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IN THE REGION/Connecticut

Royal Treatment in a Colonial Setting

By ELEANOR CHARLES

WILSON
In a beguiling example of adaptive reuse, a historic 17th-century farmhouse and barn here have been converted into an upscale spa and surgery center, offering a variety of facials, massages, manures and pedicures, as well as plastic surgery and two customarily furnished rooms to accommodate in.

Connecticut has more than 170 spas, according to Spa Finder Inc., a company that markets prospective clients with spas. But spas that have plastic surgery facilities are a new development.

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

This conversion is supported by Hanalette Leroy, executive director of the Day Spa, International and Medical Spa Association. "It's still got that serene, relaxing" she said, "having everything in a very remote, private place where people can have surgery, stay and take away."

Ms. Steiner, a developer of spas in California, is president of Boston Spa L.L.C., and head of the Steiner Health Care Group, a physician referral service in Manhattan.

THE three-acre Wilson property at 519 Dabney Road (Route 7) was purchased in September of 2001 by Dr. Neil A. Gordon, a facial plastic surgeon who runs the medical facility at Yale and has an office in Greenwich.

"I finally found the perfect location 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 eye done. This provides an adjacent, nice hotel for privacy and sleeping before you go home."

The surgery center is a totally separate business from the spa, where tanning is done in an open air \$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 Kinsky for The New York Times

CREATIVE REUSE

A 17th-century barn and house were renovated to create the Retreat at Split Rock, where Dr. Neil A. Gordon runs his plastic surgery practice.

Dr. Gordon and interior designer Dr. Craig D. Friedman and Dr. Richard J. Hurdle, work at the spa only on outpatient cases, performing complex, targeted operations. Dr. Friedman, owner of Dr. Gordon's Greenwich office, and Dr. Hurdle has an office in New Haven.

An owner of the land and buildings, Dr. Gordon also conducts an unadorned amount of rest from the spa, and the spa caters the rest from the two units.

Dr. Gordon spent well over seven figures on renovating and restoring the buildings, which comprise a total of 14,000 square feet. Most recently, the house was renovated according to a comprehensive plan from 1990, set in Cambridge, a historic district of the town, to use a supply depot for Washington in 1697 during the Revolutionary War, and in the 1890s it was a stagecoach stop for the old Split Rock Inn and Tavern.

Dr. Gordon avoided on spa treatment center, two spa units, each with a bedroom, sitting area, and bathroom, a reception area, treat-

ment rooms, doctors' offices, and

recovery rooms in the barnhouse.

"We treated all stable wood, hand-

made nails and beams," he said. The

large stone fireplace, which once

heated the tavern, now warms the

reception room.

The barn was dismantled, dis-

assembled and reconstructed, attached

to the north end of the house. It now

holds two fully air-conditioned, state-

of-the-art surgery rooms, two recovery

rooms and a waiting station. An ex-

terior was added to accommodate

doctor's offices.

Facilitating the spa sales and re-

stating spa equipment on Ms. Steiner

amounted \$250,000. A third spa is

being created by Dr. Gordon in a

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

The wide expanses of lawn and the stacks 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 study in rooms located with lavender and eucalyptus with the smell of an indoor waterfall. The cost of a 75-minute to four-hour spa is spent in any of a variety of treatments offered in "a double cabin," said Ms. Steiner. "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. Steiner has reviewed their background and educational ability. She also relies on technical equipment. "Within a 2-minute I can tell by their hands whether they can be staff here," she said.

Francis DeWitt and his wife, Trinka, have been clients for about five months, since finding Split Rock on a bit of top spot in New England. Away from his job as New York sales manager for a large pharmaceutical firm and her work at the hospital's pharmaceutical division, he cycles up to 30 miles a day and she does triathlons.

They both became mischievous and had a couple of bad experiences at other spas, Mr. DeWitt said. They like the diagnosis that people can't be treated at Split Rock, containing treatment to specific need. "The atmosphere here is great," he said.

Some prices are \$150 for a 70-minute facial and massage; \$235 for a Steiner spa's facial, Swedish massage, manicure and pedicure; and \$300 for a one-night retreat for one person, with a facial, massage, head or foot treatment, and both Swedish wraps, aromatherapy, lymphatic drainage, glucose cellulosic mask, foot bath and massage. Some classes are open to couples or trios.

But the Split Rock experience is not all sunbathing and body work. There have been several beneficial and back-to-back parties and mother and daughter retreats on the grounds, with clients from a local center and beautiful Cheshire.