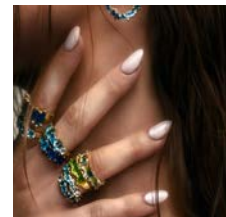


# UPSCALE

MARCH/APRIL 2024

# *Living*



EXPERIENCE THE DIFFERENCE

[www.upscalelivingmag.com](http://www.upscalelivingmag.com)



# OSMOSIS DAY SPA

*A One-of-a-Kind Day Spa*

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

The Osmosis Day Spa Sanctuary, nestled between giant redwoods and famous Sonoma County vineyards, is only 60 miles from San Francisco in Freestone, California. Osmosis has a reputation as one of the most aesthetically pleasing and serene spas in the United States. The concept of Osmosis arose from founder Michael Stusser's love for gardening and meditation. In the early 1980s, Michael apprenticed in the art of traditional landscape gardening in Kyoto, Japan, and later brought his skills back to the United States to design the gardens at Osmosis.





Remember  
The Silence

SPAS





## A DAY AT OSMOSIS

I arrived at Osmosis in the morning, and after changing into a spa gown and slippers, I met Michael in the tea room for an interview.

### How did Osmosis Day Spa and Sanctuary begin?

Osmosis came about as an extension of a journey I made to Japan in the 1980s. I went to learn about Japanese landscape gardening, and I was fortunate to participate in ancient traditional landscaping with a fourth-generation landscaper. I lived with the family, and it was a very in-depth apprenticeship. I worked from dawn to dusk seven days a week, and this experience changed my life. It was an overlay to my deeper study of Buddhism; I had been studying Zen for many years and became more involved in meditation while living in a monastery.

During this rigorous practice, I contracted a severe case of sciatica. After seeking various forms of treatment, I was guided to a cedar enzyme bath in Japan. It had a dramatic healing effect on not only my body but my spirit. I knew I needed to bring it back to the United States.

### What is in the bath?

The bath consists of ground cedar, Douglas fir, rice bran, and water.

### Tell me what to expect during my cedar enzyme bath.

To begin, an attendant will help bury you in the bath. Your entire body is covered except your head. During the bath, an attendant will wipe your brow with cold clothes and bring cold water for you to sip about every eight minutes. After approximately twenty minutes, the attendant will help unbury you and brush you off. From there, you will continue to brush off any excess particles and then take a warm shower. Once you are clean, you will be led to the pagoda by the creek for a massage.

### What is unique about a cedar bath?

What makes it different than other baths is that the heat is generated biologically. An enormous community of microbes is thriving, creating the ideal household for this fundamental impulse in biology, something similar to making compost. It is very refined, and cedar is the most fragrant wood in the world;

it is defined and wholesome. The bath experience interfaces with similar activity in your body. You get a massive infusion of enzymatic activity through your pores and a heat, herb, and metabolic treatment at the same time. As the material ferments and gets hot, it dilates your entire cardiovascular system through your pores, which open to let everything in, and the oils in the cedar and fir are released in the steam. It is like a full-body compress. Cedar has been used in ancient cultures for years for purification, raising spirituality, and helping elevate what the limbic system can do.

### What are the benefits of the bath?

The bath accelerates the metabolism and is deeply cleansing and detoxifying. It also gives your internal organs a rest. The treatment is proven to relieve joint and muscle pain, improve circulation, thoroughly cleanse the skin, and leave clients with a radiant glow.

### How often can you take a bath?

People come at all different frequencies. Some have taken two baths in a day, while others come for a special day of pampering.

### THE TEA SERVICE

Before going to the bath, Gabby performed my tea service, which is a cedar enzyme therapy. She described this as an internal to external treatment. She said, “We start with the internal treatment by beginning with our spa-blend tea with cooling diuretic herbs, peppermint, red clover, nettle, and yarrow. Enzymes made from other fruits and vegetables are blended, creating an herbal tonic that serves as a digestive aid that helps catalyze other metabolic processes in the body that translate externally while in the cedar bath.”

After the tea, I went into the cedar bath. I left feeling warmed through and through, relaxed, and rejuvenated at the same time. Soon, I was led to the pagoda by the creek. After the massage therapist worked out any remaining tension, I wandered to the gardens to meditate before lunch.

### THE GARDENS

While training in Japan, Michael became enthralled by the way that various elements in a garden—not only the plants but the stones and water elements—stood in relationship to one another. They provided a deep feeling of

equanimity that stood outside of linear time. In 2000, Michael reconnected with an old friend he met in Japan, Robert Ketchell. Robert was from England, and he shared Michael’s love for Japanese gardens. He was intent on understanding its underlying theme and magic. Michael sent a site map and photos of where he planned to build the garden at Osmosis. Robert returned a plan with a themed design—The Story of the Ox and the Ox Herder, a parable from Zen Buddhism that is a metaphor for the enlightenment experience.

### THE MEDITATION GARDEN

The Meditation Garden follows the story of the Ox and the Ox Herder, which is a Zen parable of Chinese origin but appears in both Chinese and Japanese temples as a spiritual path. The story illustrates the progression toward a state of enlightenment. Throughout this garden, visitors will find elements that represent different stages of enlightenment.

#### Five Specialty Gardens

- The Welcome Garden is at the entrance to the spa and is used to relax upon arrival.
- The Tea Garden, one of the oldest gardens at Osmosis, is where guests wait for the Cedar Enzyme Bath and where they participate in the Japanese tea ceremony.
- The Cutting Garden supplies the staff with flowers to create beautiful fresh bouquets found throughout the spa.
- The Zen Garden is an expansive landscape to view while relaxing in the Cedar enzyme baths.
- The Field of Hammocks is the newest garden where guests connect with nature while relaxing in hammocks or zero-gravity chairs under giant umbrellas. This garden is next to the banks of Salmon Creek.

After lunch, I went upstairs for my final treatment, a luxurious organic facial. After a full day of pampering, my friends picked me up to enjoy a lovely dinner in the area. Osmosis is the perfect place to relax your mind, restore your body, and find inner peace. The Dali Lamma says, “The purpose of life is to be happy.” Michael’s goal is to bring visitors happiness. ❖

