

spa business

Botanique Hotel & Spa

The Brazilian project
backed by David Cole
and Gordon Roddick

HOT NUMBERS

The latest
US hotel spa
performance
stats revealed
by PKF-HR

Click here to subscribe
to the print edition

www.spabusiness.com/subs

DEBORAH SZEKELY

Launches Wellness
Warrior to lobby
government on
wellness, diet and
exercise policies

COVER PHOTO © VICTORIA WILL

Floating Gardens

A spa built out
of recycled
polystyrene
that breathes
oxygen

TELOMERE TESTING

A cutting-edge
diagnostic tool



FOLLOW THE SERIES

1. Feasibility studies
- ▶ 2. Concept & brand development
3. Design consulting
4. Pre-opening & daily management
5. Operational consultancy

CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT



Gary Henkin



Doug Chambers

Special experiences are created when spa concepts are expressed through great design. Kate Corney talks to WTS president Gary Henkin and business partner Doug Chambers, principal of Blu Spas, about concept and branding

What does the concept stage of a development encompass?

Doug: We consider a broad range of variables during the process of bringing a concept into focus – culture, location, demographics and what the competition's offering. Our task is to create something compelling which distinguishes the project and ensures it's financially viable from both development and operational standpoints.

We encourage collaboration with the project architects, interior designers, project managers and the client to bring the concept together. It's a reference point for project planning and operational decisions.

Gary: Clients define the word concept in different ways. To some, it means shaping the design of a facility, to others creating a theme or a story, a signature element or treatment.

We define the word as part of the vision

statement for the spa but we're flexible and shape our involvement based on what the client needs, whether that's in the concept, design or pre-opening phase.

Do spas need a concept?

Gary: There are lots of spas that are very similar and don't make a statement in the way an innovative concept spa can. The world is becoming more competitive and brand conscious and hotels and resorts are looking to define themselves through design features and operational and guest experience. They're asking us to create spas that offer consumers something special.

Doug: Concepts matter – if not, why do consumers select one spa over another? While there may not be a single answer, a great concept can be a helpful component in creating a successful spa.

What does it cost to create one?

Gary: Costs range from a few thousand US dollars to significantly more if a concept book and vision are needed. It takes work and time to create a concept book to include a theme, story and the signature elements of a spa vision.

Doug: Cost is related to scope. Frequently we're approached about projects that – in addition to a traditional spa – include aspects of wellness, perhaps a medical spa, fitness facilities and often a salon. Many are mixed-use and include hospitality, residential, membership and local guest components. To deliver a concept which fully addresses these elements and which is different from what everyone else is doing costs money.

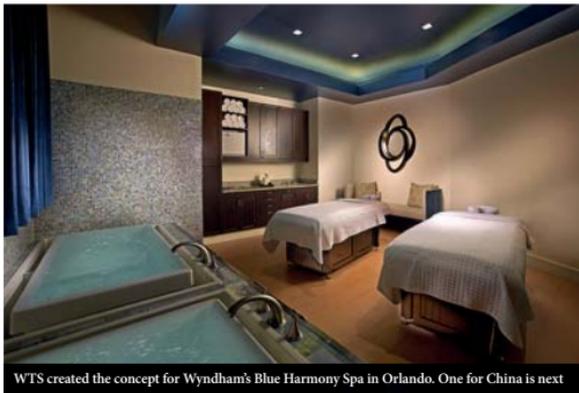
Are concepts scalable?

Doug: Yes. We've worked with operators of single boutique sites who want something tailored to one location. We also work with developers envisioning multiple sites or hotel brands who want a concept that translates from a tropical beach resort to an urban location and everything in between.

How do concepts translate across cultures?

Gary: We build a malleable concept. Around 70 per cent is transferable to anywhere in the world and 30 per cent is customised to the individual region it's going to.

We've recently opened a Blue Harmony Spa for Wyndham Worldwide in Orlando, Florida and we're working on one for China. The spas won't be identical – the menus and service elements will be customised, but they'll contain the thread of the concept. The quality, guest experience and some of the design will be recognisable.



WTS created the concept for Wyndham's Blue Harmony Spa in Orlando. One for China is next



▲ The Sè Spa concept at Hotel Palomar, San Diego, is based on a Zen-like design with a mix of textures, clean lines and no clutter

At what stage do you create the brand?

Doug: Ideally, you want to be aware of brand design early on, so when you're devising the programme and layout, brand design requirements can be taken into account.

It can be awkward if branding decisions are made after the concrete's poured and you realise the brand calls for some special design element – signature water features or thermal experiences, for example. It can be expensive to do a u-turn at this point.

However, for projects we know will build the brand decision, we create a flexible design that can be nimbly adapted.

Will it make more money than a non-branded spa?

Gary: There are branded spas that do well and others that underperform. They can carry the same brand, concept and product line in two different locations and one will do well while the other won't. Why is this? The answer comes down to how they're managed, marketed, promoted, and integrated into the hotel or resort.

Doug: There are advantages to having a branded spa, particularly in an independent property which doesn't have a corporate structure from which to draw support in areas such as training and marketing.

But branding isn't a magical elixir that makes your spa successful – who's operating it is just as important. However, when you bring together a great brand, strong operator, solid training and well-implemented marketing – that's when it works.



What marketing and exposure might a brand give my spa?

Gary: Brands will provide exposure. There are good reasons to consider them:

1. Cachet. Brands can provide unique features for your spa
2. Consumer recognition. If the brand is recognised, this is a good reason to consider it.

3. Press/media exposure. Most brands can bring added momentum from media buzz.

Your expectation should be that the brand will influence in these areas and if it can't, then don't consider it. The brand has a vested interest in marketing, promoting and exposing the spa to potential guests and pushing to make it happen. It can influence the exposure of the entire property.

Will the brand contribute to build costs?

Doug: Brands are more reluctant to contribute than before the downturn. In most instances, they won't contribute cash, but may make other types of contributions.

Gary: You should ask if there's a licensing fee for bringing in a brand. This depends on the brand and the business model.

▲ Sè Spa is based on an all-suite concept

Which brands would you recommend?

Gary: There are two options. Through a consultancy like ours, spa owners can create a brand, make it their own and roll it out throughout the world. Or they can ask us to identify brands for partnership working and we'll present them for consideration.

An early question we ask is do they want to develop, own and control their own brand, or do they want to work with a partner?

Doug: We try to find brand candidates most compatible for the specific project. One of the key considerations is whether the brand serves the end objective of distinguishing a spa from its competitors. We apply this same screening process on behalf of our client whether we're recommending our own proprietary brands or third-party brands.

wts INTERNATIONAL

Contact WTS International
Tel +1 301 622 7800
Fax +1 301 622 3373
www.wtsinternational.com