

THE WELLNESS FILE

This Winnipeg spa is a Turkish delight

Modern take on ancient ritual

Co-ed treatment is a first in Canada

MICHELE PETERSON
SPECIAL TO THE STAR

WINNIPEG—Lying on a table, my entire body covered in oil and wrapped in a triangle of shiny foil, I felt like a fresh perogy.

And it was somehow not surprising. After all, the ubiquitous crescent-shaped dumplings are a favourite among the city's large Ukrainian community and appear on menus everywhere from church bazaars to fine restaurants.

What was surprising was that I was actually at Ten, Winnipeg's newest luxury spa and Canada's first co-ed treatment hamam, a Turkish bathing facility. Named for its location on the 10th floor of the venerable Fort Garry Hotel, an elegant landmark best known for its chateau-style architecture and role as a railway hotel during the early 1900s, the spa has blended several international therapies to create a new experience that is cosmopolitan with a Winnipeg twist.

At the heart of the spa's philosophy is the hamam. Rooted in ancient Byzantine and Roman traditions, hamams have evolved over the centuries to become known as Turkish baths focused on ritual cleansing and relaxation.

"Our spa is a modern reinterpretation of this ancient bathing ritual," explained Ida Albo, the hotel's co-owner. "Historically, a hamam has always been more than just a place for a bath. It

served a social purpose and was a hub for community celebrations and social gatherings." Ten Spa uses traditional scrubbing rituals followed by soft steam sprayed on heated marble slabs for relaxation. The treatment can be enjoyed communally, in private parties, or individually.

During my visit, a bridal party of eight women was lounging in white Turkish cotton bathrobes waiting for a mud treatment. "Much like ancient warriors, they'll be painting their bodies with specially selected colours of mud and clay," said Albo. "It's very interactive."

Richly tiled with luxurious textures and curved surfaces, the 730-square-metre spa has four guest zones that wouldn't look out of place as a martini bar in the swankiest neighbourhood. It even boasts a fully licensed lounge. Although the primary theme is Middle Eastern, many elements in the spa's design were drawn from other influences.

"We were inspired by treatments from around the world," explained Albo. Her team spent three years researching facilities in Istanbul, Paris, London and New York. The result is smooth marble, blue tile and arched doorways.

Behind the sleek curves is the latest technology such as experiential cold fog showers and microdermabrasion equipment that uses infrared lasers and ultrasound to restore the skin.

I brushed aside a beaded curtain and entered a quiet zone. White leather chaise lounges and faux fur pillows awaited. Yet despite its exotic pedigree, Ten Spa has a no-pretensions, no-attitude philosophy — much like

Winnipeg itself.

"When we considered the design, we were thinking about real people and real conditions," said Elena Zinchenko, the spa director. "Winnipeggers experience extreme heat, extreme cold and very dry conditions so our philosophy is that we must go beyond pampering. Treatments must be real workouts and deliver tangible benefits."

Soon it was time for my treatment. Although I had been intrigued by the concept of the hamam, I had chosen Ten's Fully Loaded Facial. But stripped naked and lathered with essential oils custom-mixed for my skin condition, I was a bit puzzled.

"We treat the entire body," explained Branka, my spa attendant, placing cucumbers on my eyes and rubbing bergamot moisturizer on my feet. In the next hour and a half, I had an intense facial exfoliation with a dermatological peel, a collagen eye treatment, an algae treatment and a vitamin-infused blast of medical-grade oxygen.

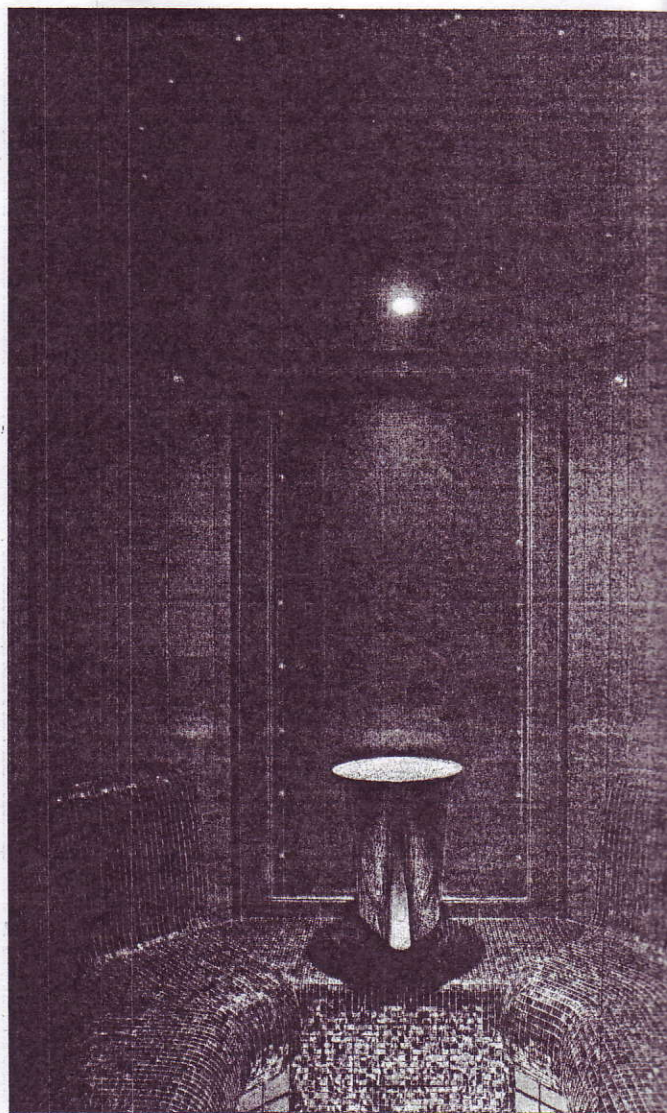
Then, she cranked up the heat until steam rose from the foil draped around my neck.

When she finally revealed the end result I was thrilled. Not only was I rejuvenated, but my softened, fragrant skin seemed to cry out for a dollop of sour cream and some fried onions.

► For more information on Ten Spa see www.tenspa.ca.

► For more on accommodation, transportation and events in Winnipeg, contact www.destinationwinnipeg.ca.

Michele Peterson is a Toronto-based freelance writer whose trip was subsidized by Ten Spa and Destination Winnipeg.



Ten, Winnipeg's newest luxury spa and Canada's first co-ed treatment hamam (a Turkish facility) offers a variety of revitalizing treatments, merging ancient know-how with modern technology.