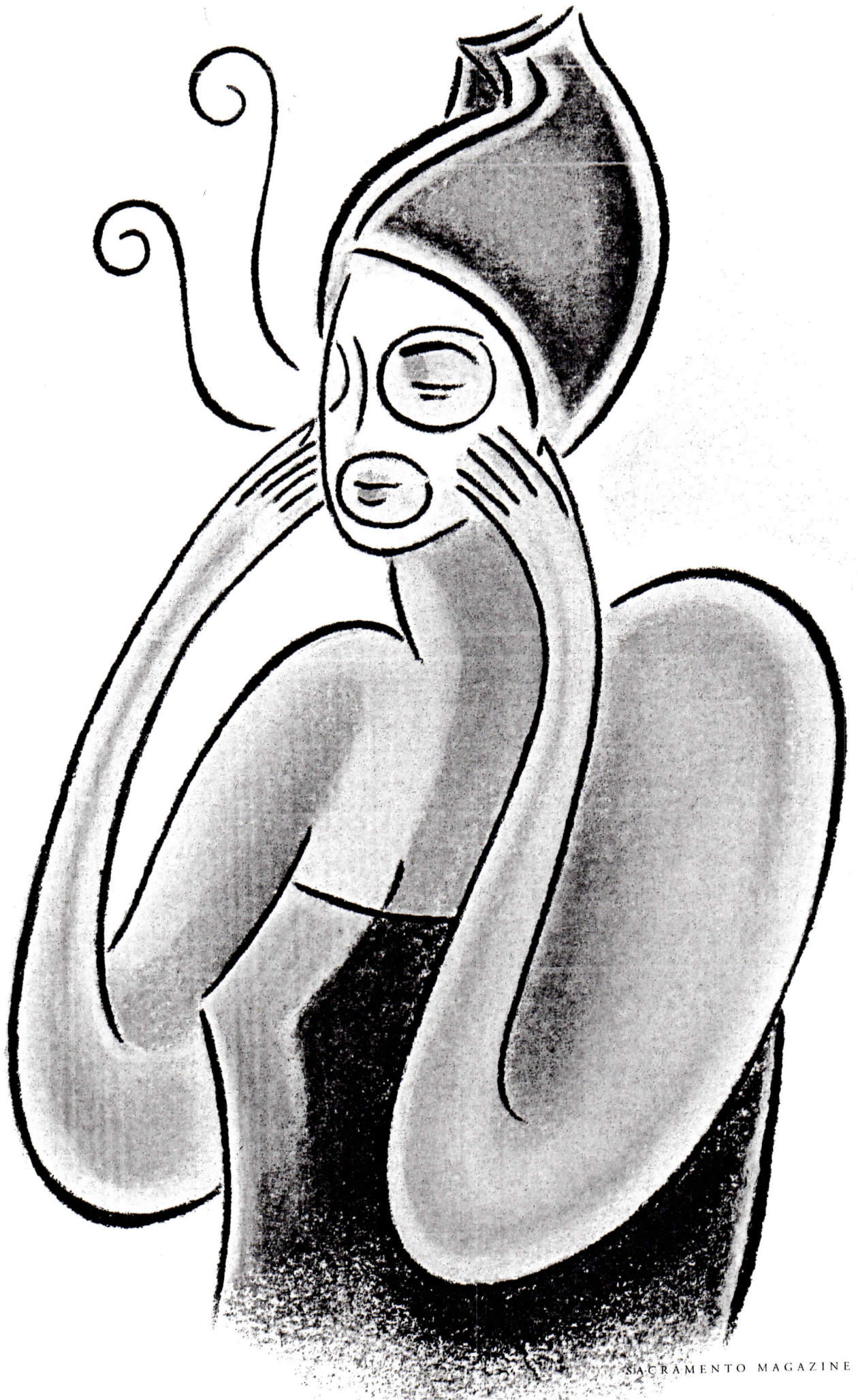


A Day at the

Spa

A group of local writers ranging in age from 20 to 50 turned off their computers, hung up their phones, left their family members for a day and went out, on assignment, to spend a day of luxury at several local spas. Their job: to write about their individual spa experience. Many of them started the day feeling a little nervous about baring body parts and being “fussed over”—some worried about the ability to sit still for a day of passive, placid comfort. Some opted for the standard day-spa package; others customized their day to comply with their own needs. In some ways, the writers’ experiences were similar; in others, vastly different. Everybody, however, walked out looking forward to their next spa experience.

For specifics on services provided at each salon, see sidebar “Local Spas.”



Glass Slippers

by Thea Marie Rood

I am not a glamour puss. My beauty regimen consists of slapping on some of my daughter's baby lotion and applying mascara that seems to disappear most days by noon. I have been cutting and coloring my own hair—with rather expected results. My excuse for this behavior is my current lifestyle: I'm home with my busy 2-year-old, writing articles from an upstairs bedroom office. In short, there's no one around to critique my appearance except for our golden retriever and—on playgroup days—some equally casual mom friends.

However, it is no coincidence that my daughter's favorite story is *Cinderella*, for her mother was whisked away—on orders from her editor—to a nearby day spa: **Elite at the Lakes** in Folsom. I became a pampered princess who only needed to push a button to have anything I wanted delivered: enormous chocolate truffles from Snooks Candies, mimosas made with fresh orange juice, Chinese chicken salad and a glass of cold chardonnay from neighboring Paragary's.

My physical luxury began with a five-minute sauna—designed to open pores and hydrate the body—which was followed by an hour-long facial. The lights dimmed, candles flickering, a subtle relaxation tape playing, I was allowed to sink into drowsy reverie for 60 minutes while Wendy—a cheerful mother of four—plied my dry skin with gentle cleansers, moisturizers and a warm air treatment.

I had a few moments to come back to reality, enjoying the tree-lined river view out the window, before my massage. I'd never had one, and my massage therapist claimed



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it showed in the stored-up tension and stress in my back. Aaron spent 45 minutes on my back, working slowly to deeply release tightened and strained muscles. Despite the darkened room and classical music, this treatment wasn't relaxing for me, but more like having my teeth cleaned. The results, however, were important: Although I was sore by that evening, I noticed increased freedom of movement and a major reduction in back pain by the next morning.

After the massage, I moved on to a pedicure and manicure by Avrria, who painted my toenails plum and left my "mom's hands" clear, massaging them and conditioning them before adding polish.

After a haircut and style from Eric, I returned home much like Cinderella post-midnight. Despite my luscious locks, smooth skin and newly repositioned back, I wasn't a princess anymore. My house was a mess: dishes piled on the counter, my toddler in mismatched clothes grouchy watching a video, my husband sheepishly explaining how he'd forgotten to put on her diaper before she napped on our bed. These irritants aside, however, I did look ravishing the next day at playgroup.

Stress Relief

by Kira O'Donnell

After a week of wrestling with tax returns, staying up late with a sick child and entertaining in-laws, every cell in my body was screaming for indulgent, luxurious rest. A day at **Esthetics by Jeanette** was just what I needed.

I changed into a fluffy white robe and was ushered to a bench, handed a glass of ice water with an orange floating in it and asked to submerge my throbbing feet in a mineral bath. As I glanced through *Cosmopolitan*, my feet celebrating euphorically below me, I felt relaxation setting in.

Next stop was the eucalyptus steam bath. My senses were assaulted, then soothed, by the strong aroma. The first blasts of hot steam felt delicious, then warmer, then just plain hot. Right about the time I began to mentally apologize to all the rotisserie chickens I've purchased, my five minutes were up.

The next phase of my grand indulgence: the salt glow. A charming attendant took fistfuls of coarse sea salt and rubbed it vigorously into my skin, starting with my feet. It was a chafing, stinging sort of pleasure. She then sprayed me with warm, soothing water. I felt scrubbed clean and tingly all over.

In the massage room, I was squeezed, rolled and worked over like bread dough. My thoughts drifted randomly, hazily, and I felt so loose and liquid I could've slid through the face hole at the top of the bed. I was then escorted to the facial room, where an esthetician turned a bright light on my face, briefly scorching my eyeballs and awakening every nerve in my body. I imagined my pores, as large as moon craters under her scrutinizing gaze. She gently chided me for not drinking enough water, and then explained the ABCs of good skin care. As she expertly massaged my face, she chatted about the benefits of reflexology and ear candling—a process by which ear wax is removed gently through a hollow candle. Go figure.

Limp and blissed-out, I was ready to slither home and collapse into bed. My last stop was the pedicurist's chair, and I discovered what a spa neophyte I was. The other pedicure clients wore dainty little sandals that revealed their glittering, jewel-like toenails. The shoes allowed them to walk out of the spa without maiming their still-damp nail polish. Sheepishly, I clumped past these paragons of femininity in my bulky running shoes. My pedicurist smiled sweetly and proceeded to clean and rub my tired dogs with great compassion. I selected a hot magenta for the polish.

As I made my shaky way back to my car, I realized with deep appreciation that I had left my worries back at the mineral foot bath. Spirits high, I cruised home and fell, with the last of my energy, into bed.

A Long, Luxurious Day

by Jo Chandler

The moment I entered **Pavilions Salon and Spa**, with its pristine white walls and art deco curved ceilings, I felt at home. My aging, aching back was begging for a massage. I was greeted warmly and shown to a dressing room where I changed into a white terrycloth wrap. It was 9 a.m.

Esthetician Amy Mason gave me the slowdown on my day: a European facial, followed by a body treatment and body wrap, a complete body massage, a gourmet lunch, a manicure, pedicure, a haircut and professional makeup.

She left me alone for 45 minutes so the solution could work its magical promise—a loss of up to an inch on each extremity treated.

Amy's deep-cleansing European facial was the finest I have ever had, and I've had a few. The music, mercifully not New Age; the fragrances, a cornucopia of essential oils designed to heighten one's response to the treatment; the cool, soothing orange blossom- and vanilla-scented creams; and Amy's capable hands left my skin looking and feeling rejuvenated and vibrant.

Next, I was whisked away by Min into the body room, where mine was brushed, showered and wrapped. The goal of body brushing is to remove dead cells, thereby producing healthy, glowing skin. Min, whose clients call her "Mama Min" because of her clucking, nurturing manner, explained that this treatment is especially popular with brides-to-be. After I had showered and sprayed my body with an aloe vera solution, Min measured my thighs, hips, posterior and upper arms. Data recorded, she wrapped those body parts in warm aloe- and herb-treated cloths and left me alone for 45 min-