



## Peacetime: a spa inside army barracks

SAN FRANCISCO'S LIGHT-FILLED  
SENSPA FOCUSES ON OVERALL  
WELLNESS FROM THE INSIDE OUT

It may look the same on the outside (white, nondescript, shed-like), but the men who called a particular no-frills World War I army barracks home some 90 years ago would never recognize the interior at 1161 Gorgas avenue in San Francisco's historic Presidio. Mind you, if the privates and sergeants were around today, surely they'd be happy to sample a Cool as a Cucumber facial or indulge in an Ionic Aqua Detox.

Yup, for the past year or so the long empty 13,000-square-foot space has been a spa: SenSpa. All it took to transform the once dank and dark place into a bastion of light and tranquility was \$4 million. (Over the past few years an overhaul of the Presidio, the longest continuously operated military base in the United States until its closure in 1995, has taken hold with the corporate headquarters of Lucas Films at its foundation.) However, because of the strict preservation codes that dictate all construction at the Presidio, many aspects of the building's original structure were kept intact, including wooden beams, wood floors and skylights.

Not deterred by the restrictions, the architects and designers embraced them, beautifully balancing the rustic wood elements with a dreamy chic (but not overdone) mix of textures like bamboo and teak, and custom-designed fabrics, fixtures and furnishings – all while infusing a warm Far East-meets-California look and feel that's just as pleasing to men as women (no froufrou pinks here). The open space features a retail area with natural products from around the world, a sitting area with delicious raw, organic treats like dark chocolate, dried fruits and a variety of teas and a more private (and wireless) waiting area with cozy lounge chairs. A breathtaking glass partition with continually running water gently separates the front space with the more private quarters in the back where the heart of the salon lives. The long space – dotted with plush greenery and sitting areas – comprises SenSpa's inner sanctuary: 14 treatment rooms, including two VIP rooms and two couples' retreats.

Getting the feeling that SenSpa is more than the run-of-the-mill rub-a-dub joint? Bingo! It's flush with a range of beauty and body treatments, which take place in richly appointed soundproof rooms with memory-foam beds and Italian linens. The spa is also home to a resident Master Aromatherapist who creates all of SenSpa's unique essential oils (and will custom-blend products for clients) as well as a filtered-water system that runs throughout.

But what truly sets SenSpa apart from the crowd is its focus on overall wellness from the inside out. Key to this philosophy is the SenCenter where Master Healer Ming Yi Wang performs a variety of ancient healing practices to stimulate self-cleansing, boost the immune system, remove blockages, increase circulation and the like. Chinese magnetic cupping, acupuncture and custom herbal remedy prescriptions are but a few of the Master's specialties. Wellness coaches are also on hand for one-time assessments as well as ongoing, long-term programs for locals.

Truth is, no matter what your pleasure, any time spent at SenSpa is guaranteed to be a successful mission.

*SenSpa is located at 1161 Gorgas avenue in San Francisco, California, tel. 1.415.4411777.*

**Gail Goldberg**