



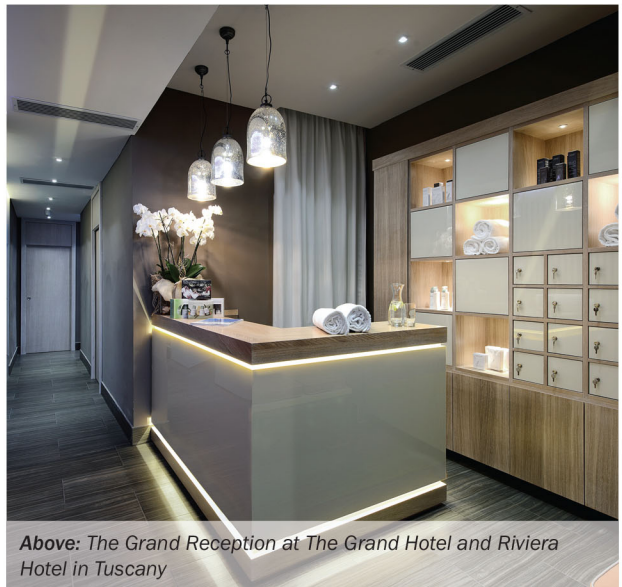
Trend: Spa Design

By **Simone Speciale Luchinat**
Founder, **S&L Associati**, Florence

Simone Speciale Luchinat, studied Architecture at the University of Florence, before training as an architect at Archea Associati and after in Milan and London. He has experienced designing for A-list singers on their Italian homes before he formed S&L Associati in 2002. S&L Associati is an architectural and interior design company that specialises in architecture, interior design and contract design working mainly in Europe on hotels, spa's, restaurants, ski chalets, private houses and estates. Simone believes that "The style can be different as it is the harmony and the atmosphere that makes a unique and unforgettable place".

Up until a few years ago, having a spa was only an essential for resort hotels, now having a spa, even a small one, is considered a basic requirement for any hotel that wants to provide 5* facilities for its customers. Wellness tourism is booming, and spa tourism makes up about 41 per cent of that expenditure, representing a \$179.7 billion market (Source: Global Wellness Tourism Economy Report, 2014). With a figure that big, it's no wonder hotels want a cut.

Alongside the larger hotels, smaller hotels have also made the move to add wellness centres to their properties, focussing on this area to grow their business. Whilst nearly every hotelier is trying to incorporate a mini spa –



Above: The Grand Reception at The Grand Hotel and Riviera Hotel in Tuscany

from the ubiquitous steam room and sauna, to facilities for special treatments, I feel it's the actual design that can really make a difference in a spa.

The most important requirement is to create a dreamlike atmosphere. Those who enter the spa must be surprised and excited, whilst encouraged to relax and unwind. All of the senses must be utilised to achieve this: music and aromas are up to the client, but we work with lighting and materials to stimulate the guest's senses of sight and touch. Every client wants us to build a unique venue, which will remain in the mind of the guest, whilst combining the charm and aesthetics with practicality to create an easy to use and enjoyable space.

Today more than ever, guests are used to spending time in hotel spas and they expect efficient and special places that leave them with a sense of well-deserved wellbeing. It is also important for designers to bear in mind the changing clientele of spas.

Whereas a few years ago a high percentage of spa users were female, increasing numbers of men are seeking out that sense of wellbeing. In an interview with Condé Nast Traveller back in 2013, Susan Harmsworth Founder and CEO of ESPA, commented that "the number of men at our hotel spas keeps rising, and today men make up between 30 and 50 per cent of our total customer base." This means that whereas in previous interiors designers have been able to sway towards a traditional feminine design focus, every space must be more gender neutral. All of this means that for a spa to truly stand out, it is crucial to have unique elements, designs not seen or used before.

In my designs I feature



Above: Relaxation seating areas are crucial and expected in all spa designs

waterfalls and glass-lit dividing walls. I also like to incorporate 'green' walls, using live plants, which can be easily maintained and fed by internal irrigation. These are received very well with clients and guests alike; not only are they visually very pleasing, but studies have shown links between live plants and increased creativity, wellbeing and healing times. Seemingly I am not alone in seeing the benefits and harmony of using green walls within spas; in recent years the use of live greenery has become more and more popular. In larger spas, usually located in some of the biggest hotels in the world, this can even stretch to the installation of a green roof, which can offer additional relaxation space for guests. In smaller spas,

the use of a green wall gives the same sense of wellbeing just in a more intimate space.

The world of spas is constantly changing and has design in them have made great strides in recent years. In recent projects I have seen clients change the location of spas from the usual basement space on to the top level of their buildings, giving the spa panoramic views. This makes for a completely different set of challenges than the usual underground spa, where there is typically a complete lack of natural light. The main challenge lies in trying to get different styles and atmospheres, whilst always following the spirit of the venue and the clients wishes, and bearing in mind the most

important characteristics of consistency.

One of my company's latest achievements was a small spa at the Grand Hotel and Riviera Hotel in Tuscany, Italy. The client wanted to have a small wellness centre within the hotel in order to give the guests more leisure facilities in addition to the existing swimming outdoor pool and deck. The greatest difficulty in the design was the total size of the space available: just 110 square meters!

We got around this challenge by making every inch of space productive, in a wholly modern design. Mini lockers were designed into the display cabinet in the reception, and the custom-made reception desk is a multi-functional space with several purposes. So as well as being an inviting entrance to set

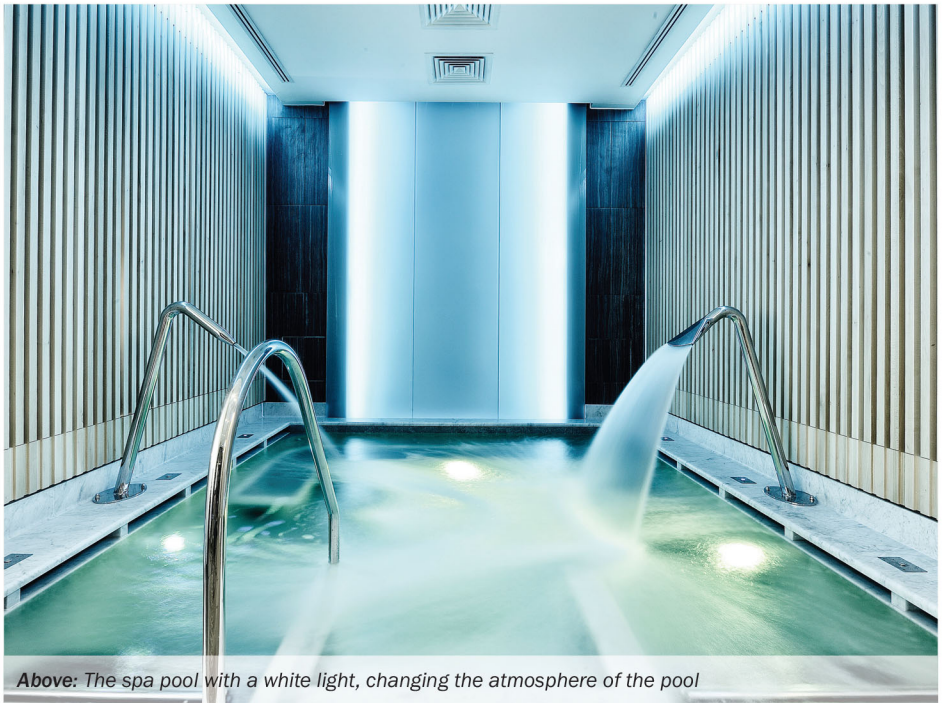
the tone for the spa, the reception is practical and has space to display products for sale, storage for water bottles and towels and store guests' valuables, whilst looking aesthetically pleasing. We also designed artwork to sit over the spa lighting switchboard to maintain the clean aesthetic. All of the wooden furniture and doors in the reception, relaxation and changing rooms use pickled oak, with walls painted in a classic taupe to promote a calming atmosphere, further enhanced by the chocolate tiles in the wet area – a recurring tonal theme through the entire spa floor. To further make the most of the limited space we designed a side-by-side sauna and rest room that faces the spa pool, so all three of the main spa components are immediately available without any corridors.

In the vitality pool, the back wall is designed with a waterfall flowing over a large glass backlit wall. The spa itself features various water features around the pool edge to promote relaxation.

A wall of ceiling to floor white curtains, which cleverly conceal an unattractive view of a tiny dark courtyard, softens the relaxation area. Lounging chairs and cane stools are used to echo the hotels beachside location, and bring a beachside feel into the space where guests can read or listen to music and cool down.

The spa opened in July 2014 and has already become a real asset and marketing feature to the hotel, and is proving very popular with guests – especially when it rains!

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Above: The spa pool with a white light, changing the atmosphere of the pool