



Inspired by Beauty

Can you imagine a more unique career path than designing spas and writing about beauty and wellness? International spa curator Judy Chapman talks to Asia Dreams about living the life of her dreams.

Asia Dreams: What is your very first memory that has to do with the exotic world of spa?

Judy: My childhood was pretty colourful – my mother was into yoga and we travelled a lot as kids to ashrams in India – and spa-wise, she would take us kids every week to a local gym/squash facility where we would swim, take saunas and steam – so from an early age I was introduced to the ‘spa world’ I guess. I grew up in a rainforest shack without any electricity and no television – on a healthy, mostly vegetarian diet, full of veggies and fruit. I guess I was born into a spa-like environment really...my sister is a well-regarded yoga teacher...

Asia Dreams: At what point in your life did you realise that developing and writing about spas would become your profession?

Judy: I remember the location and moment clearly – It was around 1996 and my sister and I experienced the traditional mandi lulur

spa treatment at a little village spa in Ubud. I was overwhelmed by the colour, scent and sensuality of the treatment that consisted of a scrub and massage and concluded with a stunning flower bath filled with red and pink flowers. I remember saying to myself ‘this is what I want to write about’ and in 1998 I published my first book on aromatherapy. From here I went on to become Editor-in-Chief for Spa Asia magazine and travelled the world for ten years reviewing spas and treatments in exotic places like Japan, the Himalayas, India, Prague and Istanbul...

Asia Dreams: You helped to grow the Karma Spa brand, one of the most iconic wellness brands in Asia today. How was the concept initially conceived?

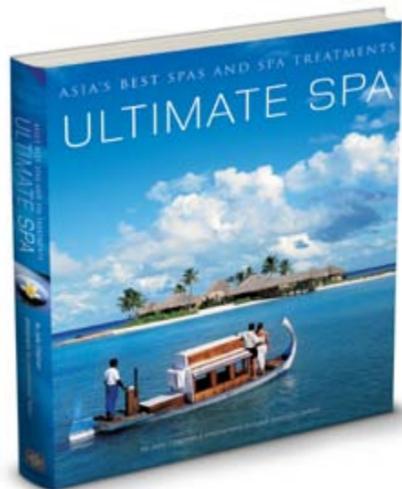
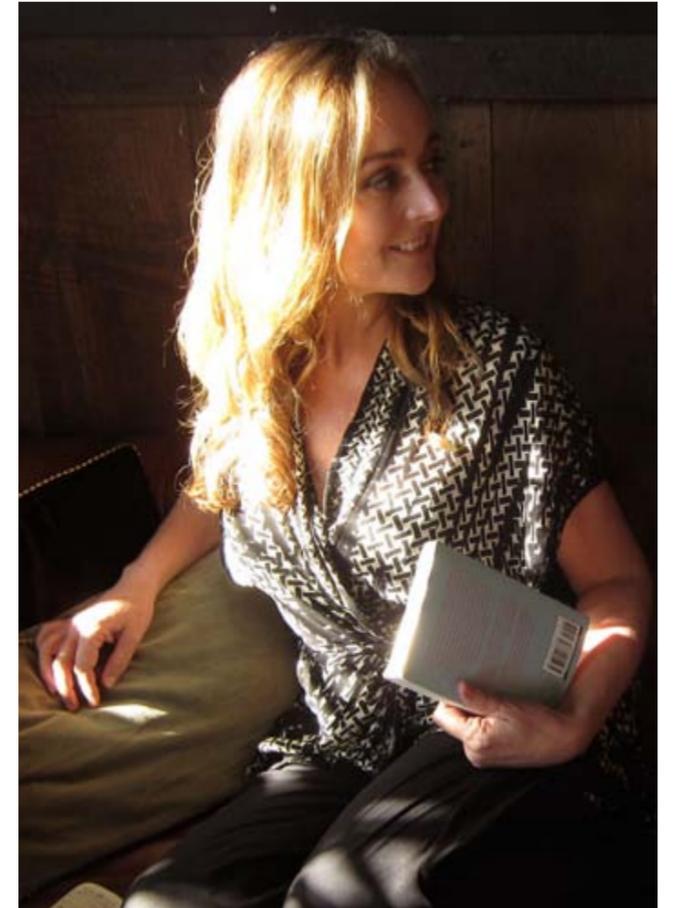
Judy: In 2008, I was working as a freelance spa writer in South East Asia and I was flown to cover the opening of a Karma Resorts property in Bali. The resort’s general manager along with Karma Royal Group Chairman and CEO John Spence basically ‘kidnapped’ me to create their spa brand. At first I felt reluctant about the idea of working for a company (being the free spirit that I am) but after 3 months, I realised it was going to be one of the most creative and inspirational jobs of my life – which it is. For a creative person seeing your ideas transform into something people love to experience and buy is the ultimate experience.

Asia Dreams: You are working together with John Spence to open and help brand spas all over the world. What projects are you currently working on together?

Judy: I recently set up a new division within Karma’s Spa Division – that is devoted to creating third party and franchise opportunities. So far, so good! We have two Karma Spas opening in the Middle East next year and one in a stunning ski resort in Norway. We also create bespoke spa brands that are even more creative as we develop and build a whole new concept for clients that are fresh and new. I am also developing our global retail brand, taking this to the next level packaging and concept wise – again, sooo creative!

Asia Dreams: How did you make the leap from spa designer and curator to best-selling author, and which one of your published spa books is closest to your heart?

Judy: That’s an interesting question! At first I thought, how can I be able to wear all these hats? How do I define myself? Then I looked around to people for inspiration and realised most successful and creative beings often have two or three or several creative outlets including many actors that are also musicians and writers. More and more I am moving away from the notion that ‘I am a writer’ or ‘I am a spa consultant’ – as human beings are often capable of so much more. For a creative person, it isn’t always about the form but more the experience of expressing your higher self. As for my favourite book, well it’s hard to choose between all my ‘babies’ but interestingly it is probably the book that has not done as well that is very closest to my heart. My first book ‘Aromatherapy – recipes for your oil burner’ (Harper Collins) was an instant best seller and the publisher kept going into reprints for years...it was fantastic. But it was my third book ‘Spa – bathing blends from around the world for you home’ that we photographed in Bali that is, for me, the most





beautiful spa book as visually it is just exquisite. However, my debut novel released this year was one of the best, challenging (and most confronting) experiences of my life so far – I definitely want to write more novels!

Asia Dreams: *Your debut novel, My Singapore Lover, was recently launched at the Ubud Readers & Writers Festival and has already received several positive reviews. How did you find the time in your busy schedule to write it?*

Judy: It was very very fortunate that last year my job allowed me to work part-time. Even though I wrote the first draft several years ago, I was able to do the final draft over 9-months - from various hotel rooms around the world of course (the novel is told mostly from a hotel suite over a 48 hour time-frame).

Asia Dreams: *Is there one spa or wellness treatment that you've encountered personally that stands heads and shoulders above the hundreds you've experienced?*

Judy: Well - there are so many different spa concepts in the world and most offer something valuable. For example, I have experienced transforming two-hour treatments to life-changing ayurvedic and detox retreats. Like most things in life, I do feel a lot of the experience has to do with how present oneself is in that moment – this makes all the difference. I would say that I have had most incredible experiences in the spas of South East Asia than in western countries, for example, so I do resonate with the eastern modalities more – even though European spa therapists are very very well trained!

Asia Dreams: *What is the one thing in particular that you would recommend to people trying to recreate that soothing spa ambience at home?*

Judy: I feel home spa is increasingly important – particularly if you are working in a more competitive environment during the day, then to come home and shut the door to the world and be in a nourishing and nurturing home environment to rebalance is essential. It's about using only the purest and organic ingredients in your home (making your home healthy as well) – epsom or



Himalayan crystal salt baths feel so cleansing - or playing inspiring music and sipping organic tea, burning essential oils – there are so many possibilities to create a spa ambience at home – ultimately, for me, it's about slowing down – so my mind and body can truly rest.

Asia Dreams: *What are the hottest trends in the spa industry today?*

Judy: So many great things are unfolding in the spa world right now – authentic wellness is the way really for spas now as people become far more educated about their health and wellbeing and expect hotels & spas to provide this on their vacation as well. A big favourite of mine is Healthy Hotels – everything from organic cuisine to wifi-free rooms so one can sleep better at night (the electromagnetics make it harder for people to sleep well). I just attended a press conference in New York by Spa Finder – who release the top 10 spa trends each year – and as well released the latest stats by Standford (SRI) - about the amazing fast growth of the global wellness tourism economy that is now growing much faster than tourism overall – it's very inspiring! Another trend in spas



is wellness lighting – as most artificial lighting apparently affects our natural melatonin levels – so there will soon be a big trend in hotels using wellness lights so their guests can sleep well at night. Other trends that are obvious are introduction of organic spa cuisine and juices in hotels, higher quality training for therapists so guests receive a 'wow' treatment for their money. I see more and more men heading to the spa – a few years ago only 30-40% of men visited the spa compared to women – but now they are completely comfortable with this, and we love men at spas as they are so relaxed and easy going! A big trend is results-oriented facials. Due to the rising baby boomers who want to stay looking young forever, there's a demand for this and I have noticed spa owners who once claimed they would never ever go down the medi-spa route now offering semi-invasive facials.

Asia Dreams: *Out of all the spas you've helped to create, which one is your favourite and why?*

Judy: Karma Resorts' flagship Karma Spa at Karma Kandara is my favourite as it was the first one I created plus the location on the cliff is sublime. I had complete creative license to do what I want – it was one of the most inspiring chapters of my life. And the beauty of creating a spa is that the process never ends. I am always dreaming up ways to improve and take our spas to the next level – in this competitive environment you really can't afford to stay still – but ultimately the most important part is the therapists' skills and training level. At the end of the day, most customers prefer an exceptional treatment compared to the surrounds and interiors – although when you can offer both then the results are phenomenal for the guest's experience. You really want your guests to depart from your spa transformed and inspired...

