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Channeling the Far East on the West Side

By Sherrina Navani

Walking through the front door of **Spa Ja** is like walking through a portal that lifts you to another space and time. Almost immediately the sound, scents, and red and black Eastern-inspired design, transports you to Japan in the late 1800s where her soft demeanor and erotic disposition enhanced a woman's beauty. Spa Ja opened their doors in August 2005, and ever since, Brazilian born owner Giovanna Kufer, and her team of very experienced beauty gurus, have been providing spa experiences, not just services, to all their customers.

As stated on their website, "Spa Ja has an extraordinary capacity to address your unique needs." This philosophy and need to provide treatment for the mind, body and soul, stems from owner Giovanna's personal fight with cancer. A six-year breast cancer survivor, Giovanna believed that her alternative homeopathic and organic treatments, combined with traditional mainstream cancer treatments, like chemotherapy, pushed her cancer into remission.

"I wanted to do a new concept in terms of a spa geared towards total wellness and not to do a treatment if it is not necessary," exclaimed Giovanna. She continued to state that her mantra is "...take care of yourself, listen to your body, think of yourself."



Recently, I was fortunate enough to enjoy a few hours of stress free pampering at Spa Ja. I was led upstairs to my facial "oasis", (which smelled deliciously sweet, I wonder if they knew I had a weakness for sugar,) given a wrap to change into, was encouraged to drink as much water from my very own pitcher, and laid down ready to be cleansed and relaxed to the sounds of chirping birds and beach breeze air.

I was scheduled for an organic micro-dermabrasion, but after a very intense overview of my skin (felt more like she was doing research for her Ph. D.) my aesthetician, Iza Nazareno, strongly recommended that I not treat my blotchy, dry, psoriasis ridden skin

to the abrasive organic crystals. Instead, she suggested nourishing my face with a deep cleansing hydration and oxygen facial. By the way, this was NOT an up sell but rather a lateral move to a facial at the same price point. Needless to say, her recommendation was my command.

Having had many facials at some of New York's top rated spas, I was prepared for the traditional clean, scrub, pinch, mask, GOOD BYE treatment. However, what I received was far beyond my expectations. Iza made sure the room, her hands and the first cleansing step was warm, instantly putting me at ease and not feeling rushed. She encouraged me to take a nap, and leave my face in her hands. A "tri-fold" of a pore cleansing Farmaesthetics™ Mouse, followed by a gauze layer, followed again by another layer of the mouse, was put on my face. A deep sea mist was then sprayed on my psoriasis spots. For those of you familiar with psoriasis, deep sea minerals are very soothing and can actually help the appearance of red blotchy spots.

"Brazilians take skin treatment very seriously..." explains Iza, a Brazilian born native herself, "...we treat acne like a doctor treats acne." Spa Ja only uses natural products, purchased from around the world so I knew the products would not enflame my psoriasis. Spa Ja actually recommends their Cleansing and Oxygen Facial for people with Psoriasis or Eczema; and the biggest plus point, their aestheticians do not make you feel like a leper just because your skin is not perfect. In fact, they have several targeted treatments for skin that is prone to rosacea, hyper-pigmentation, sun damage, age spots and acne.



During my hour and a half facial I was treated to a calendula, arnica and black cohosh oil face massage specifically created for me to aid in the circulation and healing of my skin. It was followed by a 10 minute extraction session and then a Selvert Anti-Stress and Sensitive Tender Mask. During my 20-minute mask treatment, Iza never left the room or me alone. I am all too familiar with the famous "mask and leave" portion of the facial where most aestheticians leave the room when their client is given a mask, leaving the customer to feel a bit abandoned. However, during my masking phase Iza requested her peer to work on my feet while she unknotted the day's stresses from my shoulders, arms and abdomen. YES, you read right, abdomen, no need to tell you what a great feeling that was!

My final steps were another face massage with vitamins A, E and C oils, followed by a hot towel to close my pores. The last step

was the O2 machine, used to blast an extra spurt of oxygen directly to my skin, leaving my face soft, glowing and refreshed.

Spa Ja offers exceptional service and a large array of treatments from a non-invasive cellulite treatment to Oceana 5, a new futuristic-looking hydrotherapy capsule that provides a wide range of therapies for weight loss, pain and stress relief. Their piece-de-resistance, be sure to enjoy a Brazilian pedicure given by a native Brazilian. You are tucked away in your own private pedicure alcove, where you alone or you and guest can receive a heavenly foot treatment, and a cuticle cleaning like you've never experienced before. Plus, Spa Ja uses porcelain bowls instead of tubs so you don't have to worry about bacteria.

If you're not convinced yet, take a walk over and peruse the many natural skin care and tea products available in the store; the selection is so broad it could be its own standalone store. But if that's still not enough, the soon-to-open rooftop Japanese garden will do the trick.

Spa Ja is located at 300 W 56th Street just west of Eighth Ave. 212.245.7566. Visit www.spaja.com for a list of services and while you are there be sure to shop their mini-mall of products from all over the world.