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IN THE REGION/Connecticut

Royal Treatment in a Colonial Setting

By ELEANOR CHARLES

WILTON In a beguiling example of adaptive reuse, a historic 1740 farmhouse and barn here have been converted into an upscale spa and surgery center, offering a variety of facials, massages, manicures and pedicures as well as plastic surgery and two handsomely furnished suites to recover in.

Connecticut has more than 172 spas, according to Spa Finder Inc., a company that matches prospective clients with spas. But spas that have plastic surgery facilities are a new development.

In fact, Judith Stanton, owner and director of the Wilton spa, the Retreat at Split Rock, claims that there are no others in the United States — at least not yet.

This contention is supported by Hannelore Leary, executive director of the Day Spa International and Medical Spa Association. "Judith has done something unique," she said, "having everything in a very upscale private place where people can have surgery, stay and heal away."

Ms. Stanton, a developer of spas in California, is president of Stanton Spas L.L.C., and head of the Stanton Health Care Group, a physicians' referral service in Manhattan.

THIS three-acre Wilson property at 329 Danbury Road (Route 7) was purchased in September of 2001 by Dr. Neil A. Gordon, a facial plastic surgeon who is on the medical faculty at Yale and has an office in Greenwich.

"I finally found the perfect home for what I do," he said. "I have a very high-end practice, and my problem has been how to take care of people from all over the country after surgery. We had to use hotels, friends' homes and other means. You don't necessarily want people to know you are having your face done. This provides an adjacent mini-hotel for privacy and pampering before you go home."

The surgery center is a totally separate business from the spa, where renting a suite is an option at \$300 a night. "We are like two stores side by side in a mall," he said, emphasizing that the center is not a hospital or a medical recovery unit.



Photograph by Douglas Kearny for The New York Times

CREATIVE REUSE

A 1740 farmhouse and barn were renovated to create the Retreat at Split Rock, where Darla Maslana sits in one of six treatment rooms.

Dr. Gordon and his colleagues, Dr. Craig D. Friedman and Dr. Richard J. Restivo, work at the spa only on outpatient cases, performing complex surgeries in hospitals. Dr. Friedman shares Dr. Gordon's Greenwich office, and Dr. Restivo has an office at New Haven.

As owner of the land and buildings, Dr. Gordon collects a undisclosed amount of rent from the spa, and the spa collects the rents from the two suites.

Dr. Gordon spent well over seven figures on renovating and restoring the buildings, which comprise a total of 10,000 square feet. Most recently the house was minimally occupied by a corporate outsourcing firm. Located in Stamford, a historic district of this town, it was a supply depot for Washington's army during the Revolutionary War, and in the 1800's it was a stagecoach stopover called the Split Rock Inn and Tavern.

Dr. Gordon installed six spa treatment rooms, two spa suites, each with a bedroom, sitting room and bathroom; a reception room, wait-



ing room, doctors' offices; and examining rooms in the farmhouse. "We reused all usable wood, hand-made nails and beams," he said. The huge stone fireplace, which once heated the tavern, now dominates the reception room.

The barn was disassembled, then moved and reconstructed, attached to the north end of the house. It now holds two fully accredited, state-of-the-art surgery suites, two recovery rooms and a nurses' station. An extension was added to accommodate the offices.

Purchasing the spa suites and installing spa equipment cost Ms. Stanton around \$250,000. A third suite is being created by Dr. Gordon as a

small cottage on the grounds to be used for patients after surgery or spa clients.

The wide expanses of lawn and the stands of trees and shrubs will remain intact, Dr. Gordon said. "What makes the place beautiful is the tranquility," he said. "People can walk around, sit by the pond. Besides, there are zoning restrictions on further development."

Clients enter the spa through a small dimly lit room scented with lavender and echoing with the tinkle of an indoor waterfall. The next 70 minutes to four hours are spent in any of a variety of treatments offered in "a denlike calm," said Ms. Stanton. "People feel they can really let go."

The lighting is low, the equipment is the last word, and the staff members are hired after Ms. Stanton has reviewed their background and clinical ability. She also relies on intuition, she emphasized. "Within a minute I can tell by their hands whether they can be staff here," she said.

Francis Devlin and his wife, Erika, have been clients for about five months, since finding Split Rock on a list of top spas in *W* magazine. Away from his job as New York sales manager for a large pharmaceutical firm and her work in the hepatitis pharmaceuticals division, he cycles up to 30 miles a day and she does tai-chi boxing.

They both became muscle-bound and had a couple of bad experiences at other spas, Mr. Devlin said. They like the diagnoses that precede each treatment at Split Rock, customizing treatment to specific need. "The afterglow lasts for days," he said.

Basic prices are \$10 for a 70-minute facial and massage; \$275 for a three-hour men's facial, Swedish massage, manicure and pedicure; and \$600 for a one-night retreat for one person, with a facial, massage, hand or foot treatment, and lunch. Seaweed wraps, microdermabrasion, lymphatic drainage, placenta collagen mask, tea facials and warm stone therapy are among dozen of treatments.

But the Split Rock experience is not all skindeepness and body work. There have been several bachelor and bachelorette parties and mother and daughter retreats on the premises, with bags from a local caterer and bottles of Champagné.