

## THE CONSULTANT

*Amy McDonald, founder, Amy McDonald and Associates, an international company specializing in the creation of green and sustainable spa programs and services*

### **Organic Spa: What sparked your interest in green spas?**

**AM:** In the mid-1990s, I was general manager of a small property in Baja California, Mexico, called Rancho Leonero. It was here that I first learned about organic farming and how to create a sustainable spa environment with effective healing programs and services. And it was here I witnessed people's great hunger for a deep reconnection to nature.

### **OS: Do you think that spas are behaving in a sustainable manner overall?**

**AM:** The concept of sustainability has many levels, from totally sustainable to the most basic beginnings. My feeling is that any spa that does not seek to integrate sustainability options in its design and daily operation will be rapidly eclipsed by those that are more sustainable, primarily because the consumer is becoming so savvy about what goes into their body. The organic movement is a key part of this journey. In the last three years there has been a significant interest in environmental sustainability from both privately owned spas and large hotel chains. As the public becomes more and more educated about the importance of environmental issues, most industries are beginning to respond appropriately. It makes economic, environmental, and social sense. I believe we will see the majority of spas commit on some level to becoming more green in the next five years.

### **OS: What has been your most successful project, and why?**

**AM:** Helping to create the Living Spa at El Monte Sagrado in Taos, New Mexico. This represented a great success in terms of integrating organics and sustainability. Our team had the goal of recycling all the water in the resort through a series of artificial wetlands with aquatic plants and organisms, to ultimately restore waste water to drinkable standards using totally natural processes.

Any of the products we used in the Living Spa ultimately ended up in the drain and in the water recycling system, so they had to be totally organic and life-supporting. I wanted to use organic products anyway, but in this spa we simply could not afford to clog the system with things like parabens and the many other ingredients in standard body products from shampoos to massage lotions. It was a unique situation with a unique opportunity to test various aspects of sustainability.

### **OS: What do spas owe the consumer?**

**AM:** Spas owe the consumer a truthful story of their intentions and business practices. A full disclosure of the ingredients of their products is also essential. Spas also owe the consumer education. I feel that spas invite people to heal and should be deeply committed to also giving solid hands-on tools that these consumers can incorporate into their personal lives, businesses, and communities. Education is critical, and I believe spas have an obligation to educate their guests. Spas owe their guests a safe, caring experience that helps them heal. They also owe their guests awareness, grace, and empowerment.

### **OS: How can we live a more spa lifestyle?**

**AM:** The greatest spa experience involves you returning home with more ability to care for yourself. Period! You've had a great experience at the spa, and done some great healing, but now you're home and on your own. What will you do, today, right now?

Self-Care is the key, and any spa experience can add dimensions to your self-care-ability. Choosing organic options is a great way to living a spa lifestyle. Buy organic food, use water filters on your tap, shower, and bath water. Consider every aspect of your indoor environment, from air quality to cleaning and laundry products, and the products you use on your body and in your food. Use air purifiers if necessary in your house and keep your home environment peaceful, restful and clean. Discover the healing power of nurturing yourself and resting in the silence of your mind and body, and limit your exposure to TV and media that's not directly related to your



ability to contribute to the world. Contrary to popular belief, you need not be wealthy to live a spa lifestyle. You just need to decide to become more aware of the choices you face every day. Nobody's perfect, so, we just do the best we can to choose to live more in balance with nature.

### **OS: What keeps you awake at night?**

**AM:** The state of our environment is a constant concern. I have a two-year-old daughter. What will life on this planet be like for her in ten, twenty, thirty years? I wonder about how much of the ozone layer will be left when she is my age. I wonder about air quality and worldwide water issues. Will future generations walk safely through nature? What areas of nature will remain undisturbed for us to learn from? How biologically diverse will the world be thirty years from now? On the plus side, I also lie in bed at night thinking about how nature is a marvelously self-healing system. Certain powerful plants, for instance, when placed in polluted rivers or lakes, literally gobble up toxic waste and re-oxygenate the water so that it is clean enough to reintroduce fish to them. There are many environmental remediation strategies that are working organic magic in cities, towns all over the world.