

# Girls Day

## the spa experience

by Leigh Hartsell Miller

My girlfriend Vicki has always known how to celebrate her birthday. She introduced me to the concept of the birthday week and, yes, even the birthday month. This girl celebrates in style. After her most recent birthday, enjoyed with friends in Charleston, Vicki asked me, "Have you ever had a hot stone massage? Oh my gosh, it was ninety minutes of heaven!" Wow. Her husband and sister-in-law, who surprised her with the gift, earn major bonus points for this. Sounds absolutely fabulous!

So I started to ponder: spa and salon experiences have become a serious business over the last several years. Women and men of the Upstate are indulging themselves in this type of luxury at a rate not seen in the area before; the proliferation and range of services offered in the Upstate has grown at an astonishing rate.

I asked Susan McAlister, owner of Head Quarters Salon & Spa in Greenville, what she thought. "When people come in for spa services, I always tell them 'this is your time NOT to think,'" she says. "Spa services are great. I always look at it as a time for our clients to chill-out, enjoy the services and relax." Her services include everything from salon services with cut and coloring and make-up artistry to waxing, nail services, and massage. A variety of body treatments, including vichy shower, seaweed body wraps and hydrotherapy baths are also available. Susan grew up in the salon business and gives the effort her full attention. "We have a lot of time under our belt," she says. "But we are constantly looking at ways to offer new experiences for our clients while keeping our services affordable." Her establishment also provides on-site services for hotels in the area and regularly tends to performers at both the BHL Center and Peace Center in Greenville.



Elaine Finley of Merle Norman Cosmetics demonstrates spa-at-home products for a customer.



Make-up techniques are part of the services offered at The Spa at West End.

At The Spa at West End in Greenville, I sank into a hydrotherapy bath for a little milk and silk treatment. The bath was large and deep with hundreds of jets that alternately pounded my back, waist and hips, and legs. The aroma was sweet, candles were lit, rose petals strewn about, and music played softly. "You'll sleep so well after this," proprietor Stacy Coulter told me. And she was right - I did. Stacy and her husband, Dwayne, spent years researching the spa industry before opening The Spa at West End doors about two years ago. She advises potential clients to do their homework before paying for spa services. "Determine what you're looking for," she advises. "And go find it. You may want to take a tour of the facility and find out the extent of the services. You may have a back issue or are looking for a day experience - find out what is the most appropriate place for you to be." Affiliated with the Day Spa Association and the International Spa Association, The Spa at West



# Out:



*A client enjoys a pedicure on the pedicure "throne" at The Spa at West End. (above)*

End follows a set of guidelines established by the associations to distinguish day spas from facilities that offer spa services.

"This is a growth industry," Stacy adds. "People are more educated about spa services today. It's not just an elitist hobby. Everyone can indulge in the physical and emotional benefits from spa service. A lot of our clients seek us out during stressful periods of life: they may have lost loved ones, are new to the area, or have lost a job. People seek us out for a place to escape. A spa is one of the few places that you can go to rejuvenate, put gas back into your system. It's our responsibility to make sure that we take care of our clients. Anytime you're within somebody's comfort zone, it's a very revealing experience."

Nicole Martin, a licensed skin esthetician who runs her business at Cindy's Day Spa in Greenville, says her clients benefit from her services by the personalized cleansing and moisturizing program she offers. "I do a skin analysis at the beginning of every treatment," she explains. The process allows her to see each individual's needs. "Your skin is hit everyday by the elements," she says. "This type of treatment is not about pampering, it's about wellness." I decided to see for myself. After a 60-minute treatment that included a facial massage, deep cleaning with a hot towel, cleansing, moisturizing, and even a neck, arm and foot massage, I found myself zombie-like. Nicole had provided a quiet, cool environment, and went courteously about her tasks, allowing me to relax. I was surprised that it took me a few minutes to gather my wits. Several days later, my skin still showed visible benefits: the dryness that I usually experience during the winter was gone, and even those not-so-teeny-anymore lines around my eyes seemed to have faded. I am now adding an occasional facial to my routine.

Elaine Finley, owner of the Merle Norman Cosmetics boutiques at Haywood Mall and on Augusta Road in Greenville, says women can take advantage of spa-at-home products. "With today's lifestyle, involving kids, home, work, and spouse, women may not have extra time for themselves, although they still want to look and feel good." A third generation proprietor of Merle Norman products, she



*Skin esthetician Nicole Martin applies facial treatment to her client. (above)*

*Hair services are just one of the many services offered at Head Quarters in Greenville. (right)*



is familiar with the research and development that has gone into the over 70-year-old company's skin care line. "There are several things that need to be done every day in order to take care of the skin," she explains. "The skin needs to be cleansed, exfoliated, moisturized, and protected from the environment. Our products provide a deeper cleansing, exfoliation and moisturizing, but can be used while you're at home at your convenience." Cathy Hanks' Merle Norman studio in Anderson is an example of a franchise that offers spa services without being a full-blown day spa. Massage, facials, and nail services are offered in addition to the cosmetic line. "It's stress-relieving and relaxing to take advantage of these services," Cathy says. "To be pampered is wonderful." Indeed.