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(Pg. 43)

CONTENTS

YYC

40

Features

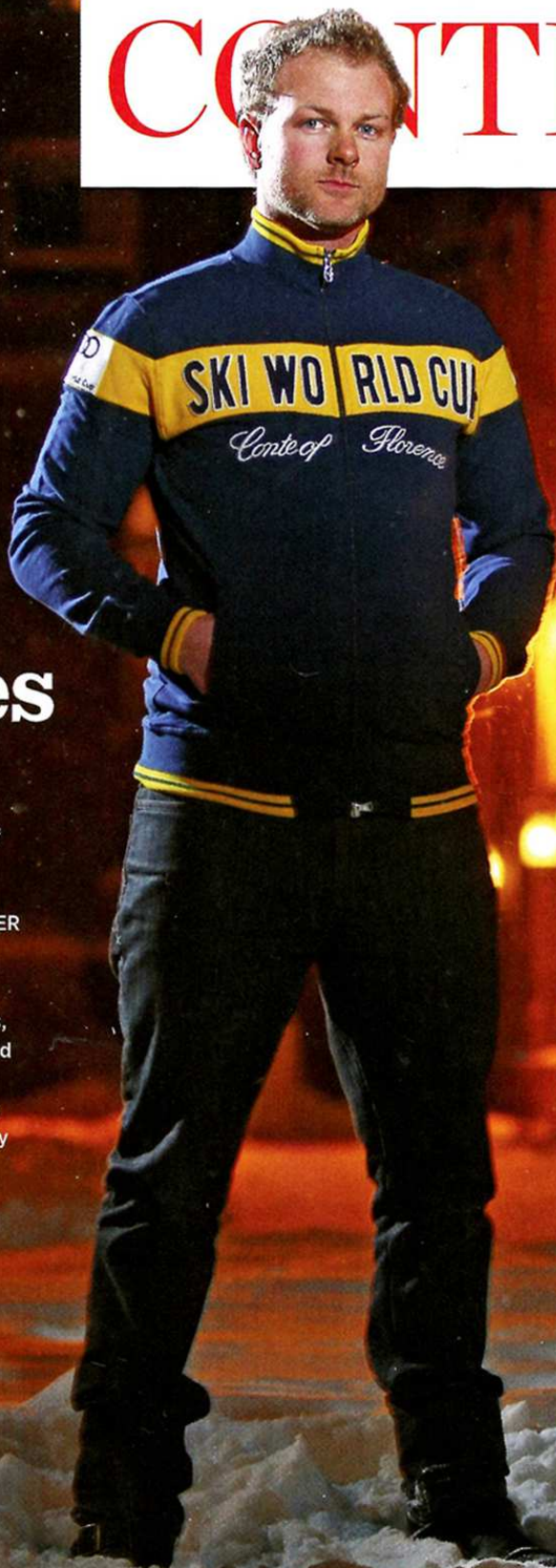
40 EXCELLENCE ▶ IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

With three spectacular resorts, **Banff National Park** offers dynamic skiing, yes — but also an unparalleled winter wonderland. BY CRAI S. BOWER

48 THE ART OF BODY CLEANSING


Despite testimonies from movie stars, rock legends, world-class athletes and billionaires, a commoner is dubious about **rejuvenating the body** using a steady diet of wheatgrass, bio-energy treatments and psychotherapy. So he seeks enlightenment at the Hippocrates Health Institute. BY ORION RAY-JONES

SKIING IS IN HIS BLOOD:
Paul Stutz at the Fairmont Banff Springs Hotel in Banff National Park



MALCOLM CARMICHAEL

THE ART OF BODY CLEANSING



DESPITE TESTIMONIES FROM MOVIE STARS, ROCK LEGENDS, WORLD-CLASS ATHLETES AND BILLIONAIRES, A COMMONER IS DUBIOUS ABOUT REJUVENATING THE BODY USING A STEADY DIET OF WHEATGRASS, BIO-ENERGY TREATMENTS AND PSYCHOTHERAPY. SO HE SEEKS ENLIGHTENMENT AT THE HIPPOCRATES HEALTH INSTITUTE.


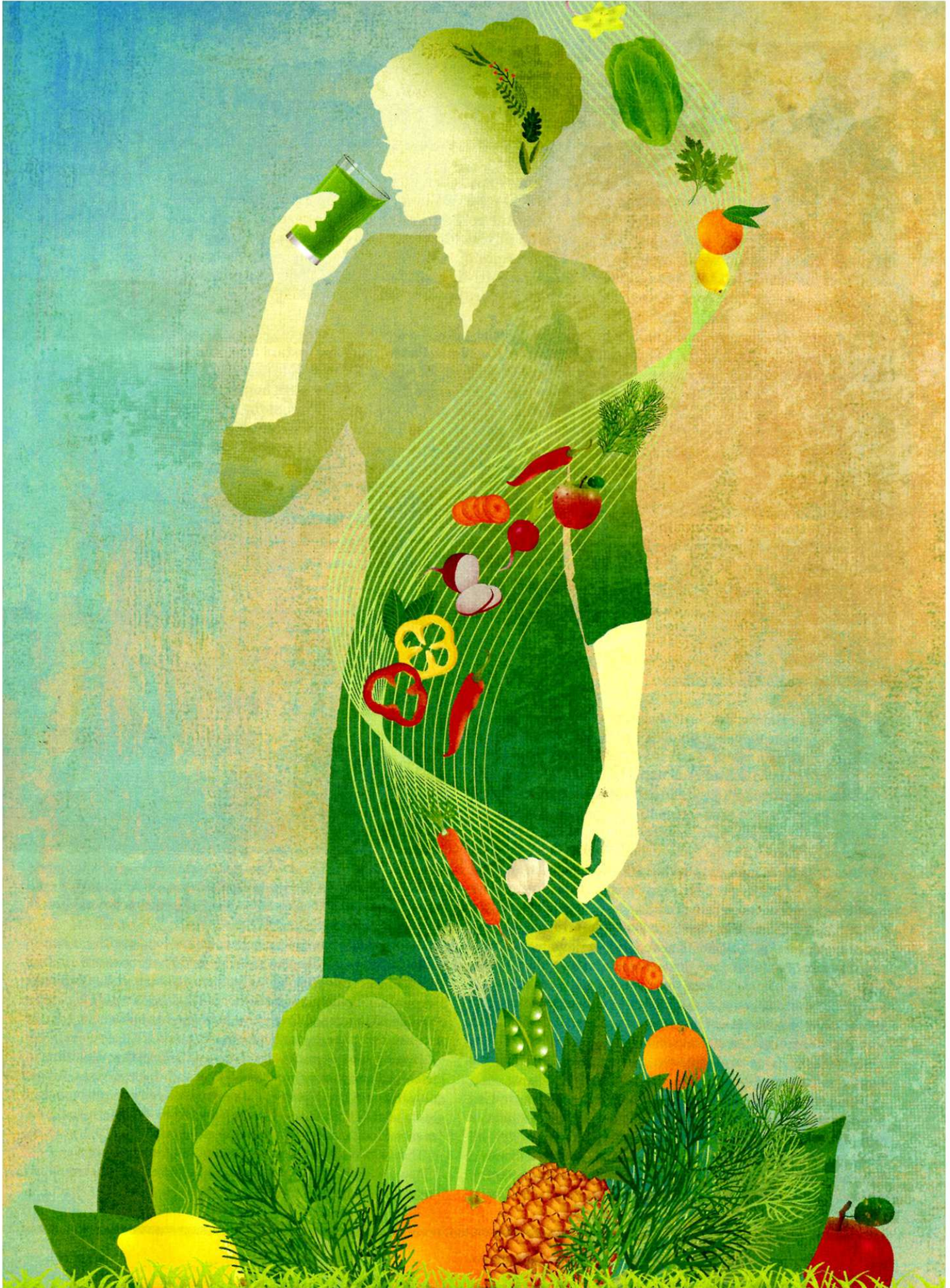


Illustration by
Stephanie
Dalton Cowan





WITH MAGICAL HANDS ON MY BELLY,

my new craniosacral massage therapist with a syrupy voice is having visions of my physical ailments in metaphorical forms. Pam Blue says she feels “glue,” and this evil substance apparently resides deep in my abdomen. She suggests we meld minds in order to melt her sticky discovery, which I suppose could symbolize anything from kidney stones to acid reflux. When I signed up for this zany treatment, I thought “cranio” and “massage” meant I would be getting a scalp rub, not a reading of curious infirmities in my torso. When Venus Williams was on this health retreat’s massage table, did her mind likewise wander toward words like *efficacy* and *evidence*, or did the tennis star give herself over to the images of “balls of light” and “nets of power” that Pam softly whispers in my ear? “There’s a power in the symbols you see,” she coos. With three more hours before my next meal of uncooked veggies, I was having visions of cheesecake.

After our introductory handshake a few minutes earlier, Pam had greeted me with the common compliment: “I love your name.” My celestially inspired forename, Orion, gains me instant acceptance in certain circles. I was born to a family formed on a California commune led by vegetarianism guru Bubba Free John, and my childhood was spent deep in the trenches of the world of holistic, homeopathic, health-food hokum. But I rebelled successfully. To the great dismay of my name-givers, at the first sign of a snuffle, I rush past the crystal shop and the vitamin store on my way to the doctor for antibiotics.

Being skeptical about new-age healing doesn’t mean being closed-minded, however. So when I was due for a week of rejuvenation, I felt magnetically drawn to the Life Transformation Program at the Hippocrates Health Institute, a detox retreat set in Florida’s glamorous and sunny West Palm Beach that boasts a clientele of movie stars and billionaires. Sure, my inner Carl Sagan was slightly troubled by treatments promising longevity through the power of crystals, but special relativity must have sounded pretty wacky when Einstein stepped onto the world stage. Maybe it was time to put my youthful rebellion to the test and treat myself to a week of alternative wellness. Besides, if this place was good enough for Sir Anthony Hopkins, it was good enough for me.

“Let food be thy medicine and medicine be thy food.”

—HIPPOCRATES, 400 B.C.

The Hippocrates Health Institute was founded in Boston in the 1960s by Lithuanian-born Ann Wigmore, a passionate raw-food and wheatgrass-juice advocate who claimed that a diet of “living” plants could cure pretty much any ailment. Nutritionist Brian Clement joined the institute in the ’70s. Clement, as director, and Anna Maria, his wife, moved Hippocrates to a verdant 50-acre property 10 minutes west of Palm Beach International Airport in 1987. Since then, celebrities from Ellen Page and Heather Mills to Coretta Scott King, Mick Fleetwood and Kenny Loggins have visited to heal, detox, lose weight, fight the process of aging and get a fresh perspective on life.

The Life Transformation Program consists of lectures, exercise, massage, bio-energy treatments, psychotherapy and more with a raw vegan diet fueling visitors throughout. It lasts for three weeks, although some, like me, choose to do one week at a time. Beyond the core offerings (starting at about \$3,000 per week), add-ons like IV vitamin supplements and laser facials are available at an extra cost. But the highly recommended colonics, enemas and twice-daily wheatgrass “implants” are included in the price of the program — so they’re basically free — a price that still seems too high to me.

The retreat sits perfectly at the nexus of a number of growing health trends. According to a 2013 study by SRI International, a nonprofit research institute, wellness tourism now reaps \$181 billion a year in the United States. And “complementary medicine” — from homeopathic cold cures to acupuncture — is used by half of all Americans, making it a \$34 billion business. The country’s greatest



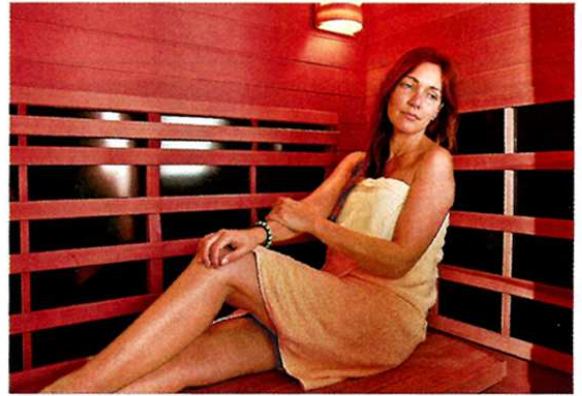
medical superstars — Dr. Oz, Deepak Chopra, Dr. Andrew Weil — fill best-seller lists with books about alternatives to the clinical Western practice of medicine.

Can we really live healthier, happier and longer with the help of some Chinese herbs, Indian stretches and Thai massages? Dr. Paul Offit, chief of the division of infectious diseases at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia and author of *Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine*, has his doubts. I decide to consult with the doctor before making myself a test subject.

“If you go and use a light machine and believe that it’s killing invisible bacteria in your body, and if that’s helping you, great. It’s not going to hurt,” Dr. Offit says. “If you take a weed and rub it on your chest, face the East and pray to the planet Mars, and that helps, great. I mean as long as it doesn’t hurt, I’m all for it.”

Then, I list some of the resort’s more, er, exotic offerings.

“Are you really going to do this to yourself?” he asks, incredulously. “You’re a brave man.”



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Didgeridoo by the lake; an infrared sauna; the Stockholm villa; mini yurts; a sampling of raw cuisine



When you arrive at the resort, you encounter dozens of varieties of fruit trees and abundant wildlife — cranes feeding in the pond, lizards darting out from behind Asian sculptures and maybe a member of the shy raccoon family. Wandering paths will lead you past an impressive farm and a futuristic greenhouse, which turns out 36 huge trays of wheatgrass each day, along with 90 percent of the sprouts that play the central role in lunches and dinners and in the resort’s ubiquitous “green juice.” It’s hard not to be impressed with the villa you splurged on. The duplex boasts en-suite bathrooms, a washer and dryer, a private patio on the lake, a huge flat-screen and enough comfy faux-leather seating to host a bustling mocktail party. Ignore the fact that your villa is named Stockholm. You’re a staunch skeptic. No amount of fasting and tai chi will convert you into a Phoebe Buffay. Sure, you’ll drink the wheatgrass juice, but not the propaganda.

At Wigmore Hall, lunch is served and you learn to be creative with the salad bar’s brightly colored organic vegetables. They will provide the vast majority of your sustenance during your stay, except on Wednesdays, when you will be doing a juice fast. As you scoop up some alfalfa, Chef Ken Blue — Pam’s hubby — will tell you that sprouts are “the most nutritious food in the world” and should take up the majority of your plate. The carrots, cucumbers and other familiar veggies should be treated merely as “side dishes.” So mix and match from



TO THE GREAT DISMAY OF MY NAME-GIVERS, AT THE FIRST SIGN OF A SNIFFLE, I RUSH PAST THE CRYSTAL SHOP AND THE VITAMIN STORE ON MY WAY TO THE DOCTOR FOR ANTIBIOTICS.

among the freshly harvested sunflower, mung bean, lentil and other germinated shoots. Salt and vinegar are verboten, so spice things up with a squeeze of lemon and some dried sea vegetables, which Ken promises “will protect you from outside sources of radiation.”

Hypothesis: Hunger makes humans more susceptible to suggestion. It was the morning of Day Three of my experiment when this brave test subject found himself willing to fully believe in the effectiveness of any alternative therapy, including those involving pixies and fairy dust, in exchange for some sushi and a cappuccino. Two nights in Stockholm and four low-calorie meals had left me in a serious state of junk-food withdrawal. I didn’t care if the menu had been specially designed to extend life by “working at 75 hertz” (something about harmonics and body vibrations) or that my weight had already dropped by a few pounds. All I could think about were

the rumors of past guests smuggling in pizzas and beers.

Meanwhile, alumni were giddy, practically skipping around the grounds. “Hi, I’m Eddie,” a veteran buoyantly announced. “I combine sexuality, humor and raw food.” Actor and comedian Eddie Brill warms up the crowd at *Late Show With David Letterman* and is a headliner on the stand-up circuit. Not only does the retreat provide good material for his shows (colon-cleansing is comedy gold), but Hippocrates also changed his life. After his first visit, he transformed his lifestyle by quickly losing more than 100 pounds and curing his rosacea and sleep apnea. He comes back for vacation whenever the TV show is on a break. “When life gets crazy and weird, I come back here ... to get crazy and weird,” he jokes. Eddie wasn’t the only returning famous face. Omar Al Fayed — son of famed billionaire Mohamed and the youngest brother of Dodi, Princess Di’s boyfriend who died with her in the 1997 car crash — could be seen lazing by the pool or attentively attending lectures.

But I was here on a mission for science, not to hobnob with the glitterati. Hippocrates claims scientific bases for all its treatments, proudly differentiating itself from the crunchy image of wellness centers from the flower-power age. Its Magnetic Resonance Stimulation machine apparently cleansed and repaired my body by matching the frequency of my body’s cells. “You know what grounding means, right?” asked the therapist as I lay on an innocuous white mat. “Yeah. Like electricity,” I answered. “No. It’s like being on the ground,” she explained. “Like laying on the beach.” The eight-minute session did indeed feel a lot like lying on a beach, though I never quite understood what that had to do with the magnets, frequencies or melatonin she mentioned.

My Thermagem and Viofor sessions similarly consisted of lying on my back while medical-looking devices did sciencey-sounding



LOVE SHACK: The Hippocrates Health Institute promotes warmth and good health in its treatments.

Bernay-Roman — a wizened psychotherapist who looked not unlike the painting of the resort’s Greek namesake on the wall behind him — I began to accept that Hippocrates did make people well. By encouraging guests to create their own bespoke program from a mix of conventional and alternative therapies, the resort offers something for everybody, which is why it boasts a return rate of around 60 percent.


“Every person that comes here is expecting to change and transform,” says co-director Brian Clement. “We facilitate that by meeting them where they are. We don’t drag them and say this is how everyone has to change. We don’t force anyone to do anything here.”

Nobody seems to agree about exactly which day most detoxers will get over the hump, but sometime near the end of your first week, something strange will happen: You’ll stop feeling like you’re starving. Though you’ve only eaten the new diet for a few days, your body will have changed.

And your mind will have changed too. For many, the yurt is the site of this transformation. The cool, circular space hosts yoga and Pilates classes for all levels, along with early-morning meditation led by Dr. Keith Cini. As the ex-football player guides you to a state of relaxation, the hour will simultaneously fly by and last forever.

Perhaps the perfect health retreat would eschew any hint of mysticism. But there are basic ingredients at the core of what makes Hippocrates and all such retreats successful. The food is inarguably some of the healthiest stuff you can eat, and there is a plethora of fitness and relaxation options. (The greatest stress relief I found was the fact that you can exchange your weekly colonic for a bonus Swedish massage.) When attendees get their second blood test and weigh-in at

the end of their visit, nearly all will see profound improvements to their cholesterol levels and body mass.

It’s not hard to understand why the wellness industry is expanding in tandem with our ever-busier lives. For centuries, the rich and famous have understood that the best way to spend a vacation is at the spa, unwinding in thermal pools and treated to healthy foods and personalized pampering. And in these days of technologically accelerated lives, even a skeptical commoner could benefit from a few weeks of scientifically approved relaxation. 

As editorial director of INK, which produces travel publications, **ORION RAY-JONES** helped launch airline magazines for United, Delta and AirTran. He has also worked for music magazines *Mixer* and *Big Shot*. This is his first article for *American Way*.



NO AMOUNT OF FASTING AND TAI CHI WILL CONVERT YOU INTO A PHOEBE BUFFAY. SURE, YOU’LL DRINK THE WHEATGRASS JUICE, BUT NOT THE PROPAGANDA.

voodoo. Thermagem used light beamed through a sapphire (there are various gems to choose from) onto my head. The only sensation I felt was a roar from my digestive tract vibrating the water bed below. “I’m so hungry,” I overheard one technician say to the other as they watched their guests being vibrated, magnetized and bedazzled. “I only had melba toast and radishes today.” Melba toast? I would have sold my firstborn for such a delicacy. “Can you cover things while I go get my cheese from the car?” she asked her co-worker as she left the room to a chorus of stomach growls.

As he was attaching electrodes to my body, the H-Wave technician described his treatment as “evidence-based medicine” so many times that I began to suspect that he was hurling veiled accusations