my shiny, happy visage. His invaluable post-treatment skin consultation gives me words (and products) to live by. If you are tired of the cookie cutter spa experience, you probably deserve a personal touch. The "Forget Me Knots" massage and facial package is \$185. www.facetofaceny.com

—Andrew Mersmann

SPA EASTMAN EASTERN TOWNSHIPS, QUEBEC, CANADA

The amazing thing about being at **Spa Eastman** is the wide-open space in every direction. The grounds are immaculately landscaped and visitors wander around in matching bathrobes pondering tufts of lavender, or the ripples on the swimming pond. Venture further into the 315 acres of wooded property and find miles of trails for hiking or jogging, as well as the sense that there isn't another soul to be found for miles.

Guestrooms are simple but comfortable in the large main pavilion or in one of several smaller group pavilions or cabins. This retreat is great for couples or any individual searching for focused relaxation and peace. As a destination spa it includes a personalized fitness program, daily scheduled activities (which you can opt out of for some alone time), spa treatments, and all meals. The Eastman kitchen proves that a tuft of sprouts and a carrot stick no longer define healthful diet food. Fresh natural ingredients, many from the spa's gardens, make up the several offerings available at each meal designed by a staff nutritionist. While there was a duck and a fish option, my mood was overtaken by the health focus and I opted for vegetarian fare—a hearty vegetable soup and a seaweed salad. Afterwards, I splurged on a gooey raspberry cake for dessert. Eastman is definitely a lifestyle spa, so some people are on strict diet regimens, while others are highly fitness-focused. The program you design with your "wellness specialist" will determine the nature of the treatments you experience. Treatment areas take up the entire lower level of the main building, which also includes a jam-packed shop to take spa products home with you. Everything from Watsu to grape and tonic cures are available, with a wide variety of body and facial treatments. After an intense day of outdoor activity, a heated herbal plaster on my back grows to near volcanic intensity. When my therapist finally pops this signature "Mineral Miracle" off, every