

BEAUTY

# Bush remedies scrub up well



Traditional Aboriginal techniques help patrons refresh body and spirit, writes **Hannah Tattersall.**

Since 1998, beautician Gayle Heron has spent a number of years with the indigenous Ya'itd-mitung people from the north-east alpine region of Victoria and the Kosciuszko region of NSW, learning about native botanicals and their beneficial properties.

Kakkib li'Dthia Warrawee'a, a spiritual adviser and "wise doctor" of the Ya'itd-mitung people, told her there was a healing tradition called "yabung" that had not been shared with white people.

Heron gained permission to use the elders' teachings in developing a range of beauty products and skin treatments she released in 2000 under the name Li'Tya (meaning "of the earth").

Spas have been flourishing in

recent years and as competition increases so too does the pressure on beauticians to offer customers something new.

These days people no longer want a quick facial scrub and a slap of moisturiser from their spa treatment – they expect diagnosis, facts, treatment, massage and cups of herbal tea. In other words, the full spa experience.

"The industry has grown so very, very quickly and there are lots of product companies [competing] to meet the demands of the spa properties themselves," says the owner of Exclusive Spas Group Australia (ESA), Carol Fleming.

Fleming says today's customers want unique recipes, fresh ingredients and a bit of muscle in their massage.

As a result, beauticians are sourcing ancient therapies and including minerals and other natural ingredients in their treatments to provide customers with an experience quite unlike anything they've had before.

ESA spas, which include Peppers Beach Club, Port Douglas,

Q1 Resort, Surfers Paradise, and Sebel Reef House Spa in Palm Cove, north of Cairns, offer a combination of ancient Aboriginal therapies with hydrotherapy and Li'Tya products containing botanicals gathered from the land.

Lemon myrtle, eucalyptus

**Treatments based on Aboriginal history are popular with tourists seeking an Australian experience.**



Relaxing: The Chi healing stones massage at the Shangri-La Hotel spa.

leaves, native pepperberry, lime, wattle and wild rosella have been scientifically proven to contain properties beneficial to the skin, Fleming says. And the desert quandong has been found to soften hair.

"People can come in quite sceptical ... but we get great big rugby forwards in here, in little white robes, and they just melt. It certainly has a very powerful process to it," Fleming says of the treatments.

Certainly, the story behind the process can be just as important as the treatment itself. Customers love hearing about the amount of research that goes into producing Li'Tya's feel-good therapies, just as they enjoy Heron's account of learning about remedies while living in the bush. Often it's a case of the wackier the story, the more popular the treatment.

Some of the latest crazes in the US include a caviar hair treatment, in which fish eggs containing Omega-3 fatty acids and proteins are applied to dry and damaged hair to make it soft and smooth again; a "kitty litter" face mask treatment that uses bentonite clay (which is most cat litter) to draw out toxins and absorb oil from the skin; and a chocolate body wrap which involves lathering the body in sea clay infused with cocoa.

In Australia, treatments based on Aboriginal history and culture are particularly popular with tourists seeking an Australian experience. As well as at ESA's spas in Queensland, natural Australian products are endorsed by the Shangri-La Hotel in Sydney, where botanical ingredients such as bush honey, eucalyptus and macadamia nuts are used in the hotel's Chi range of treatments.

Locals are becoming increasingly interested too.

Maria Karras, owner and founder of Skin Therapeia in Sydney's Leichhardt says that over the past couple of years she braced herself for declining interest in beauty products and services. She needn't have worried. Her business, which offers treatments such as stone massage using stones from the Arizona desert, has grown 29 per cent, she says.

New research conducted by IBISWorld reveals a similar pattern; it estimates \$3.4 billion will be spent on hair and beauty in Australia in 2010-11, 5 per cent of which will be treatments. But the trend is probably being fuelled by the increasing number of spas popping up around the country.

Indonesian-born Pratiwi Kadir opened Oriental Spa three years ago in Chatswood, Sydney. She wanted to recreate the Balinese spa experience for her clients.

Inspired by ancient practitioners in Bali, Java, Thailand, India and China, Kadir recreated body, skin and hair treatments using spices such as cinnamon, ginger and fresh lemon grass from formulations handed down through generations.

Kadir says her business is faring well; people want to treat themselves because their working lives have become particularly stressful in recent years.

Despite, or perhaps because of, increasingly hectic work lives, customers no longer want to dash in and out. They want to spend a few hours relaxing and expect their spa to put them at ease.

While location is obviously a boon for relaxation (Geranium House, for example, located just outside Canberra and with a Brindabella backdrop, is a favourite haunt for politicians looking for a secluded refuge), Skin Therapeia's Karras says the beautician must make the client feel both relaxed and special.

Fleming says today's beauty treatment "has a story to it and it makes you feel wonderful – body-wise as well as spiritually".

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