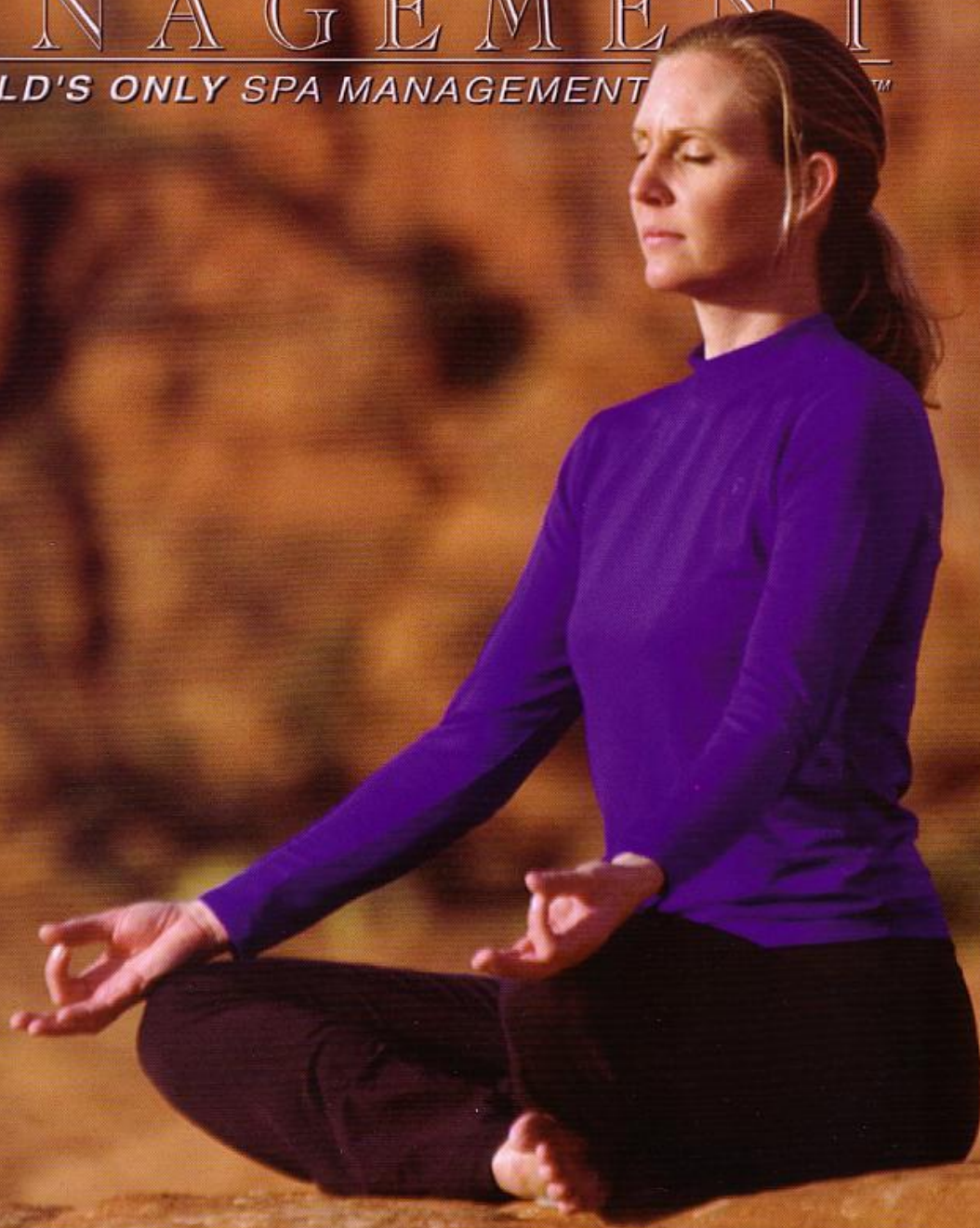


SPA®



MANAGEMENT

THE WORLD'S ONLY SPA MANAGEMENT JOURNAL™



*RED MOUNTAIN RESORT & SPA
St George, UTAH*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Sam Margulies is an architectural and interior designer from France. Located in Montreal, Canada, his firm, ATMOSPHERE SPA DESIGN, is specialized in the conception and design of spas, medical spas and resorts across the world, with a portfolio of more than 120 projects around the world.

He is regularly invited as a lecturer in a variety of professional shows and conferences, and his articles are published in a variety of professional magazines.

In Sam's view, a floor plan must conciliate the purpose of the spa, the owner's vision as well as the projected client experience, within a well conceived traffic flow supporting the highest surface utilization rate, optimizing the business potential of each specific project.

Sam Margulies is recognized as a world leading expert in spas, medical spas and resorts conception and design.

For more information:
ATMOSPHERE SPA DESIGN
Tel: (514)332-8941
www.atmospherespadesign.com
Email: atmospheredesign@hotmail.com



SPA Floor Plans Conception & Design



By Sam Margulies

When setting-up a new spa, one must have a well thought business plan, as well as an efficient management system, treatments menu, and marketing plan. However, all these elements must be supported by a structure that will allow them to be useful. That structure is the physical existence of the spa. Because no matter how good your business plan and management team are, if your floor plan is not optimizing the "utilization rate" of the surface within an intelligent traffic pattern, you will never be able to achieve a healthy business format.

As an architectural designer specialized in spas, I regularly receive plans from architectural firms to assess and analyze. In most cases, the utilization rate of the square footage is rarely above 55% and the traffic pattern is not adequate for the needs of a spa, which brings the utilization rate even lower.

In a typical spa, there are two types of spaces. This is true for any type of spa, be it medical spa, salon/spa, fitness/spa, wellness/spa, destination spa, or any other type of spa. The spaces which are usually referred to as either "Income Generator (IG)," such as the treatment rooms and the retail area, or those that do not directly generate income (NIG=Non Income Generator), but without which the spa could not function. I have, for example, received some floor plans for assessment, where only about 22% of the square footage was IG. Try to imagine investing one million dollars in a venture where only \$220,000 will generate revenue. I am not saying that 100% of the structure must be IG, but there must, however, be a reasonable and intelligent balance.

In other words, the best business plan will be worthless if it is not supported by an adequate structure. The conception and design of the floor plan of a spa is the element that will have the most

SPA DESIGN

WHAT ABOUT A MANAGEMENT SYSTEM - TREATMENTS MENU - MARKETING PLAN

Different areas in a spa have different and sometime non compatible energy level. For example, a hair salon is a high energy space, while the spa treatment area must be a calming energy. It doesn't mean that you cannot have both areas in the same structure; it means that you have to design your floor plan in a way that each space's energy level will be respected without one overpowering the other.

dramatic influence on the business viability of the spa. Although the colors of the walls and the type of flooring material are important elements, it is not what eventually "makes it or breaks it."

From a conceptual perspective, a spa floor plan must be based on four principles:

1. The purpose of the spa.
2. The vision of the owner.
3. The projected client experience.
4. The technical requirements.

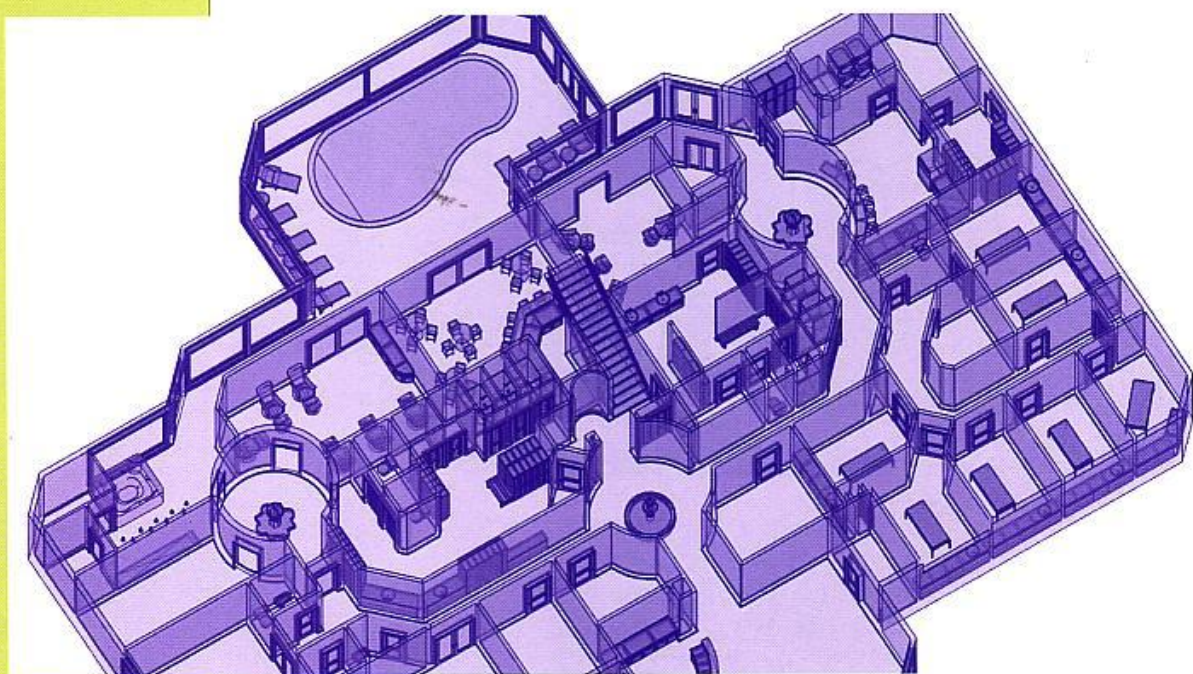
The purpose, the vision and the client experience must be defined prior to any other elements because they are the basis of the project. Before anything else, you must have a meeting with your spa architectural designer where he/she will ask all the necessary questions, leading you to define together the real profile of the whole project. Based on these findings, the spa designer will be able to define the fourth principle: the technical requirements.

When this is achieved, your spa designer can begin the conception of the first skeleton of the floor plan. By the way, now a day, most professionals work on computerized systems that allow them to create a first skeleton within a couple of days. What I do recommend is to work with a spa designer that will

combine the first meeting and the creation of the first skeleton, so he/she will be able, within the first two to three days, to present to you the first skeleton. In addition, the designer would possibly present to you a 3D version, allowing you to have a virtual visit of the skeleton, as if you were walking inside a built structure, giving you a better understanding and feeling of this first floor plan. This procedure allows an immediate feed-back on the floor plan and the traffic pattern, gaining understanding and speeding the conception process of the floor plan.

Once the purpose, the vision and the experience are defined, the spa designer and you have to develop the core of the floor plan that is the "sequenced pattern of the spa life". Let's take an example of what this would entail. If your sequence pattern begins with the check-in followed by changing in the locker-room, it must translate into the floor plan by a direct and short way from the check-in desk to the locker-room. If the floor plan is designed with the locker rooms separated from the front desk by treatment rooms or relaxation room, then your floor plan will not support the purpose, vision and experience. So, the best design process is to create a typical visit pattern, and conceive the floor plan according to the visit pattern.

Let's take an example of a typical visit pattern: the client arrives, checks-in and goes to change in the



SPA DESIGN

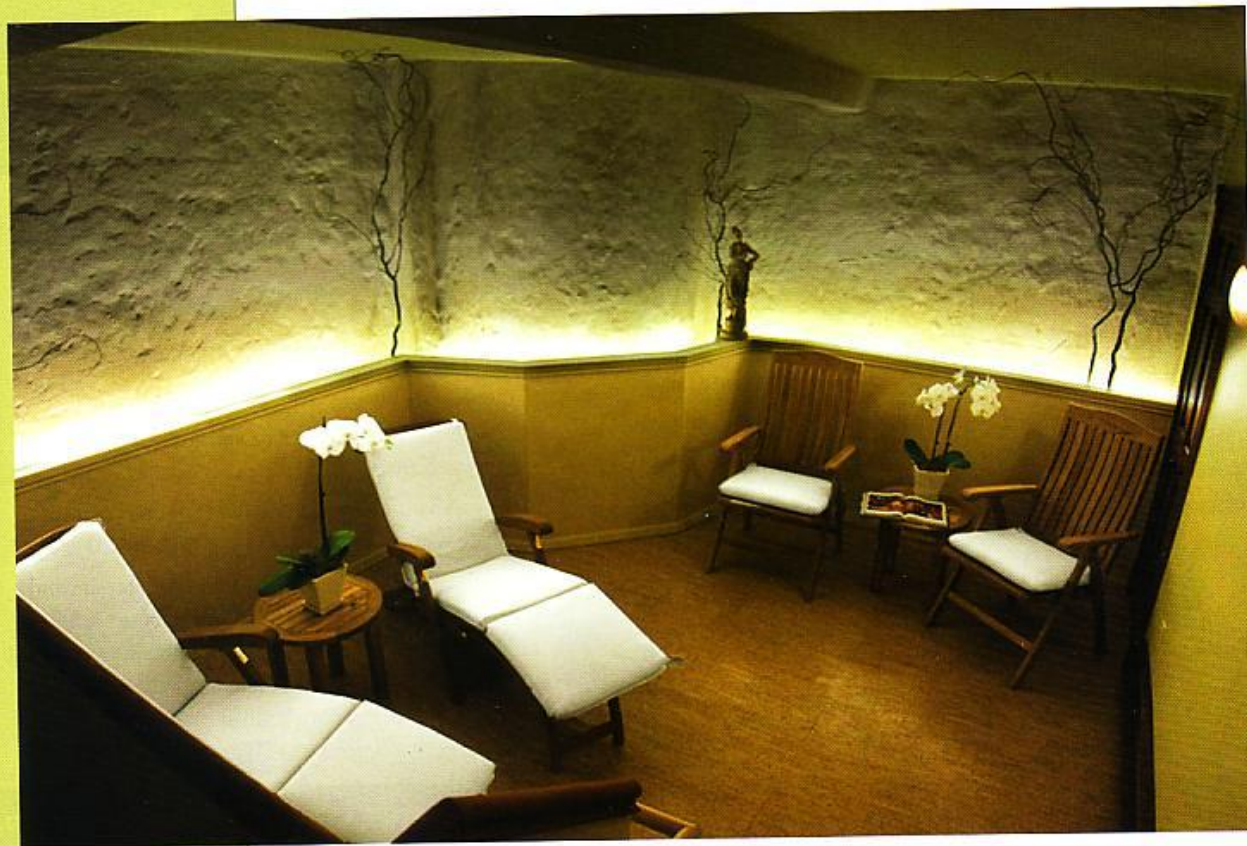
THE STRUCTURE IS THE PHYSICAL EXISTENCE OF THE SPA

More treatment rooms may not always result in more treatments and more income. In some cases, it just translates into higher costs and more operational expenses. It is the utilization rate of each treatment room that makes all the difference.

locker room. When ready, the client goes to the relaxation/waiting room to wait for being picked up by the therapist to be escorted to the treatment room. Between treatments, the client might need to take a shower and/or visit the bathroom. After the last treatment, the client goes back to the locker room to change, apply make-up, get some retail products, check-out and go home. With such typical sequence, you need to conceive the floor plan accordingly, and the physical location of the spaces must correspond to the "sequenced pattern of the spa life." Consequently, when conceiving the floor plan, the first space upon entrance must include the check-in desk, followed by a short access to the locker rooms, followed by a short or even direct access to the relaxation/waiting area. Once in a treatment room, there need to be access to a shower and a bathroom, without having to go back to the locker room through the relaxation area, so these amenities need to be included in the treatment area. It is not only for the comfort of the client that this is important, but it is also a critical issue for the general management of the appointments, as well as for the square footage utilization rate. If the clients have to go back to the

locker room every time they need to go to the bathroom or to take a shower, it means that you have to increase the average time per treatment. It might be only 2 to 3 minutes each time, but multiply this by the number of treatments per year, and you would end up with a significantly serious loss in revenue. As for the utilization rate of the space, this increased traffic to the locker rooms would translate into oversized locker rooms where it is not only the additional space for toilets and showers, but also an increased traffic space requirement allowing more clients at one time in that amenity space of the spa.

Different areas in a spa have different and sometime non compatible energy level. For example, a hair salon is a high energy space, while the spa treatment area must be a calming energy. It doesn't mean that you cannot have both areas in the same structure; it means that you have to design your floor plan in a way that each space's energy level will be respected without one over-powering the other. Let's further clarify that statement: if you, for example, design a salon/spa where the reception is directly within, or open to, the hair salon, it means that the energy level of the reception/check-out space will have the same



IS YOUR FLOOR PLAN OPTIMIZERS SURFACE UTILIZATION RATE?

high-energy as the salon. For a client that comes for a relaxing experience in the spa, they will be welcomed in the structure within a none-calming high-energy space, and upon checking out, would go from the quiet spa space to the high-energy salon like vibes, before they can check-out. This might ruin their spa experience before even checking-out, and your chances of seeing this client coming back are slim to none. This means that your marketing efforts will have to be greater to get new clients to fill up your spa business, which will translate into higher cost to bring the client in the door. In order to avoid such situation, you might want to separate your reception desk from the salon space, so each and every client coming through the door will be welcomed in a manner corresponding to the purpose of her visit.

More treatment rooms may not always result in more treatments and more income. In some cases, it just translates into higher costs and more operational expenses. It is the utilization rate of each treatment room that makes all the difference. In order to reach the best utilization rate for each treatment room, your spa designer must conceive the plans with a deep knowledge of how a spa operates, what are the general and specific needs of a spa, as well as of your specific project, incorporating the correct amenities for the structure and creating the best traffic flow with the adequate supporting spaces.

The floor plan is the most important element in the creation of the client experience. If the treatment rooms are too small, the reception area is too cramped, or the corridors too narrow, the client experience will become negative. For a treatment of one hour at \$100 in a too small treatment room, the client will become impatient and the one hour will feel too long and the \$100 will be perceived as overcharge. Such an experience might turn into a statement that would sound something like "I paid \$100 and I was parked in an over-sized closet for too long." This would then turn into a bad word-of-mouth for the business and call for a constant damage control. The key word here is "perceived." It is the perception of the client that prevails and that will decide the overall experience of the client, including the possibilities of return visits to your spa. It won't matter how good the treatment was, if the perception of the experience of the client was bad or, even if it was just uncomfortable.

From a business perspective, the location of the different spaces in the spa is definitely a critical aspect. Let's look at two different examples. If a dispensary is located too far from the treatment rooms, it will add two minutes to the average treatment/time allowance. Two minutes added to each treatment, because of an incorrect floor plan, can lead to a loss of direct income of several hundreds or thousands of dollars per year. Other serious mistakes in the spa design will prevent your clientele repeat business and, will multiply your marketing expenses in order to keep a viable utilization rate of your treatment rooms.

Some other common mistakes would be related to the "high-tech" treatments. As an example, some laser companies are proposing to you their



SPA DESIGN

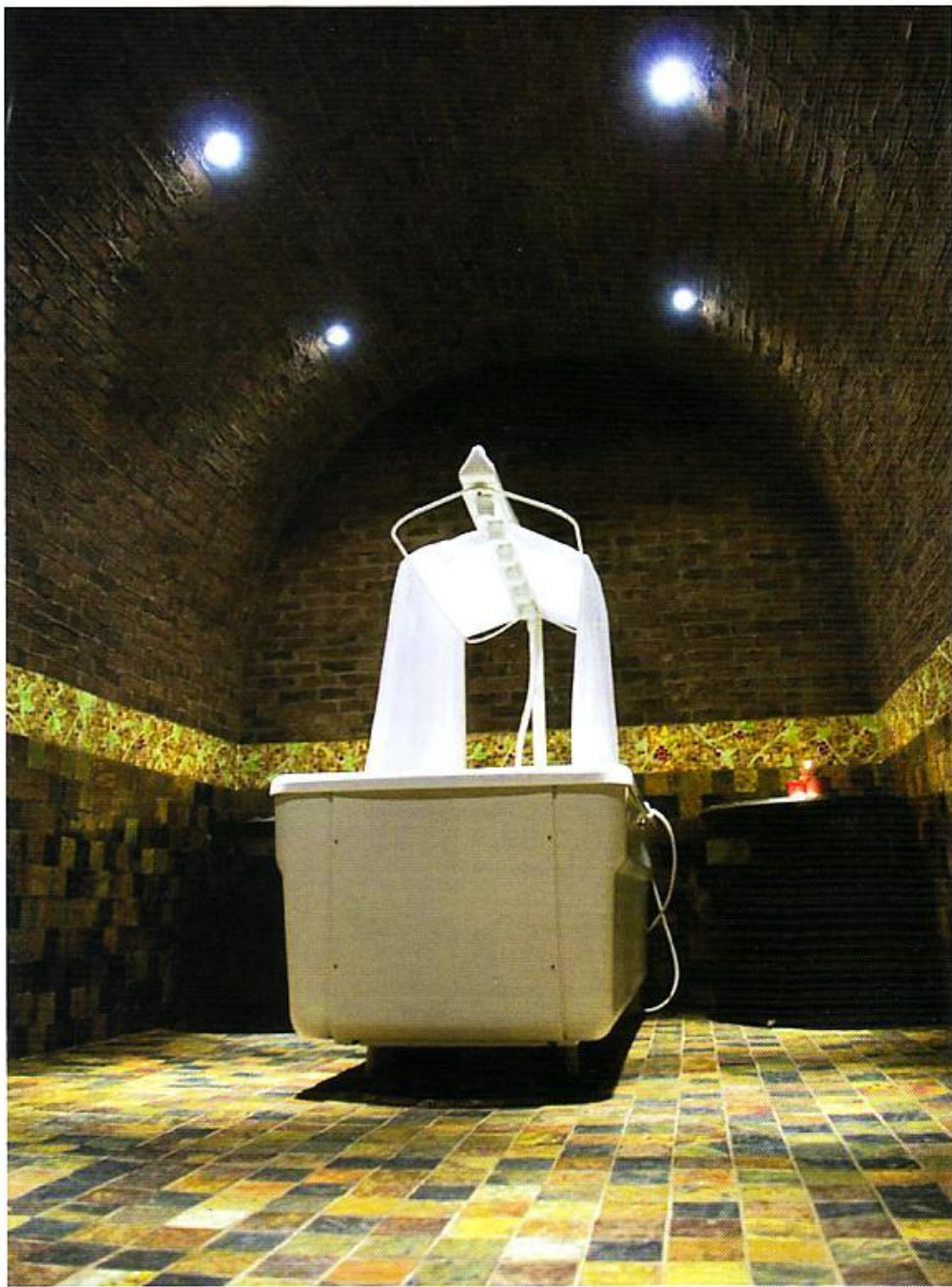
IF NOT YOU CAN'T ACHIEVE A HEALTHY BUSINESS FORMAT

equipment in 110 volts or in 220 volts. Most spas buy them in 110V because of not having the power structure to accommodate 220V. But if you know that the recovery time between two pulses can be divided by 3 to 4 with a 220V unit, it means that you can get the same treatment results in 15 minutes versus an hour, multiplying your direct income per square foot utilization rate by 3 to 4 times! So while conceiving your floor plan, lighting and power

plans, (then?) your spa designer MUST know what would be the technical requirements for the current top notch equipment, as well as for future.

Going back to the utilization rate of the spa, then most of the time, a project begins with a detailed business plan. When that plan is ready, one needs to build or to find an existing location that will meet the needs of the business plan and support its goals.

When you have your business plan ready and before you begin to look for a location, I highly suggest to you to spend some time with an experienced spa designer. The designer would help in defining the type and the dimension of the location you need, in order to support the projections of your business plan, giving to you the right direction to develop the kind of business you expect to have.



SPA SQUARE FOOTAGE UTILIZATION IS RARELY ABOVE 55%

The more product units per shelf square foot, the lowest will be the "perceived value" of the product. This is the merchandising principle of stores like the Dollar Store, or Wal-Mart. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the principle is that for the highest priced product, the lowest must be the number of units of this product on the shelves, in order to increase the "perceived value" of the product.

For example, it is necessary to estimate some space for locker rooms, relaxation area, perhaps a separate space for men and women, a staff break room, a dispensary, utility room, proper corridors and so on. All these additional spaces would not generate direct revenue, but without a corridor, there would not be proper access to the treatment rooms and without utility room, you would not be able to provide heat, AC, light nor water for the treatment rooms. With just a few treatment rooms, it would not be necessary to provide locker rooms. When, however, exceeding a certain number of rooms, in order to keep the services at an acceptable level, as well as the utilization rate of each room, you need to incorporate changing rooms or locker rooms; otherwise, the utilization ratio of treatments per room would drop dramatically. Then the question becomes: how big the locker rooms need to be? This would depend on the number of treatment rooms. Based on the number of rooms and amenities, your spa designer needs to calculate how many people could be at the same time in the locker room, and make sure that you have enough space for the clients to feel comfortable. In other words, for every square foot that will generate direct income (IG), you need to have additional space that will not generate any direct income (NIG), but without which your spa

will not be able to be fully operational. The smaller the spa is, the bigger becomes the square feet percentage that would be required for the NIG spaces. On the other hand the bigger the spa, then the smaller would be the required square feet percentage for the NIG. The reason for this is simple. With only one or two treatment rooms, you will still need one to two ADA (handicap accessible) restrooms, depending on the federal, state and local construction codes, but with 10, 20 or 30 treatment rooms, your ratio toilet/treatment room will drop considerably.

When you have your business plan ready and before you begin to look for a location, I highly suggest to you to spend some time with an experienced spa designer. The designer would help in defining the type and the dimension of the location you need, in order to support the projections of your business plan, giving to you the right direction to develop the kind of business you expect to have.

Another important issue would be the spa's retail space. Most spa consultants agree on the fact that, a minimum of 30% of your total revenue must be generated through products' retail sales. This doesn't mean that you need to dedicate 30% of the total square footage to the retail space, but in order to

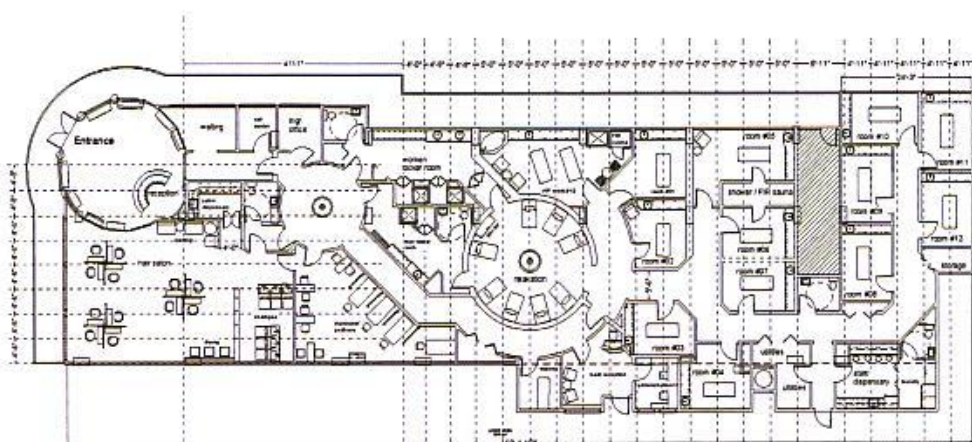


IS SPA TRAFFIC PATTERN ADEQUATE FOR YOUR SPA NEEDS?

When opening a spa, you are investing most of your money or, of the banker's or investor's money, in the construction of the spa, which is based on the conception and design of the floor plan.

Therefore, it is in the conception and design of the spa that you cannot afford to make any mistakes.

My best advice would be, to hire a good spa architectural designer.



achieve such retail sales' volume; it would obviously require a sizable space for retail. The issue here is not only the square footage of the retail area, but also how it is designed. It is actually a floor plan, within the floor plan of the spa. As a first principle, remember that the "perceived quality" of your retail products is the reflection of the quality of the treatments offered in your spa. The most accepted merchandising principle is as follows: For the lowest priced product, there must be the highest number of units of this product on the shelves, to maximize the shelf space income.

The more product units per shelf square foot, the lowest will be the "perceived value" of the product. This is the merchandising principle of stores like the Dollar Store, or Wal-Mart. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the principle is that for the highest priced product, the lowest must be the number of units of this product on the shelves, in order to increase the "perceived value" of the product. This explains why you can walk on Rodeo Drive in Hollywood and see twelve feet wide store windows, with only three products on display.

This is the merchandising principle followed by the high-end boutiques like Cartier, Channel and others. So, you have to decide what level of "perceived value" you want to project with the retail space of your spa.

The incorporation of Feng Shui or Vastu Shastra principles and techniques have an important influence in the conception and design of a Spa.

There is no simple way to use Vastu Shastra or Feng Shui, but you can follow the core and most

important principle: the energy flow. In order to comprehend this principle, imagine that your spa is the bed of a river, and that the goal of the design is to create the smoothest path for that river to flow, in every part of your spa. Visualize a spa where a wall would be built just a few feet from the front door. The water of the river would splash against the wall, and the river (energy) would not flow smoothly inside the spa. Now, imagine that the retail area of the spa would be so cluttered that you would need to zigzag all over, to go from one side of the space to the other. The river would have to separate and rush around the obstacles, and the calm river would become rapids; not exactly the kind of energy you want to create in a spa.

Every aspect in a spa must be thought of, in order to create the right experience for the clients. The principles of energy flow are an essential part, in the creation of this experience, by creating a structure within which the energy flow will be well balanced.

In conclusion, remember this: When opening a spa, you are investing most of your money or, of the banker's or investor's money, in the construction of the spa, which is based on the conception and design of the floor plan. Therefore, it is in the conception and design of the spa that you cannot afford to make any mistakes. My best advice would be, to hire a good spa architectural designer. You should hire one, who is really specialized in the spa industry, which practices Feng Shui, Vastu Shastra, or other arts of the environment, and understands the principles of energy flow. If you are about to build or redesign a spa, then open the door to the river and look at the water flowing evenly and harmoniously into the spa. ■