

SPA SLEUTH | EL MONTE SAGRADO

rate treatments are given in guests' rooms and probably will continue to be when the spa expansion (from 2,500 to almost 5,000 square feet) is finished in late spring or early summer. The resort is adding a consultation room, locker rooms, saunas and steam rooms, and shower facilities—and expanding the salon. There will also be “a lot of retail,” according to general manager Leeann Ray.

It's not the building, however; it's the therapists that make the Living Spa stand out. McDonald, who was the spa director at Miraval in Tucson and is one of the most respected people in the business, says she's astonished by the high level of expertise and diversity in Taos, adding (as proof) that the gurus of Acutonics, a sound healing treatment that uses tuning forks, live here. “I've been like a kid in a candy store,” she says. But she hasn't gone totally wild. Even the out-there therapists McDonald has hired are grounded in at least one respect: They know how to give a great massage. It's the consistency of the hands that makes this spa singular.

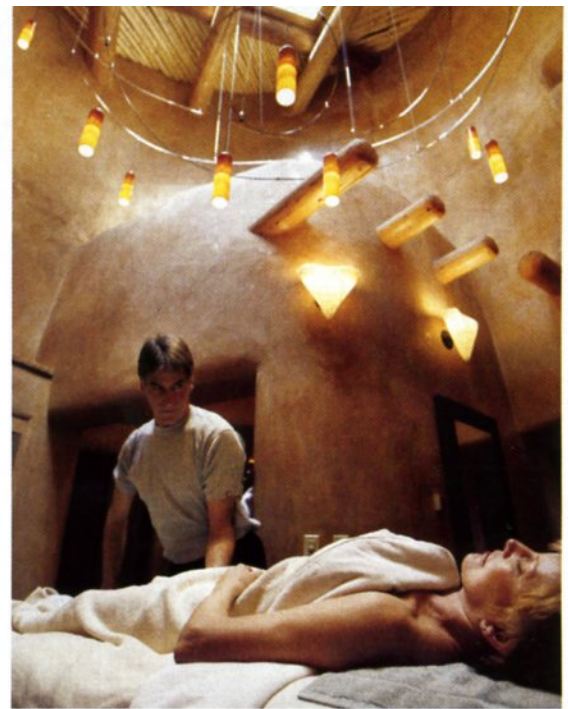
One of the best bodyworkers in the business, Ed Moffett (right), gives a massage in the Torreon (Spanish for “big tower”), the spa's showcase treatment room. The Native American suites (below, the living room) display a clean southwestern aesthetic, especially in the bedrooms (bottom).

ENOUGH ABOUT ME

“You're well on your way to sainthood,” says Lydia Safina about five minutes into the Life Reading Massage, which combines deep-tissue work with deep-issue work. In this treatment Lydia is a sort of receiver-transmitter, verbalizing the vibes she gets from my energy field while she performs the massage.

Her comment, welcome as it is, raises more attitude than beatitude in me—I have a Calvinist streak—but before I can respond, more phrases tumble out of her mouth. “You are an adult full of good intentions and with more adult knowledge than you know. But”—why is there always a but?—“you have to give yourself to yourself instead of always going off into enough about me, what about you?”

Here Lydia puts her finger on the fact that I am being two-haloed. I'm in the experience, and I'm reporting on it (although she doesn't seem to know I'm writing a story about the resort). I stifle a confession and we roll on, with me querying rather than relat-



ing to the things she's telling me, often because I don't understand what she's saying. (I'm not about getting but about inviting people to my table. I'm about distributing bread loaves. All getting is already inside me—and much else that is opaque.) In Lydia's book, I'm disconnecting rather than connecting. As we come down the homestretch, Lydia, perhaps exasperated by my journalistic rope-a-dope, suddenly says that I've broken our communion and goes quiet. I feel guilty.

But very happy, for the massage has been excellent. When I get up to dress, my shoulders are snap-crackle-popping with release, and my upper back no longer feels like a suit askew on a hanger. I emerge from the treatment room ready to offer profuse thanks (in the form of bread, not loaves), but Lydia has vanished. The receptionist says such behavior is “unordinary” for her, and that she left a message: I should try her Awakening Massage, which is more about touch than talk. “She said you'd like that better.” She read my mind on that one.

MEANING, MEANING EVERYWHERE

“There's symbolism in just about everything here,” says the young bellman at the start of our room tour. Indeed, from a design standpoint, El Monte Sagrado is a compendium of cultural quotations and references. The tented structure around the swimming pool is a bonsai version of the ones at Denver International Airport. The library is intended to evoke a 19th-century Texas ranch parlor, and the cocktail tables in the Anaconda Bar, which has an enormous bronze anaconda twisting through it like a Chinese New Year float, are skin-topped drums. Cultures are mixed and matched with glee. In the boardroom, Picasso's *Reclining Nude* hangs on *continued on page 106*

