



The Spa OF THE FUTURE

Franz Linser, founder of consultancy Linser Hospitality, shares his views on the necessary evolution of spa, and building the wellness model of the future

Spas have to be a mirror of society. A spa offers what life outside cannot and it's crucial to the sustainable success of the industry that we find out what the real desires of potential spa goers are and understand customers' lives outside of the spa premises.

Over time, our working and living habits have changed dramatically. We are today, for the first time in the history of mankind, faced with generations where the majority no longer work physically, with their bodies. If not specifically compensated for by moving around and working out in our leisure time, this lack of a behaviour that is natural to us and the misuse of our bodies by not

exercising them, leads to imbalances: physically, psychologically and socially.

Around 15 years ago we saw the rise of the classical pampering spa, as people worldwide reacted similarly to having worked hard and not taken good enough care of themselves – by developing a strong desire to take time out, relax and recharge. This led to the growing popularity of spas, with their warm atmosphere, pleasant and relaxing smells and the power of touch. Spas became the antithesis to the cold and dehumanised world outside.

Different times, different model

The pampering spa was designed to make people forget about the world outside. However, the kind of wellbeing achieved with this strategy is often one of wellness for the moment, without lasting benefits to take home with you. With time, people began to ask for physical improvements as part of their spa experience, offered by what was soon to be called medical spas.

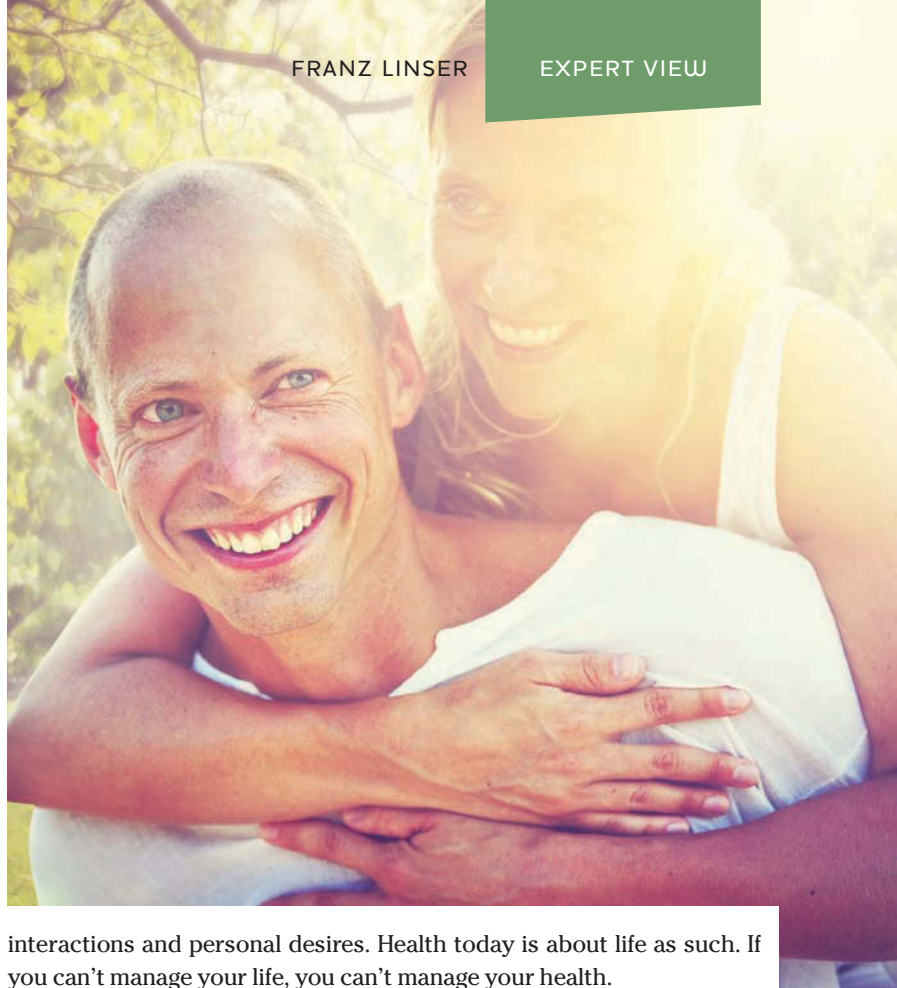
However, medical spas in many cases focused on improvements to the surface, on



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EXPERT VIEW



botox, facelifts and the application of skincare products. This approach addressed people's problems but it fought the symptoms rather than the cause. There are of course exceptions; some medical spas offer efficient and in-depth programmes, though most of them are on a curative basis. They fix different problems and when the problems return, they fix them again.

This is essentially how the European cure tradition works: based on great medical work that is serious, scientifically proven and of substantial practical help to those in need. However, times have changed. The problems and the reasons we become sick have changed and it seems logical that our health strategies will, therefore, have to change as well. Cultural and psychological features now influence our health more than physiological processes.

In addition to good nutrition, workouts and relaxation, we more than ever need a healthy relationship with our self, and our surroundings, one that includes strong social contacts and meaningful work. Can a spa provide programmes for that? One is initially tempted to say no. However, science indicates that many of today's illnesses originate in mental and/or social problems, with physical symptoms being only the visible signs. A medical approach that exclusively treats the [physically] measurable symptoms of ill health will fail to heal the person as a whole, and will, therefore, fail to achieve overall wellbeing.

Health redefined

With the ongoing changes in our society, health and wellbeing must also be redefined. Health today is more than the absence of disease, more than ensuring physiological normality in terms of weight, blood pressure and cholesterol. It's about the acceptance of the rules of nature, about a deeper understanding of the connection between body and spirit and about strategies to balance emotions, work, leisure, social

interactions and personal desires. Health today is about life as such. If you can't manage your life, you can't manage your health.

In the spas and wellness centres of the future, it won't be enough to give customers know-how. It will be crucial to also provide strategies for the “do-how,” the crucial motivational bridge between know-how and change. But in order to deliver motivation, one has to deliver sense. Only people who understand why they should change will adopt that change; a transformation that becomes a positive strategy for their personal goals.

They will then want to change and will be motivated to develop a lifestyle concept that helps them live in a sustainable and healthy way. Consequently, spas and wellness resorts will in the future need to widen their horizons, reflecting the knowledge that life is about more than momentary wellbeing. Life is about happiness, a happiness that derives from sense. Spas that ignore this will fail to cater for the needs of a growing number of customers who are physically healthy, but unhappy.

What is the strategy for them? Pampering and distraction? Hopefully not. A successful wellness strategy has to deal with a person as a whole. In other words: modern health management is lifestyle management. The successful spas and wellness resorts of the future will be places that accompany people on their way to finding their individual self.

If it's true that markets always react to the desires of customers, it is to be expected that after medical doctors, psychologists, sociologists, motivational coaches and religious practitioners will be the next to join spa teams. They won't be dressed in white or curing the sick, but they will be there, ready to talk and help. They will be an integrative part of unique lifestyle programmes: the life coaches and wellness partners of the next generation of spa clients. 🌀



Franz Linser is the founder and chief executive of Austria-based consulting firm Linser Hospitality, specialising in the health, wellness and hotel industries. Linser, who has more than 20 years' health and wellness industry experience, set up Austria's Wellness Tirol group, which today includes more than 100 companies, and established medical resorts management company Vayu International in 2013. He sits on the board of the Global Wellness Summit and is a popular speaker at international events, including the 2015 Professional Spa & Wellness Convention.

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