

beauty

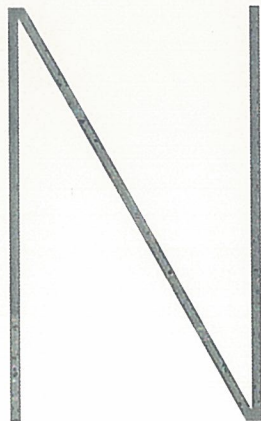
PHOTOGRAPHED BY
ISABELLE BONJEAN

EAU

*Hollywood stars just can't
get enough of colonic
irrigation, and a hardcore
spa in Palm Springs is
bending over backwards to
accommodate them.
Jeffrey Podolsky gives it a go*

DE

COLON



ame the hotel that stocks its loos with 15 rolls of loo paper in case of intestinal emissions. Is it the Ritz? Au contraire. That distinction belongs to the We Care Holistic Spa in Palm Springs, California, where I recently spent a week beautifying myself by fasting and cleansing.

Why choose We Care? Let's just say it was a process of elimination. Call it reverse chic: despite its spartan decoration (don't bother bringing your tennis racket, golf clubs or the latest bikinis), We Care is one of the trendiest spas in the US, especially among the Hollywood set, because of its rigorous regimen of detoxification. It's a holistic purge whose praises have been sung by such celebrities as Courtney Love, Gwen Stefani, Liv Tyler and Drew Barrymore, who flock there just before the Oscars in an effort to ward off the gut-wrenching squeeze into their snug gowns.

For this star-studded clientele, a pre-Oscars trip to We Care has become as de rigueur as a Botox underarm injection. Just ask Gisele Bündchen, Christy Turlington, Maggie Rizer and Karen Elson, who wouldn't dream of taking to the catwalk before a tummy-flattening pilgrimage. No wonder Bianca Jagger has been and Alexandra von Furstenberg is dying to go.

The prospect of baring my posterior daily for 45 ego-deflating minutes of deep-cleansing irrigation terrifies me – and, God help me, even the pleasures of a smoke are forbidden. Still, I figure if those waif-like gals can do it, why can't a robust fellow like me? Besides, I'd be in the equally robust company of such indisputable male stalwarts as Matt Damon and Ben Affleck. And dropping a few pounds wouldn't hurt: I'd finally be able to fit into that coveted Richard James velvet suit my middle-aged gut has made obsolete. You shed a lot of inches at We Care.

PRE-SPA: THE PREPARATIONS BEGIN

My psychiatrist underscores his stamp of disapproval by informing me that I'm nuts to be going to such an establishment and, my homoerotic protestations aside, insists my desire to have someone insert a tube into my nether regions must have deeply subconscious origins. For this, I pay him \$150 an hour twice a week.

Loni, my We Care ambassador, recommends that I prepare for my 'journey' by eating only fruit and veg for four days, in addition to a glass of prune juice each morning, two spoonfuls of olive oil at night and a herbal laxative called Smoothmoves. Unfortunately, life in Manhattan doesn't lend itself to such sage ministrations. I submit myself to a modified regimen of prune juice, bran muffins and a relatively harmless laxative in the form of a wafer that my 81-year-old father swears by. Nevertheless, I don't question the wisdom of my last supper at Da Silvano (the hip, downtown equivalent of San Lorenzo), where Silvano regales me with an orgiastic feast of bruschetta, antipasti, fried calamari, venison osso buco and such light confections as panna cotta, tiramisu, crème caramel and bongo bongo, a beignet filled with vanilla ice-cream and chocolate fudge. It's my last hurrah!

Upon arriving in Palm Springs, where the weather is always sizzling but never humid, I tell the cab driver to get me to an eatery, where I devour a cheeseburger and fries and light up to my lungs' content. 'They'll

know,' the cabbie says, referring to my imminent colonic expulsions. 'Their motto is, "If it doesn't sprout, throw it out."' We pull up to an old-fashioned ranch-style house decorated in shabby-chic bronze Buddhas and crystal ioniser lamps – not exactly the ambience one associates with Palm Springs, where Rollers and Bentleys are the norm. I'm welcomed by an affable security guard, who tells me how *Patriot Games* director Phillip Noyce conquered a three-pack-a-day habit during his stay and how Tom Arnold ('I took in twice as much water as Matt Damon during my colonics') kicked his cigar habit. My room is a comfy re-creation of an adobe casita with a Balinese-Mexican interior – and loads of loo paper.

DAY ONE

Hell, I'm supposed to be fasting anyway – I'm Jewish and today is Yom Kippur. Any good Jew would be at synagogue atoning for sins on this holiest of holy days. But after my first colonic I decide it's better to be sacrilegious than drop in on Temple N'vey Shalom (recommended, ironically, by Pam Pagan, an administrator at We Care), and spend my entire time holed up in the loo waiting for the floodgates to close.

I sleep through the 7am morning walk and catch up with the crew on a desert trail. They're all women, and they're incredible: I can barely keep up with their bionic pace. Tomorrow, I vow, I'll show them – that is, until I twist my knee and practically wipe out. I check in at the spa's communal watering-hole, where everyone gathers to 'feast' on a smorgasbord of herbal teas and powdered libations supplemented by an array of capsules to boost everything from digestion to energy, which, in my case, is flagging by the minute. At night, we're given a cup of puréed vegetable soup – and that's it. Our dietary fare consists of 200 liquid calories a day: a mélange of blood-purifying and liver-and-kidney-cleansing teas, capped by a shot of aloe vera juice and a castor-oil chaser, if necessary, to prod a sluggish colon into waste-disposal action. There's also valerian root (a herbal Valium – that made my ears perk up and take notice), asparagus (if you're retaining water), charcoal (if you're gassy and bloated), garlic pills and cayenne pepper to increase your metabolism.

Given the dearth of standard culinary satisfactions, bon vivant that I am, I gird my loins and go in search of the next best thing: celebrity gossip, of which there is a steady diet at the spa. There's talk of how Courtney Love – and her pizza – had to be dragged from her limo kicking and screaming but turned out to be a pussycat during her colonics; how Matt Damon loved the place but buddy Ben, for whom the spa was the final step in his rehab makeover, was ambivalent about it; how Andie MacDowell comes twice yearly and is adored by the staff, but another guest was asked to leave after she was allegedly caught doing coke in her room and, in general, behaved like a spoiled brat, telling everyone to go to hell; how Gisele nibbled on Swiss chocolates but still had 'wonderful releases' and looks like anyone else without her make-up; how a gaggle of snooty models, many of whom suffer from bulimia and anorexia, paraded in stilettos and jewellery (bathrobes and flip-flops are the

norm); and how Alicia Silverstone (frequent visitor, strict vegan, beloved by all) shared a nightly grapefruit with Norm, the trusty security guard.

I've become the resident delinquent, missing morning yoga because of my first colonic, which proves disappointing. (Imagine having a long tube painlessly stuck up the opening of your bum while your tummy's massaged with a giant vibrator.) Sure enough, my burger manifests itself. But I'm 'impacted' and fall short of a bountiful release. Bountiful or not, however, I get to survey the entire evacuation after my colonic attendant, Sydney, suffuses me with purified water to coax stubborn residues from those hard-to-reach places. There's plenty of mucus and bile (via my gall bladder and liver, I'm told, which 'shows stress'). Still, I've let Sydney down and I'm determined to go one better tomorrow.

Despite an 80-minute Body Deluxe, in which my skin is freed of trapped waste and my pores are scrubbed open with a sympathetic sea sponge, I'm convinced I'm fading fast. I can hardly focus on the colonic chitchat around the drinks buffet ('Yes!' exclaims a guest, pumping her fist in the air, as she chronicles what appears to have been a volcanic release). The juice sommelier hands me a quick fix: a paper cup of rice milk accompanied by integras which gives my blood sugar a much-needed lift. Reduced to a leaden crawl, I sneak off for a smoke, which leaves me dizzy, my head throbbing from my failed nicotine high. That evening, I also fail miserably in 'breathwork' class ('You're from New York, aren't you?' the instructor surmises. 'They just vibrate at a different frequency'), where we're supposed to be transported to a 'different earth plane'. One gal has such a successful transport, she ends up sobbing and retching uncontrollably when her bottled-up emotions finally pop the cork. 'Someone's going off the deep end in there,' Norm says. 'That breathing really gets it out of you.' I manage to snore while others over-emote, thrashing and shouting with their arms and legs flailing wildly.

DAY TWO

Not only do I miss my dog, I miss his biscuits. I'm beginning to hallucinate. I'm seeing double, which in the case of the Swedish model isn't such a bad thing. If only I could have spoken to her during that 7am three-mile trek in the desert, but she and the other members of that fleet-footed seraglio outdistanced me by almost half a mile. To soothe my bruised libido, I sign up for a Deluxe Body Facial: two hours of pure bliss in which another spa babe, Shelley, draws a luscious bath for me – mango smoothie and all – and proceeds to lave my entire body in fresh coffee grounds to stimulate the lymphatic system. No wonder Liv Tyler loves this particular treatment.

After being wrapped in a specially formulated mud (organic, of course, like everything else at We Care), I'm treated to a spine-tingling scalp and body massage. I drift off and dream of swimming laps in a Starbucks caffe latte. If only my bowels could be persuaded to partake of

HOSE WHO OF CLEANSSED CELEBS



Gisele Bündchen



Matt Damon



Andie MacDowell



Ben Affleck



Courtney Love

this rich harvest: my colonic bears bitter fruit, so my new therapist, Liz, whose office is decorated with diplomas from some of the most prestigious colonic institutes in the land, orders me to add aloe vera juice and castor oil to my daily menu.

DAYS THREE, FOUR AND FIVE

I've lost seven and a half pounds! And that's before my groundbreaking colonic, in which I expel so much age-old waste that Liz rates my prize-winning release as super-duper excellent: 'I'm so proud of you. It makes me so happy to see all this coming out of you.' The spa insists that after two days of feeling like death warmed-over you begin to show signs of rejuvenation. Sure enough, I feel as light as gossamer and bound back to my room with the unbridled zest of a young stud. My hunger has miraculously abated, and I no longer salivate when the Chicago commodities trader explains how he trades in pork bellies and cattle.

After my facialist Candi tells me that I have the same skin as Julia Ormond, I swagger over to the pool (chlorine-free and hyper-oxygenated, natch) and flirt shamelessly with Madeleine the model. I find myself becoming incredibly randy as I walk the meditation labyrinth. I make a note to ask the astrologist about this newfound Eros and what it portends and remind myself that I have a girlfriend, whom I love deeply. Besides, what am I going to say to Madeleine during pranatic healing class: 'Would you be interested in getting together over an early evening cocktail of lemon water and castor oil on the rocks?'

For the rest of the week, I feel fabulous. My mind seems clearer than it has been in a long time – the perfect antidote to 20 years of psychoanalysis. 'You made my day again,' exclaims Liz as she watches my posterior produce one stupendous release after another. I'm ecstatic. In six days, I've lost 10 pounds.

I'm considering having monthly colonics when I return to New York. Then again, though I've managed to keep off the 10 pounds I lost, I haven't committed to the litany of lifestyle changes the spa recommends, including a resounding injunction against caffeine, sleeping with your dog (parasite alert, unless you feed him pumpkin seeds), showering without a purifier attached to the shower head, eating sushi (double parasite alert, though the ginger can help nullify the vermin), and the exhortation to drink gallons of distilled water with lemon (it rids the intestinal tract of mucus). To my credit, I do eat sparingly – only fruits and vegetables – for the three days following my spa stay, unlike someone who once gorged on Chinese food and had to be rushed to hospital. But I certainly haven't been eliminating the requisite two feet of waste a day. Still, the spa's fervent inducements haven't been a total loss: to my delight, numerous New Yorkers have commented on the healthy glow of my skin. Of course, this could be because of that great tan I got while lounging by the pool, awaiting my next exotic massage. No matter. I feel like a semitic Adonis. And if the feeling doesn't last – well, it's back to We Care for a triumphant reprise. Then again, perhaps it's high time I started looking into some self-tanning lotions. I hear Dior makes one helluva product. □

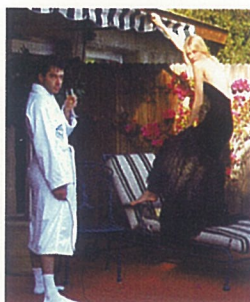
contributors

MATT JONES

The first photograph that 27-year-old Matt published was a snap of Damien Hirst naked – and he has continued to photograph the Britart superstar ever since. For this issue he shot our covergirl, Naomi Watts. He was struck by her uncanny resemblance to his own wife: 'I showed Naomi a picture of my wife and she thought it was her!' Though based in New York for the time being, Matt dreams of the day when he can retire to the country and settle down to a quiet life growing organic vegetables.

JEREMY WAYNE

'Starched but not starchy' is how our restaurant editor, Jeremy Wayne, describes his ideal restaurant. 'Happiness for me is sipping a properly made Negroni while trying to break little corners off the tablecloth to see if it passes the starch test,' he says. In the *Tatler Restaurant Guide 2004*, which accompanies this issue, Jeremy reviews over 300 of Britain's top eateries, including nearly 50 newcomers.



JEFFREY PODOLSKY

'It was truly enlightening, in every sense of the word,' says our New York editor, Jeffrey Podolsky, of his visit to a holistic spa in Palm Springs for this issue. After fasting and enduring daily colonics for a week out west, Jeffrey returned to Manhattan a whole 10 pounds lighter, but has found it hard to stick to the rigorous post-spa detox regime. He's now back to chain-smoking and hourly caffeine fixes.

WILL RICHMOND

Five years of studying literature was quite enough for Will Richmond, so he set off to Italy to soak up the sun and culture for three months. He ran out of cash in Rome and lived as a beachcomber in the Bay of Naples before winding his way back to London – which he much prefers to dusty old Oxford. For this issue he interviewed 25-year-old American writer Ryan Gattis. 'He was wonderfully unassuming, but his Zen-like calm masks the start of a sizzling career,' says Will.

