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THE SPA PROFESSIONAL'S CHOICE

# american spa

## SLOPESIDE SPA-ING

THE RITZ-CARLTON HIGHLANDS  
SPA, LAKE TAHOE (TRUCKEE, CA)





# features

a closer look at some of the spas that are making news in the industry both here and abroad

## 74 THE PEAK OF PAMPERING

The Ritz-Carlton Highlands Spa,  
Lake Tahoe (Truckee, CA)

## 78 PLACID PLEASURES

The Spa at Mirror Lake Inn  
and The Spa at Whiteface  
Lodge (Lake Placid, NY)

At The Ritz-Carlton Highlands, Lake Tahoe natural elements, such as the granite used to construct the 55-foot fireplace located in the Living Room, are used throughout the resort and its spa to lend a clean, earthy vibe to the décor. For the story, turn to page 74.

# THE PEAK OF PAMPERING

Explore this elegant escape in Northern Tahoe, which caters to wellness seekers and outdoor enthusiasts who have a love of the mountains and first-class service.

WRITTEN BY CRISTINA DE OLIVEIRA

Seamlessly blending into its environment, The Ritz-Carlton Highlands, Lake Tahoe is situated mid-mountain, providing ski-in/ski-out access to its active guests.

**W**ITH NARY AN ANTLER CHANDELIER or a bear-skin rug in sight, The Ritz-Carlton Highlands, Lake Tahoe (Truckee, CA), which opened in December, has successfully added a glam factor to the classic idea of a rustic mountain lodge. The first LEED-designed Ritz-Carlton and the second mountain resort in the hotel group's portfolio (Bachelor Gulch, CO, opened in 2002), the building harmoniously blends into its environment and is discreetly tucked mid-mountain in a forest of pine trees at the Northstar-at-Tahoe ski resort.

Inspired by iconic 20th century lodges, such as the Timberline Lodge on Oregon's Mt. Hood, the Ritz was constructed with natural materials that were primed and polished to perfection. At the heart of the resort is the Living Room, a communal area that surrounds a stately 55-foot granite fireplace column. Cozy furnishings are sprinkled throughout this contemporary space, which also features smooth caramel-colored wooden beams on the ceiling that glisten in the natural sunlight that streams in from 25-foot windows. Sure, fireplaces and flannel are spotted around this ski-in/ski-out resort, but so are martinis and Moncler jackets alongside guests, who would prefer to not sacrifice an ounce of chic for the sake of being sporty.

The refined, yet cozy, alpine-inspired aesthetic of the resort is carried through to the 17,000-square-foot **Ritz-Carlton Highlands Spa, Lake Tahoe**, which features a consistent, yet subtle, theme. "The spa design celebrates the magic of the High Sierras at Lake Tahoe," says Stanford Hughes of San Francisco-based BraytonHughes Design Studios. "The feeling the spa was intended to evoke was that of being suspended in the forest above Lake Tahoe, connecting with the mountain setting visually and metaphorically in a natural, elegant, and comfortable manner."

Upon entering the spa, guests are immediately introduced to this woods-and-water idea by simply taking in the panoramic view of the mountains and enjoying the natural light, which streams in through floor-to-ceiling windows. These windows run

along one side of the spa on the floor that is home to the reception desk, retail area, salon, and state-of-the-art fitness center. "The slopeside location of our spa and the expansive views of the forest are integral to the experience we offer, as well as the sense of place we deliver," says spa director Michael Taylor. "We want to provide a place where guests can relax, restore, and rejuvenate in an amazing setting—a warm space that complements the refreshing mountain experience."

Paying a tangible homage to the region's woodsy environment, many of the building materials used in the spa, according to Hughes, came from the western region of the U.S., including stone from Montana and Douglas fir columns and cedar panels from the Pacific Northwest. Even the wild yarrow flowers that are suspended in glass panels behind the registration desk come from the Sierra foothills.

Leaving the bright lights behind them, guests descend to the warmly lit treatment area on the ground level, which is where the true relaxation occurs and the 16 treatment rooms—all named after native blooms—are located. This experience of heading downstairs is supposed to mimic the feeling of descending into the forest and is enhanced by an abstract representation of a row of branches that hang above one's head, which Taylor explains is an architectural detail that is echoed throughout the hotel giving it the feel of "a contemporary forest sanctuary."

Modern touches do not stop at this architectural detail. The spa doubles as a gallery for a sophisticated collection of artwork, most of which was commissioned for the spa. Pieces include paintings of Tahoe's landscape, hand-blown glass bottles, poplar wood wall sculptures, photographs of the region's flora, and even a series of stacked granite boulders, with the tallest column measuring up to seven feet, that were sourced from the resort's construction site and are meant to recall the boulders that emerge from Lake Tahoe. Backlit photos of the adjacent forest hang in every treatment room so that, even in the windowless interior rooms, spa-goers can still get a feel for the outdoors.

*continued on page 76*



Natural light and clean lines, as seen here in the resort's Living Room, are design elements that are carried through to the spa.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ELIZABETHCARMEL.COM (OPPOSITE PAGE); CHRIS CYPERT



Four treatment rooms have access to The Cabin, a relaxation area that offers groups additional privacy.



The copper tub located in the Couples Journey room is a soothing place to soak after the slopes.

*continued from page 75*

Also taking inspiration from the area, the menu features treatments using wildflowers, pine nuts, and even traditions from the local Washoe Tribe. “I wanted to combine local and historical elements into a menu that offered results-oriented services using the finest products and ingredients possible,” says Taylor.

In addition to offering a dry-heat experience, which gives a nod to Native American sweat lodges, the spa boasts an exclusive Pinyon Pine essential oil that is created especially for the spa by Laboratory of Flowers through a proprietary process. Not only does the spa have a steam room dedicated to this invigorating, earthy scent but it also features the oil in a number of treatments, including the Pinyon Pine Nut Organic Warm Stone Massage (\$155, 50 minutes; \$210, 80 minutes), which also includes indigenous arnica to soothe muscles.

Mirroring a true Tahoe experience, the spa combines the benefits of water and the earth in many of its packages. A perfect showcase of this is the Couples Journey (\$480 per couple, 90 minutes), which takes place in a beautifully appointed treatment room that offers a stunning panoramic vista of the mountains and starts off with a warm soak

for two in a copper tub. During a full-body massage, skin is then exfoliated with a gentle bamboo scrub and moisturized with fig and olive butter to counteract the effects of winter-worn skin.

While relaxation is key at the spa, offering revitalizing therapies is also important. Thanks to the spa’s location just paces away from the slopes, spa-goers can shuffle right in—in snowy ski pants and all—and recharge with services such as the Ski Patrol Aching Feet Rescue (\$130, 45 minutes). They can bask in the sunlight through the windows of the pedicure station or even watch the sun set over the mountains as their battered toes soak in a whirlpool footbath and are treated with a peppermint scrub, menthol mask, and a foot and lower-leg massage.

Active guests can combine sport and spa with the Woods and Water experience through April 11. Starting at \$575 per night, including accommodations, the package allows them to first experience the outdoors through a one-hour guided snowshoe excursion. Right from the spa, guests meet their guides and trek into the surrounding forest for some memorable sightseeing in the snow and a substantial workout. To warm up after a healthy trek, they return to the spa where they are treated to a warm stone massage. Then, an Energizing Body Glow & Rain Shower follows to slough away chapped skin and stimulate blood circulation. The scrub is removed by towels infused with lemon, lime, peppermint, and pine, followed by an application of moisturizer to leave guests refreshed and ready for the next day’s activity.

The spa experience is not meant to end once guests leave the treatment room. “The spa offers spa-goers the chance to sit fireside sipping hot tea or to melt their cares away, rejuvenate, and prepare for another epic day on the slopes,” says Taylor. Even without booking an appointment, hotel guests are encouraged to use the facilities, which include the hydrotherapy features in the lounges, as well as an adult-only lap pool that is perched at the edge of a ski slope.

While it may seem like the spa is centered around snow, Taylor promises it will also cater to the summer crowd, and he looks forward to working with his staff of 55 to develop a menu for warmer months, which may include outdoor treatments. Until then, he will continue to assess how to deliver first-class experiences to the discerning clientele. Of course, in a setting like this, Taylor will also enjoy his favorite part of the spa—the expansive view of the mountains. ■

## THE RITZ-CARLTON HIGHLANDS SPA, LAKE TAHOE

(Truckee, CA)

OWNER: East West Partners

SPA DIRECTOR: Michael Taylor

OPENED: December 2009

### CLIENT BASE

70% female, 30% men

### SPACE

17,000 square feet; 16 treatment rooms

### OFFERINGS

aromatherapy, body treatments, couples’ treatments, facials, fitness, hand and foot treatments, hydrotherapy, makeup application, massage, nailcare, prenatal services, reflexology, spa pool, salon services, spinning, waxing, yoga

### SIGNATURE SPA SERVICE

The Ritz-Carlton Highlands Signature Organic Massage (\$145, 50 minutes; \$195, 80 minutes)

### MOST EXPENSIVE OFFERING

Couples Journey (\$480)

### PRODUCT LINES

- Babor
- Body Coffee
- Éminence Organic Skin Care
- Kneipp
- Laboratory of Flowers
- MD Skincare
- Mello Mama
- OPI
- Pureology
- Skin Authority

### EQUIPMENT

- Boca Terry
- Lonto-Comed
- Living Earth Crafts
- Oakworks
- SpaSoft
- Zendals

### ARCHITECT

Hornberger + Worstell (San Francisco)

### INTERIOR DESIGN

BraytonHughes Design Studios (San Francisco)