

# europa Spa

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# A new era of wellness

European Spa reports from the 11th Forum HOTel&SPA event in Paris, which examined many aspects of the ongoing evolution in global wellness

REPORT BY SARAH TODD

Returning to the iconic Four Seasons George V in Paris, the 11th annual Forum HOTel&SPA featured a packed day of networking and conferencing for more than 120 delegates. Organised by the VK Organisation, the one-day event attracted delegates from Russia, the UK, the Netherlands, Italy and the US to explore the theme of 'A new era in wellness'. The comprehensive speaker programme concluded with the Black and Blue Diamond awards ceremony, which recognised outstanding spa and wellness professionals.

Welcoming delegates to the forum, organiser Vladi Kovanic and moderator Jean-Guy de Gabriac said the event was a unique opportunity to network with the cream of the European spa and wellness industry.

Exemplifying this, guest of honour Aldo Melpignano, owner of Italy's iconic Borgo Egnazia hotel and spa gave a presentation that highlighted the shift towards transformational experiences, and focused on the importance of connecting 'place to people', specifically the local community to his luxury property.

Following Melpignano was Thomas Bauer, COO of Austrian thermal wellness resort operator Vamed Vitality World. Ideally placed to examine the past and future of spa, Bauer asserted that the most important consideration when building a spa should be to create areas that provide guests with time and space to 'unlearn' as much as to learn anything new.

He then focused on the 3,600sqm Silent Spa that has been added to Vamed's Therme Laa property in the Weinviertel region of Austria. The installation offers guests space for silent contemplation and integrates many sacral structures, including a restaurant with seating resembling choir stalls, and an octagonal tower



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Vladi Kovanic Founder, VK Organisation

at the heart of the spa, hinting towards cultures that use the number eight to represent infinity.

## Beyond conventional wellness

One of the most dynamic presentations came from László Puczkó, director of industry intelligence at Resources for Leisure Assets, who said the 'McDonaldisation' of the word meant that now "everything is wellness", leading to the western world replacing status-anxiety with a new type of wellness-focused anxiety.

Juxtaposing old and new, Puczkó asserted: "Wellness doesn't require luxury, it's an evolving concept that depends on how the individual applies it to their business."

He also predicted a rise in 'low-fi' wellness, saying spas should focus on why their brand is good for each guest. "Always remember value propositioning," he added. "I rarely hear the word 'value' when spas are described and this value exchange is crucial to understanding why people are buying your services."

Echoing Melpignano's earlier presentation, Puczkó said spas should more clearly define their business strategy and decide whether they want to have a high-yield business or one that

focuses on self-actualisation, and whether being brand-driven or experience and outcome-driven was of more importance to them.

## Evolution of thalasso

With thalassotherapy forming a central part of the agenda, next up was Caroline Mahe-Lea, manager of France's Thalasso Concarneau.

Outlining the difference between emotional and psychological hunger, she explained that her spa had focused on mindful eating programmes two years ago, encouraging guests to develop a 'healthy and joyful' approach to their body in its emotionally cocooning environment.

Mahe-Lea also passionately outlined her belief that the successful treatment of chronic issues, such as stress and obesity, needs to begin with a global approach to transformative wellbeing. An awareness of the power of touch on the body should not be under-estimated, she added, nor should the benefits of connecting with nature as much as possible through ocean walks and a variety of outdoor activities.

## The human experience

After a short networking coffee break, an expert panel assembled to examine the 'human experience' in spa. Comprising Beata Aleksandrowicz, co-founder of Pure Massage Spa Training; Zoe Douglas, spa manager of Dormy House; and CEO of Aromatherapy Associates, Tracey Woodward, the panel deftly explored the challenges presented by the theme.

Each panelist delivered considered and thought-provoking remarks, with Zoe Douglas asserting that spa owners should ensure personalisation remains a priority over profit.

All agreed that more needs to be done to care for the industry's care-givers through consideration of the entire team's wellbeing.

Woodward said teams should be nourished, supported and guided to better personal wellbeing, with Aleksandrowicz adding: "Therapists create deep and enduring connections for the client. To be effective, they need authentic empowerment and education to boost their own wellbeing." ▶

1. László Puczkó of Resources for Leisure Assets
2. Four Seasons Hotel des Bergues' Martin Rhomberg (left) with Roger Allen of Resources for Leisure Assets
3. The runners up and winners of the Blue and Black Diamond Awards with organiser Vladi Kovanic (right)
4. Delegates enjoy a networking opportunity
5. From left: Tracey Woodward of Aromatherapy Associates with Dormy House Spa's Zoe Douglas and Beata Aleksandrowicz of Pure Spa Massage Training
6. Vamed Vitality World's Thomas Bauer



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▷ Following this vibrant discussion, Dr Leonid Elkin, owner of Russia's Dr Elkin's Wellness Center, spoke about restoring vitality for spa guests through his patented Dr Elkin Method, which provides a total manual remodelling of the face and body using several therapeutic modalities, including cranio-sacral therapy.

The engaging and diverse speaker line-up continued with Ré-Consulting's Didier Le Calvez, who discussed the many therapeutic benefits of the ancient forest bathing practice of Sylvotherapy. Known as *shinrin-yoku* in Japan, where it is a cornerstone of preventative medicine, Le Calvez outlined the many forms this can take, from slow walks through forests to hugging trees for their vibratory effect.

### The economics of wellbeing

A second panel, moderated by Kim Marshall of The Marshall Plan, featured Sammy Gharieni, CEO and founder of Gharieni Group; Scott Vogel, executive spa director of Fisher Island Club & Resort, US; and Tammy Pabel, principal of Spa Management Solutions, discussing how spa businesses can use strategic partnerships to

differentiate and elevate their offering.

The final group discussion at the Forum centred on the economics of wellbeing in luxury hotels, with Roger Allen, CEO of Resources for Leisure Assets, joined by Martin Rhomberg, regional vice-president and general manager of the Four Seasons Hotel des Bergues in Geneva, Switzerland.

"The idea of luxury has been industrialised, so operators need to focus on providing individual and elevated spa and wellness experiences that deliver superior REVPAR," Allen asserted.

Rhomberg agreed that the future of luxury lies in the authentic customisation of the guest experience and said wellbeing in the future will be about offering choices for their guests.

### Rewarding the industry's finest

Taking place in a short ceremony at the end of the event, the Blue and Black Diamond Awards were given to the Best Thalasso Manager and the Best Spa Manager respectively.

Honouring superior management qualities, innovative spirit and dynamism in the thalasso sector, the Blue Diamond was awarded to

1. Organiser Vladi Kovanic welcomes delegates to the event
2. From left: Fisher Island's Scott Vogel, Tammy Patel of Spa Management Solutions, Kim Marshall of The Marshall Plan and Gharieni Group's Sammy Gharieni
3. Guest of honour Aldo Melpignano of Borgo Egnazia
4. Forum HOTel&SPA's theme of 'A new era in wellness' provided the inspiration for wide-ranging discussion

Marie-Nöelle Berry, executive director of Alliance Pornic Resort Hotel Thalasso & Spa.

The Black Diamond Award was won by Erica D'Angelo, spa manager of JW Marriott Venice Resort and Spa, who enthused: "Wellness shaped me like the diamond I'm holding and this amazing industry has enabled me to make the world a healthier and happier place."

Summarising this year's successful event, Vladi Kovanic said: "We had a great selection of senior professionals attending from around the world and I hope the Forum's spirit of collaboration and honest communication will continue to inspire our attendees in their businesses through the rest of 2018." ●●●●●  
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*The 12th Forum HOTel&SPA will take place on June 6, 2019*