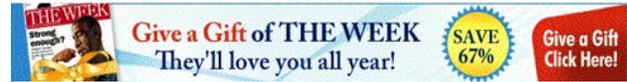


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Amy McDonald: Spa Queen

by **kyle roderick**



amy mcdonald: queen of the green spa world

Wouldn't it be cool to get paid for dreaming up how to bring mind/body bliss into people's lives? Amy McDonald does exactly that, in her role as Spa and Programs director at El Monte Sagrado Living Resort & Spa TM (www.elmontesagradoc.com) in Taos, New Mexico. Even better, her lushly alive workplace is the only ecologically sustainable luxury resort and spa in the U.S. Thus, although she works in a luxury eco-resort, McDonald also dreams up solutions for 21st century emotional, environmental, and psychic remediation.

For example, with her staff of therapists and technicians, she co-creates all spa treatments, many of which are existentially avant-garde compared to the cliché pampering rituals offered at most luxury destination spas. A perfect example of McDonald's magic for helping people find bliss is in-room Trauma Recovery (a two-hour, clothed treatment dedicated to relieving body/mind of stored tensions). Performed by a licensed massage therapist, Trauma Recovery is an experiential tool for rediscovering parts of you that may have been missing for some time, due to an accident, chronic pain, and/or emotional stress. "It's a body/mind re-education treatment that respects and protects the individual's privacy by never verbally discussing the issues being remedied," McDonald says.

Formerly the Spa director at Catalina, AZ's Miraval Life In Balance, McDonald explains, "I have a rare opportunity in the spa industry to show how authentic self-care and planetary care springs from living sustainably and organically— and treating guests like the precious and unique living systems that they are. It feels satisfying to show our guests, the surrounding community and the global community that one can live in luxury with minimum impact on our natural resources."

Before coming to El Monte Sagrado, McDonald worked for almost two decades in "normal" spas and resorts. (The overwhelming majority of spa and resort properties use synthetic building materials, consume vast amounts of energy and use harsh chemicals for swimming pools, housecleaning, landscaping, etc.) McDonald asks: "How can a spa be a place of healing if it is divorced from nature, built with toxic materials, cleaned with carcinogenic industrial solvents and landscaped with chemical fertilizers, pesticides and fungicides?"

"To my knowledge," McDonald continues, "there is indeed no other luxury spa in the US that is as committed to sustainability as El Monte Sagrado." "We recycle enough water on the property that we are actually putting water back into the Taos water system," she observes. More green examples: chlorine is never used on the El Monte Sagrado property. A biodegradable, nontoxic and gentle product that the spa created called Curoxin is used in swimming pools instead of chlorine. Biodegradable, nontoxic cleaning products are used in the kitchen, landscaping, spa, and laundry. All food scraps (except protein) are composted into the resort's organic garden.

While solar panels around the resort feed back into the El Monte Sagrado grid, the spa uses a solar powered car and has natural heating and cooling systems instead of air conditioning and heating ducts. "We did not use any synthetic products in the spa: the building of the Living spa is all made of natural products," McDonald says with pride. "Adobe and micaceous clay walls and a natural air ceiling allow us to grow tropical plants that re-oxygenate the air and purify the environment."

When she found out that the electricity breaker box for the entire spa property was next to her desk, McDonald had the office tested for electromagnetic frequencies. "My husband Ed Moffett, [a yoga teacher, artist and workshop leader who also works at El Monte Sagrado] brought in some EMF detecting devices so we could see just how much the box was emitting." As a consequence, the breaker box was moved to a remote area of the property where people rarely pass.

McDonald says that one of the most blissful parts of her job is creating products for the property that improve the quality of people's lives. Take for example Chara, the spa's new line of paraben-free body care products that are placed in every guest room. Chara means jubilation in Sanskrit; the name celebrates the pure ingredients that are beautifully packaged inside gold-lined aluminum bottles.

Found in most children and adult body care products, parabens are preservatives that have been identified as estrogenic and disruptive of normal hormone functions. Estrogenic substances are chemicals foreign to the body that mimic the function of the naturally occurring hormone, estrogen. "There is substantial scientific evidence to suggest that increased exposure to parabens and other substances that behave like estrogen in the body may elevate an individual's risk of developing cancer," says McDonald. "It feels very gratifying to be able to offer our guests the alternative of Chara

products. Anything we can do to help reduce people toxic load and the planet's toxic load, we are all for it."

While engineering blissful experiences for the resort's guests is a "beautiful privilege," so is managing spa therapists and other personnel. "The most highly skilled therapists do not speak the same language that the rest of a more corporate environment do," says McDonald. "They need to be heard and need time to process and digest and are very intuitive and sensitive. It takes a high level of sophistication and discernment to manage them effectively," she continues. "It takes a lot of energy to hold a sacred space within a structured work environment. Although I feel I excel in this, it is still really challenging."

With the intuitive heart of a healer and the fair finesse of an ethical executive, McDonald believes "in the value of blissful experiences to transform, empower, heal and reveal. At work I find bliss when I create a spa treatment or a product that gets national media recognition," she says. "I find bliss in reading about people committed to sustainability and the environment. I find bliss from reading about the courage of others."

As the proud mother of baby Maya and wife of Ed Moffett, McDonald also finds bliss "hearing my 6 month old daughter squeal with delight over a flower or clouds above. I find bliss on a date with my husband, hiking to a mountain top with a picnic at sunset and staying long after dark to just stare at the stars. I love how we share silence and space together and how nature heals us. I find bliss in my weekly one hour-long bath...just having time to think and just be. I find bliss smelling and kissing my baby...there is nothing like it."

And what's more, "I find bliss in sharing; anything that is true and warm and living; and I intend to teach this to my child." Hmm. Perhaps McDonald's next assignment will be an ecologically sustainable spa resort with pre-school facility. "Now that's a vision of bliss," she says, smiling into the pink and turquoise Taos sunset.

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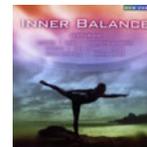
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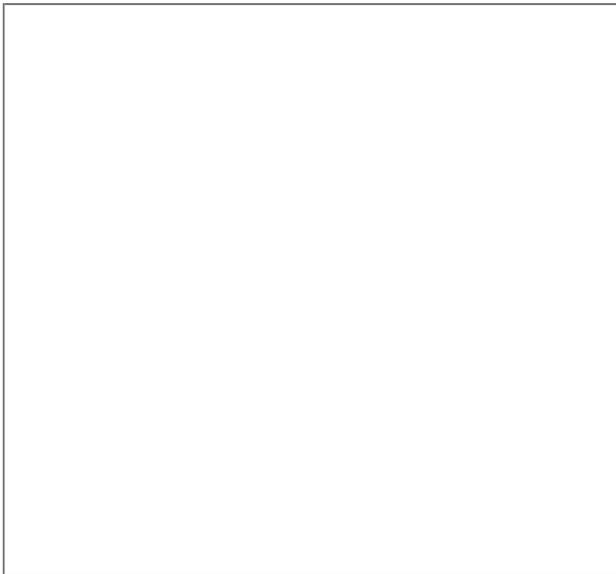
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