

Wellness File



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The Elemental Nature Facial for Self-Renewal at Elm Hurst Inn and Country Spa begins . . . with a footbath.

Learning ins and outs of self-care

Sensory insight key to therapy

Choices make perfect 'scents'

LIZ FLEMING
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

INGERSOLL, ONT.— I have discovered I know frighteningly little about caring for myself.

But apparently, I'm not alone, according to the folks at Elm Hurst Inn and Country Spa.

"Most people pay no attention to themselves," says spa directress Chriss Wilson. That's why a treatment at the Country Spa involves teaching clients self-care — from the inside out.

The brochure suggested an hour and a half for an Elemental Nature Facial for Self-Renewal but in fact, two hours flew by as I learned more than I'd ever thought possible about how my habits — good and bad — affect my skin.

The process started with a questionnaire based on the Aveda theory of holistic care: you can't fix the outside until you understand the inside, which involves an analysis of five elements, Infinity, Air, Fire, Water and Earth, that supposedly make up your body and spirit.

Each element has sensory and physiological links. To determine your individual blend, clients answer questions on everything from skin type to thought processes.

Energy level came next (consistent, strong) and then stress response (snarly wasn't listed so I went with "can get irritable and frustrated.") Body type (athletic build) and sleep patterns were easy (sleeps solidly and can function well on less than six hours) as were routine/orientation (mildly dislikes routine) and thinking style (focuses well, sometimes.)

Each answer fell into one of the elemental categories — the grand total comprised my Aveda profile.

I'm overwhelmingly a Fire girl, with just one response in the Water column and two in the Infinity row.

"It's best to have some responses in every elemental category," Wilson said tactfully. "This tells me you're a very high-energy person who pushes herself hard."

I'm blazing, and unbalanced.

"Is that bad?" I asked.

No. Apparently, in a Zen kind of way, it's neither bad nor good. It just is.

The treatment began with a footbath so relaxing I couldn't fret about anything.

Lovely. But wasn't I having a facial?

"You are," Wilson explained. "This first step is to lower the barriers between us and help you relax. Next, you're going to take a sensory journey so I can determine which scents and products to use."

Eyes closed, I smelled three vials of scent.

Easy, I just chose the one I liked best. Wilson presented three more. Again, all were aromatic and soothing but one was a standout.

"Your first choice determines the scent overtone, and the second, the undertone for the products we'll use. Your choices make perfect sense. The second fragrance you selected is for sensitive skin, like yours. When we let our sense of smell take over, it can often determine exactly what our face, body, mind and spirit need."

Apparently, one thing I need is quiet time.

Wilson was nearly silent as she examined my skin under a powerful light, then gently cleansed, exfoliated, massaged and hydrated the face of Fire. I tried to ask questions.

"Talk later," she crooned.

"Just relax."

Afterwards, as I sipped cool water in the lounge, the self-care tutorial began.

"There's some sun damage around your jaw and hairline. It's not as bad as it might be," Wilson frowned in a motherly way, "... given that you say you never wear hats or sunscreen."

Bad Fire girl.

"You need sunscreen," Wilson said firmly. "And you're dehydrated. To plump up the skin, you need to drink more water."

One more glass each day for a week. Then two more the next week. Very do-able.

"Water hydrates from within, but you also need hydration for your skin's surface, especially the thin skin around the eyes. Use more moisturizer."

"Dead surface skin cells prevent moisture absorption," said Wilson, "so exfoliate every day."

Every day — wouldn't my face rub right off?

"Use a gentle liquid exfoliator on your skin overnight. And speaking of overnight, try to get more sleep. Just because you can function on less than six hours doesn't mean you should."

Smarter now, I'm off to grab a glass of water, dab on some exfoliator and smother myself in moisturizer.

Liz Fleming is a freelance writer based in St. Catharines. Her recent spa visit was subsidized by Elm Hurst Inn and Country Spa.


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