

New Orleans

Bride

MAGAZINE
WINTER 2009

Carpe Diem!

Luscious layers, sensual chiffons and over-the-top glamorous styles – find the perfect bridal attire for you!

Beautiful Bouquets,
Spa Parties,
Beauty Countdown
and more!

Mrs. Elizabeth Ashley Griffith Christy

(see more of her wedding on pg. 64).
Dress from Wedding Bells;
hair by Keith Noonan;
flowers by Federico's Family
Florist; photographed
at New Orleans Country
Club by Atelier Photo |
Graphic | Design.



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it's party time!

Spa parties redefine the pre-wedding bash.

By Su-Jit Lin

Chaos is king as the big day draws ever closer. Friends and relatives can't help being underfoot, unintentionally contributing to the lovely knot of stress living between your shoulders, and all the women in your life struggle to find common ground outside of yourself. Groups of acquaintances are beginning to clash or section off. You want your loved ones who haven't yet had the chance to get to know one another to do so, but hosting a party is an overwhelming idea at this point in time for you or your frazzled maid of honor. So what to do with all these different ladies from different backgrounds, short of declaring defeat and running off to elope in a blaze of petticoats and running shoes?

A solution that's all the rage in cosmopolitan cities throughout the U.S. is within reach of New Orleans brides at their wits' ends, too – wedding party spa parties. After all, the best way to dispel negativity is to introduce positivity and at

a spa, that's the name of the game. Indulgence and peace are focal points, distracting from the unfamiliarity of previously uncombined social circles. Nothing can get rid of tension faster than supple hands kneading sore muscles, and there's simply no greater equalizer than being wrapped bare-bottomed in a towel with a face tightly coated with clay. Seriously, who can feel holier than thou or pass judgment on another nearly naked?

The concept of bringing people together through pampering shows its brilliance through its longevity. Bonding through relaxation has had its place throughout the ages and has spanned the globe, from social soaks in Roman and Turkish baths to colonial French hairdressers and their hours-long sessions. Reflexology has been around as long as the pyramids have (both claiming Egyptian origins), and Chinese bodywork has carried through the centuries as well.

One could say that the idea of days focused around self-care has been around for just about ever, but it has now become *essential* to have pre-arranged packages for the stretched-thin bride to decompress before The Big Day. Local spas such as the carbon footprint-conscious **Green Spa Therapy**, **Spa Aria** in the historic Hotel Monteleone, **Earthsavers** and the contemporary



it's party time!

Balance in the downtown Loew's Hotel demystify what brides need by offering specially designed packages. Prices can range from as low as \$155 for basic needs, like a massage and spa mani/pedi combo, plus free pool and gym use (Balance), to package deals of \$320 for the whole nine yards, complete with a facial, massage, brow wax, manicure, pedicure, makeup run-through and day-of makeup application – all of which can be spread out over any number of days (Green Spa Therapy). Many other spas offer significant discounts on custom individual packages, like newcomers **A Touch of Beauty** in the University Corridor and cheerful **Body Bistro** on Oak Street.

But getting back to everyone else – we've attempted to take some of the guesswork out of how it's done when it's not just the bride who needs a little "me time." Every spa has its own way of hosting private events and what your needs are will determine everything, including the cost, date, time and place.

For larger parties, space is a priority, as is event management. If that's the case, commercial can be a good thing since it equates experience and efficiency.

Belladonna fits that bill, making you work with an event planner if you have five or more guests. Locals love the beautiful courtyard with outdoor treatment areas and gazebos, but required charges rack up easily here, since there are no group rates and a 15 percent event-planning fee and mandatory 20 percent gratuity on all services rendered is their standard policy.

Not to worry, though – most venues include an event planner, like at the opulent **The Spa at the Ritz-Carlton**. In 2,500 square feet, it's easy to feel like the only group in the

entire place, and completely forget about your fiancé's spa bachelor party in the adjacent gentlemen's lounge. An entire day passes quickly in this urban oasis off Bourbon Street, with included use of a resistance pool, gym, Swiss showers and several gorgeous relaxation areas. With a significant 40 percent discount for locals, you can live in the lap of luxury guilt-free.

However, Babylon may not be for everyone, which may be the case for laid-back brides who long for a comforting, neighborhood feel. For them, **Body Bistro**, housed in a sunny, converted double shotgun will do, coordinating the whole thing and even creating invitations to distribute at no additional cost. They often customize group service packages on a sliding scale, resulting in significant discounts for private events. The cozy, shabby-chic **Green Spa Therapy** also aims to make you feel at home and cuts parties some great deals. The owner, a cheery military wife, gives anyone with a similar affiliation a 15 percent discount, and groups get 10 percent off the top and complimentary makeup application. For even more intimate quarters, pocket-sized **Lux Spa**, nestled in Mid-City near Swirl and Café Degas, along with the two-room athlete's retreat **Elad Spa** in the Central Business District may be more what you're looking for.

It is also important to consider local flavor if your attendees are from out of town. For these guests, experiencing New Orleans' character can be tantamount. Calling a Magazine Street historic mansion home is **Duke Morgan, The Spa**, an Asian-influenced spa with specialized services not often found, like their Indonesian Juara treatments. The décor is vivid, exotic and fun against classic New Orleans features like a stunning floating staircase and antique fireplaces. Farther down the same street, **Spa Isbell** also offers a lot in terms of size and vibe, channeling a refuge in the tropics with open-air corridors, a brick courtyard, sky-high ceilings and multi-level facilities featuring restorations galore paired with modern industrial influence. A \$200 fee applies if your group wants to reserve the spacious lounge area or do lunch indoors.




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To pull off a real escape, veering a bit off the beaten path provides even more options. **My Spa by the Park**, an elegant Lakeview home restored into a pristine pampering paradise, offers a pseudo-country retreat. They, too, help with catering and planning, taking care of all arrangements while offering complimentary setup and use of their "hospitality room" and spacious balcony overlooking a scenic avenue. Venturing out to the suburbs can also lead to good things - Fat City claims its own hidden gem, the stylish **Aqua MedSpa**. Resembling a tasteful two-story model home on the inside, it's hard to remember that this extremely affordable day spa is in a bustling shopping plaza in Metairie.

So now that a venue has been chosen, what's left?

Most spas provide beverages for their customers, supplying tea, coffee and even flavored water. However, many New Orleans spas take it a step further and supply fun in a bottle. Just to name a few, **Belladonna**, Old Hollywood-inspired cosmetics experts **Make Me Up**, **Green Spa Therapy** and **My Spa by the Park** all offer complimentary wine; mimosas are available at **Duke Morgan** and **Spa Isbell**; and **Spa Aria** gives parties of six or more two bottles of champagne to do with as they will.

As for food, that's another item easily checked off the list. Because it's such a small, friendly city, many New Orleans businesses have great relationships with other local purveyors. Consumers reap the benefits of well put-together catering menus and spa staff at **Body Bistro**, **Lux Spa** and **Aqua MedSpa**, for example, don't mind picking up lunch from down the block. Even more conveniently, hotel spas like **Balance** and **The Spa** at the Ritz have agreements with their on-site restaurants for gourmet meals from Café Adelaide and Mélange, respectively.

Essentially, a spa party is a party unlike any other. Gone are the woes of coordinating yet *another* event, the fears of inappropriate behavior, the worries of guests finding conversational common ground and the expense of paying for everyone's entertainment. Wave good-bye to finding an on-site caterer, servers and cleanup crews, and say good riddance to events that cause more stress than what you started with. Instead, you've got an activity that no one will want to sit out, an experience everyone can bond over and share, and a gathering that you can physically and mentally feel good about. So put your feet up and pull down your eye mask - it's time to party. ☺

WRITER'S PICKS

The Spa (at Ritz-Carlton): This two-story, elegant spa has spared no expense to capture the timeless beauty of Renaissance appointments while maintaining a modern feel. Perks abound at this stunning facility, including French Quarter proximity.

My Spa by the Park: Tasteful, homey and beautiful, this labor of love is a sign of hope and recovery. The well-attended details in the spa's appearance show an eye for detail that bodes well for your event.

Body Bistro: Absolutely charming, this sun-drenched spa exudes warmth and comfort, and mini-services and sliding scales make packages really affordable. Can't function without Fido? Bring him! He's welcome here.

Duke Morgan, The Spa: Personality is apparent, with sumptuous Eastern flair juxtaposed against traditional New Orleans stateliness. The gorgeous massage rooms, each with restored decorative fireplaces, are easily the biggest in the city.

Green Spa Therapy: Go green at this intimate organics-focused day spa and feel great about what you put on your body. Their service menu is almost limitless, and mini-treatments and group discounts make sure no one gets in the red.

Aqua MedSpa: Amazing member prices and complimentary upgrades for group packages make this classy, contemporary spa an extraordinary value, with an ambience that belies the cost.

Spa Isbell: Brooklyn edge mixed with New Orleans tropical spunk best defines this space. The novel floor plan and massage rooms are gorgeous, and though they don't event-plan, the full-service salon is a major plus.

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-Hans Christian Andersen



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