

JUDY CHAPMAN

Text by Kate Roberts

Judy Chapman is an author and spa curator. She has worked worldwide over the last ten years, contributing to some of the best Spa and Travel Magazines, including a position as Editor-in-Chief for Spa Asia, and working as a consultant to a number of highly respected spas including her most recent project as curator for Karma Resorts worldwide. She has gained a great deal of insight into the industry that is currently revolutionizing the luxury and mid range travel market worldwide and is well qualified to answer questions about why this industry has become so successful. We are sitting at Sorriso, a glowing new Italian Restaurant on the island of Bali, enjoying their fine food with a crisp glass of Pinot Gringo and talking about our early days. These were days spent in my kitchen and at the Byron markets, or in Judy's office where we worked together creating aromatherapy-based beauty products that were, it seems today, way ahead of their time. Then there were the days spent communicating by the relatively new medium of email as we found ourselves at opposite ends of Australia during the final preparations for Judy's third book. As we have both discovered, the industry we were entering back then has now become not just a huge part of both our lives, but a dynamic and vital force in changing the way people view health and wellness, not just for themselves but for the people and places of the world.

K: As someone who has worked many years in the spa and wellness industry, what do you see as the industry's major contribution to the wellness of the planet as a whole, or does it remain in the domain of the privileged?

J: The beauty of spas is that there is something for everybody and while spas are often viewed as accessible only to the wealthy, in reality this is not the case. There's an abundance of healing available, genuine work that doesn't necessarily have to have the additional benefit of beautiful landscaped surroundings, five star service, or cost a fortune. Personally, some of my most memorable healing experiences have occurred in basic surrounds inclusive of my first Bali spa moment years ago at Bodyworks in Ubud. Today there are places like Jari Menari that are offering quality and services without excessive cost.

In terms of the industry as a whole though, it's the awe-inspiring experiences where one can connect with nature that I love the most - picture full moon rituals, glass-walled saunas overlooking the ocean and bathing in rockpools by a river.

I do see the entire Spa Industry as a part of the wellness revolution that has propelled forward mostly by the emergence of the baby boomers into adults who have an increased interest in living well and living longer. The emergence of "Spa" as an industry is a natural follow on from the desire to retain fitness, to balance our diets, and to boost optimum health in order to be part of a vital functioning society. This was arguably the essence of the sixties, and while it may look as though nothing changed on the surface, this interest in health, in healing, in colour therapy, crystals, and shamanics is all part of the flower power revolution that was started nearly fifty years ago. Back then it was all free and experimental, these days yoga teachers travel first class and I love this.



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K: You talk about shamanics...the role of indigenous healing has come to the fore of the wellness industry but can these experiences, or these healers be quantifiable, graded or even certified? How does a person tell if a 'healer' is the genuine article?

J: Great question. In Malaysia, where the village healer still exists, there is talk about them being regulated by the government. It's totally controversial and I sway to and fro as there's a part in me that will always be rebellious and react against the need to regulate everything. The beauty of true healers is that they often exist outside the box, in some ways they are free and in touch with another divine. Besides, a true healer might say, "No you can't quantify me, I am simply facilitating a gift".

Many people think you need to believe in something in order to receive it but I have seen people who say that they don't believe in this or that undergo quite challenging and profound changes on the basis of encounters with unexpected healing. Often, I might add, this comes from 'sources' that you wouldn't find working in a healing centre. Sometimes the most profound healing can come from a source that you may perceive as less than pure like the chain smoking *balian* who while drinking thick black coffee can perform immense healing on a person. It is important not to become blinded by obsessiveness, always be open to your innate sense of acceptance of what feels right, or not.

What is very exciting now in this industry is that spas are now training their therapists so well that they too can connect to their healing gifts and provide genuine opportunities for healing and growth through therapy.

You have to remember that it was only five years ago that the 'global' spa industry emerged. Nowadays with all the conferences, awards, industry and consumer magazines dedicated to spa culture, the industry is able to really pool its resources and open up new areas of training in previously isolated skills, creating a dynamic fusion of healing arts that brings the world an increase in knowledge and practices. Today there is no separation of culture; you can receive a Thai-style massage from a Balinese therapist and you can receive Tibetan healing from a Swedish healer. You can incorporate many aspects of bodywork into a synergistic treatment that embraces a world culture of healing and nurture. This really does reflect those dreams of the early seventies where places like Esalen and Pune were embracing these methods of self discovery through healing. These days it is less retreat oriented, you can actually embrace this type of body, mind and soul work within your daily routine.

Passionate therapists and spa directors are now creating amazing experiences to help one uncover new parts in themselves, to take risks and move you out of your comfort zone to a place where real healing can occur. This is where the role of a great spa director comes into play. Like great artists, the ones who prevail and succeed are the ones making a genuine difference.

K: Where do you see wellness heading next? We have seen a lot different healing applications, all with their detractors and advocates, from longevity and medi-spas to the energy work so popular today.

J: Like all areas of life, spas will continue to evolve as we do and we are only just at the tip of our industry's potential. Right now, I am passionate about energy healers like the cranio-sacral and Reiki

masters. Perhaps the next thing is love and tantric rituals that help people connect to their emotions and open their heart.

K: Sounds to me like we're heading back to those hills outside Byron!

J: Yes, scary isn't it?! I would never have thought I would be doing this 20 years ago as i couldn't wait to leave my hippie roots and become 'straight'. Back then I thought crystal healing was a joke but now I find it all really fantastic.

K: You mean a non-invasive, gentle supporting healing rather than an overwhelming practice that sometimes borders on hysteria.

J: Yes, a refinement of energy with its essence being love. That encourages self-focus to create better abilities to be community focused, or even planet focused. I think that is also a by-product of a great spa industry, to promote the use of natural non-chemical products, to support companies that are eco-friendly, to put in place structures and systems that are environment positive rather than negative. I also think that a well-designed spa can educate people in ways that are much more subtle than wellness therapy. Connection like I said previously, to nature, to the planet, to others and to a world we really can live in.

K: So taking a spa isn't just an indulgence then?

J: No. Remember the rainforest pools, the dams? I mean what we were doing back then was really just a living spa in nature, it was happening every day, 24/7.

K: That's true, my first product was inspired by the need to create something that soaped up in the creek that didn't put detergent into the water!

J: And our Aromazones, a personal wellness environment in blue glass. There was a lot of love and magic back in those wild and out there days.

K: Looking back, I think the environment inspired us to create.

J: Yes, but at the same time growing up there surrounded by all these folk exploring the esoteric, well, I couldn't wait to escape and see what the rest of the world was doing. Interestingly, all of us hippie kids went back, and it is always a big part of who I am today..I will always remain connected to my Byron roots.

