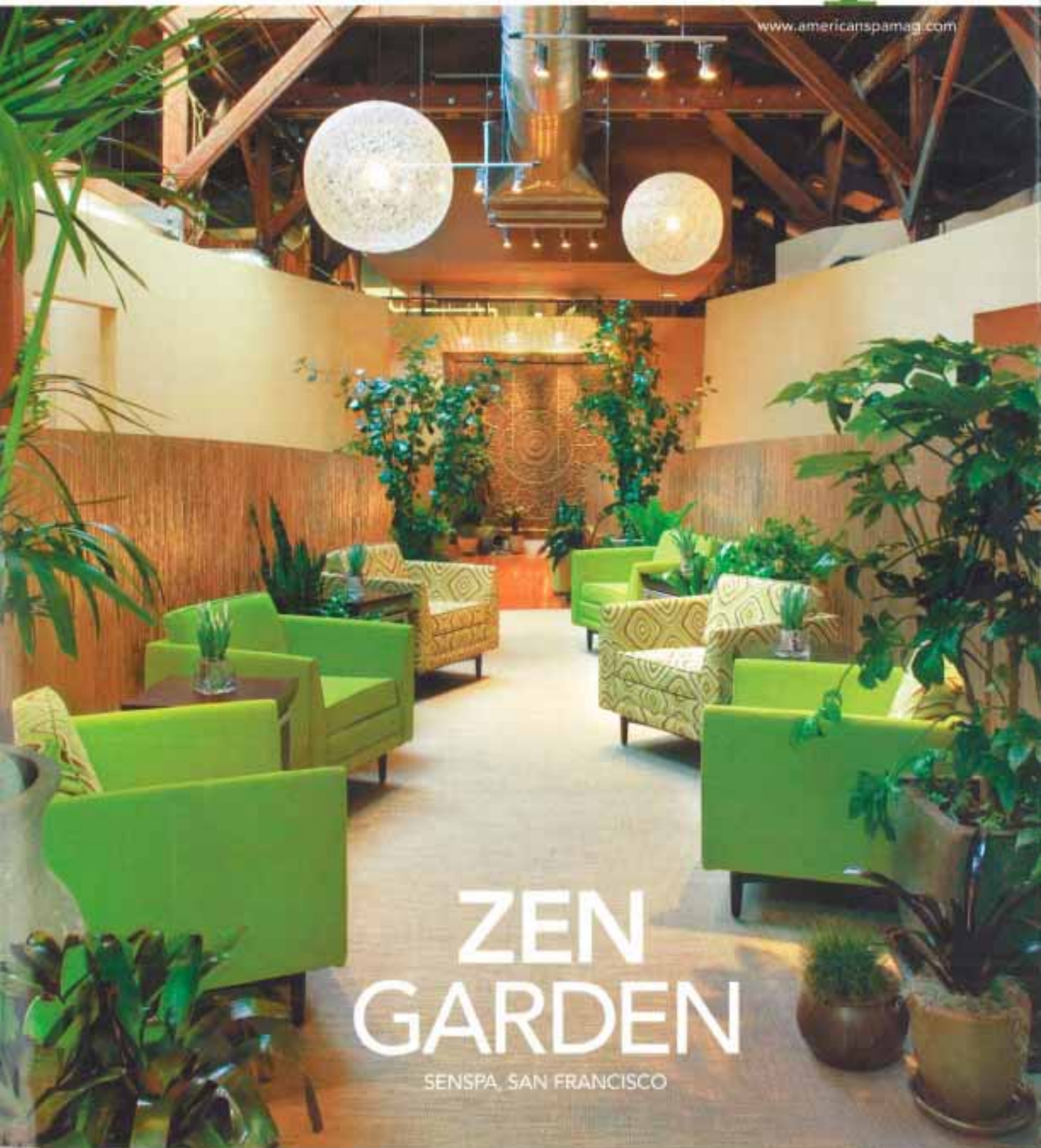


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THE SPA PROFESSIONAL'S CHOICE

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## ZEN GARDEN

SENSPA, SAN FRANCISCO



## SENSATIONAL

AN URBAN RETREAT WITH A DESTINATION SPA MENTALITY GIVES SPA-GOERS IN NORTHERN CALIFORNIA A TASTE OF HOLISTIC HEALING.

WRITTEN BY JULIE KELLER



The story of **SenSpa**, a posh healing haven in San Francisco's Presidio national park, begins, ironically, with a near-fatal car crash. David Spencer, founder and chairman of the 13,000-square-foot spa, was the victim of an automobile accident nearly 20 years ago that resulted in the loss of one leg and the use of one arm. To restore his body and his spirit, he turned to holistic therapy, eventually seeking the solace of a Chinese healer. As his body recovered, his passion for holistic healing and wellness bloomed. It was this passion that sparked his creativity as a graduate student at Stanford University in 2001 when he came up with the idea of creating a one-of-a-kind healing center and spa, and the concept of SenSpa was born.

A few years later, Spencer teamed with Randy Schreck, a marketing executive with a background in spas, and together they created the \$4.8 million retreat that opened in May 2006 and features the mind, body, and spirit offerings of a remote destination spa in a distinctly urban setting. "When I would visit places like Canyon Ranch, I would see people having life-changing experiences, where they would spend time and money to get healthy and make commitments to themselves, then they come back to their real lives," says Schreck, president and general manager of SenSpa. "They sort of settle into a moderately healthy lifestyle. What we wanted to do was create a place where people could incorporate wellness into their everyday lives."

According to Schreck, SenSpa is just that place. A major component of this wellness philosophy is the SenCenter and its Wellness Coaching Program. Elements of this program include the services of a wellness coach and Chinese medicine practitioner, as well as a number of Eastern-inspired therapies

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Randy Schreck says retail plays a "huge role" at the spa by helping guests bring their experiences home.

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such as cupping, acupuncture, guided meditation, and more. Customized month-long programs, or Paths, which include coaching sessions, body and skin treatments, and other healing services, are an integral part of the program, as well. Schreck says he recently had one client, a female bicoastal executive who he describes as "on the verge" who met with the SenCenter wellness coach and embarked on a life-changing program. "She lost sixty-three pounds, just got married, got off two prescription medications, and is simply stunning," he says. "That has been the case with almost every single person who has started with a wellness coaching program—they experience profound effects and are materially changed."

Schreck says the spa's menu is also intended to be life changing, offering treatments that follow one or all of three distinct SenSpa paths: Release, Restore, and Revitalize. Release treatments help cleanse the body of toxins; Restore treatments help bring the body back into balance; and Revitalize treatments boost energy. "When I was first envisioning the menu, it came down to the fact that you've got to get rid of toxins and release things out of the body. Then you have to get yourself to a static place where you can replenish everything you've just unloaded, and finally you've got to revitalize and get your energy back," says Schreck. "I organized the treatments around that philosophy, so each treatment on the menu either fulfills one goal primarily and a subset of the others or all three equally."

The most popular treatment is the SenSpa Muscle Refresher (\$115, 50 minutes; \$170, 80 minutes), a deep tissue massage that is part of the Release series of therapies. Schreck says this is the best-seller for a number of reasons. One, it's a favorite among the spa's male spa-goers, who make up about 40 percent of the clientele. Also, the spa is located in the Presidio, the site of several athletic events, after which team members head to the spa to treat their aching muscles. Finally, it is generally the most recognizable item on the menu and a great way for newbie spa-goers to sample the spa. Another top seller is the Super Hydrating Facial (\$195, 60 minutes), a deeply nourishing session that uses a patented HydraFacial machine to penetrate healing ingredients into the skin. "It's a brilliant concept," says Schreck, who says clients looking for anti-aging benefits and visible results flock to the treatment.

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Guests are encouraged to enjoy the spa beyond the treatment room in one of three relaxation areas.

Two of SenSpa's 14 treatment rooms are ideal for couples looking to relax together.



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Another inspired element of SenSpa is its actual location. While it is accessible to most Bay Area residents, its location in the Presidio, a former military base located on the outskirts of the city that is now a 1,491-acre national park site, helps it maintain a destination spa feel. While the usual foot traffic of a traditional city spa is practically nonexistent, Schreck says the tradeoffs are worth it. "What we do get are absolutely glorious surroundings, so people start to feel the beginnings of an escape when they first get here," he says. "In looking at creating a resort-like setting, we needed a lot of square footage and wanted a place that could accommodate that vision. In the Presidio, we could secure 13,000 square feet."

The expansive space allowed for the creation of a true relaxation retreat. The spa, which is situated in a renovated World War I army barrack, features 14 treatment rooms including two VIP rooms and two couples' suites. The design combines Eastern influences, modern furnishings, and elements of the barrack's original structure. Guests are also encouraged to enjoy the spa far beyond the treatment room in three relaxation areas, which make up about 60 percent of the total space, something that the wellness-minded spa founders felt was imperative even though the areas don't generate revenue. The private SenSpace offers lounge chairs and a floor-to-ceiling cylindrical fireplace. SenSanctuary features raised platforms and upholstered chairs where guests can bask in natural light from the skylights above. SenTea, the spa's tea garden, offers a place to lounge while sipping imported blends of organic teas.

To accommodate guests, both in the relaxation areas and the treatment room, the staff is made up of around 40 people, 14 of whom are massage therapists and six of whom are estheticians. The rest of the team includes attendants, front desk staff, back-of-house personnel, and management. Schreck says that even before the spa opened, training was one of his top priorities and is one of the reasons he thinks he's had such little turnover—nearly all of his original team members are still on board. "Before we opened, I spent an entire month having everyone thoroughly trained in everything," he says. "We also have a monthly meeting where ongoing training occurs."

Schreck also makes it a priority to stay close with his team so he can address problems as they arise. "I have tried to stay tight with my staff through this whole experience because they went through just as much as I went through," he says. "They're starting a business with me, so it is really important to hear their concerns, adapt things operationally, and make sure they have the tools they need to do their jobs."

Even though the spa just celebrated its first anniversary, Schreck and the SenSpa partners are already thinking ahead. Future plans include the development of a branded spa product line. There is also talk of expansion. "We would really love, when the time is right, to take this vision and this model and apply it to different communities where we think it would work well—we have a couple of ideas already," says Schreck. For a spa concept that got its start nearly two decades ago, visions of future grandeur—and a high probability for success—certainly come as no surprise. ■

## SENSPA

San Francisco

owner: David Spence/  
reviewer: Randy Schreck  
opened: May 2006

### CLIENT BASE

65% female  
35% male  
ages 25 and up

### SPACE

13,000 square feet;  
14 treatment rooms

### COST OF SPA

\$5.1 million

### SERVICES

acupuncture, aromatherapy, Ayurveda, body treatments, couples' treatments, cranial/sacral, cupping, energy work, facials, guided meditation, hair and scalp treatments, hammam, LED light therapy, massage, meditation instruction, microdermabrasion, nutrition consultation, packages, prenatal services, Qigong, reflexology, waxing, yoga

### MOST POPULAR

SenSpa Muscle Refresher (\$115, 50 minutes); \$170, 80 minutes) and the Super Hydrating Facial (\$195, 60 minutes)

### PRICE RANGE

\$15 for a Lip/Chin or Tummy Wax to \$1,695 for the Revitalize Path, a 4-week program that includes four wellness coaching sessions, two SenCenter treatments, seven SenBody treatments, and three SenSkin treatments.

### PRODUCT LINES

302 Skin Care, Bindi, Garden of Life, Golden Scarab Essential Oils, MD Skincare, Nature's Plus, OSEA, PFB, Pinec, Red Flower, Sensi, SkinCeuticals, Yarrow Flower Essences

### EQUIPMENT

Boca, Clarisonic, Edge Systems, Living Earth Crafts, Milano Systems, Watersung

### ARCHITECT

Teo Design Group  
(San Francisco)

