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GARDEN OF DELIGHT

The Spa at Pennyhill Park's stunning refurbishment

CLARINS' NEW ERA

Prisca Courtin-Clarins talks about her vision for the brand

MARINE HEALING

Inside three of Sardinia's best thalassotherapy resorts

A THERMAL LIFT

Our Expert Guide offers the best in heat experiences



An English rose

Pennyhill Park, an Exclusive Hotel & Spa is the proud official training base for the England rugby team. We find out how its own award-winning team has made it one of the UK's best spas

[Report by Sarah Camilleri]

Nestled in 123 acres of rolling parkland near Bagshot in Surrey, Pennyhill Park is a quintessentially English, AA-five-red-star country house property. The flagship of Exclusive Hotels and Venues, owned by the Pecorelli family, it offers a wealth of exclusive experiences including the two-Michelin-star and five-AA-Rosette-winning Michael Wignall at The Latymer restaurant, a nine-hole golf course, and its award-winning The Spa, which recently celebrated its 12th year of operation.

Located just 40 minutes from Twickenham, Pennyhill Park is also home to the England rugby team, which has its own private state-of-the-art training centre hidden away in the property's extensive grounds. Far from the glare of stadium lights, the team's handpicked squad of players are 'hot-housed' here by head coach Stuart Lancaster and his team in preparation for their various international challenges.

In contrast, with their Herculean efforts, Pennyhill Park's extensive 4,180sqm spa is dedicated to the more genteel art of relaxation and wellness. Under the leadership of general manager Julian Tomlin and spa manager Darren Dixon, the facility has recently completed a £1.2 million refurbishment.

A welcome escape

While undeniably exclusive, The Spa at Pennyhill Park also has a very welcoming atmosphere. "The beauty of our spa is that we have continued to invest year on year to enhance the journey and ensure our top industry position," states Julian Tomlin. "People are now looking for short leisure breaks and spa days that deliver relaxation without the hassle of flying. Spa is a key reason that people come to Pennyhill Park. They can really escape here."

In fact, some 80% of hotel guests use The Spa, be they corporate guests, couples, or celebration parties. "They come to swim, relax and exercise. It's an essential part of our exclusive offering," explains Darren Dixon, who has led the 40-strong spa team for two years. "Everything we offer has been planned in great detail, including underwater music, fresh food, a varied fitness offering, and individually tailored treatments. We like to give our guests as much choice as possible and the chance to personalise their spa journey." ▷



“It has been our privilege to host the England rugby team for the last 12 years. One of the key reasons that the rugby team stay here is to use the spa facilities for recovery and relaxation”

Danny Pecorelli
Group managing director,
Exclusive Hotels and Venues



From above: The new spa garden at Pennyhill Park designed by Sparcstudio; the stunning 25-metre Ballroom indoor swimming pool



nail bar, four manicure stations and a Mii makeup area, allowing up to 27 treatments to be performed at any given time.

As you would expect from such a luxury offer, the level of service is seamless. “Our spa valets are there to discreetly look after guests and to give guidance when needed,” says Dixon.

On the ground floor, overlooking the new spa garden, guests can enjoy relaxing on poolside loungers around the elegant 25-metre, level-deck Ballroom pool. Outside, three Canadian hot tubs and a hydro pool with bubble loungers and massage jets can be accessed via the swim-out. “All of our eight pools here are filled with water from our own bore hole, ozone treated, and then heated to different temperatures for wellbeing and relaxation swimming,” says Dixon.

Meet you in Heaven

Adjacent to the Ballroom pool, a recently refurbished Thermal Heaven offers 11 heat experiences split into mixed and single-sex areas. “Our sequence of thermal experiences is designed to raise the body temperature, increase blood circulation and stimulate the pores to sweat out toxins,” says Dixon.

“We now have a floating, two-level Dröm sauna, scented with orange essence, as well as a new Ice Igloo experience, a plunge pool and experience showers,” he adds. “You can walk past these to the ladies-only area where our refurbished Rose Herbal steam room can seat up to 12 people. Further along is our Blue Laconium, clad in blue and turquoise tiles.” In addition, ▷

▷ Instant spa feeling

The spacious spa lounge reception area also houses a boutique retail zone and the spa’s popular Themis restaurant. “We wanted our guests to feel ‘spa’ as soon as they walk through the door, to relax as if they had walked into someone’s lounge,” says Dixon. “Our Themis restaurant is the social heart of the spa, with an ever evolving menu of freshly prepared, healthy produce and a range of smoothies, nibbles and treats.”

Beyond the first-floor reception, opulent dressing rooms, clad in granite and marble, feature private changing areas, relaxing sofas and lockers stocked with BC Softwear robes and towels, and Exclusive flip-flops. “We want every stage of the journey to be memorable,” explains Dixon. “Whether its the spa lounge, the dressing rooms, the gym, or our new spa garden, we want to hear guests say: ‘Wow’.”

The spa’s 21 treatment rooms were recently complemented by the addition of a Leighton Denny



“We have continued to invest year on year to enhance the journey. The Spa is a critical ingredient within the overall offering at Pennyhill Park. Our guests can really escape there”

Julian Tomlin
General manager



From top: The Spa's treatments use The Spa's own-label products, Elemental herbology and Natura Bissé; the state-of-the-art Technogym equipped gym



"Escapism is a must at our spa and it really doesn't matter what time of year it is... the deck and new furnishings have allowed us to deliver a fantastic *al fresco* spa experience"

Darren Dixon
Spa manager

▷ a new two-person rasul chamber offers traditional Arabic full-body cleansing with scrubs and muds. The spa team has worked closely with sauna and steam specialist Dröm UK on new ways to communicate the benefits of Thermal Heaven. "Although we wish to educate our guests on the best way to use our thermal experiences, we also want their time here to be very much about having fun," explains Dixon. "So, if we hear the odd squeal from the drench shower, or a giggle from the ice room, we know that people are relaxing and having a good time."



Garden of delights

The creation of a stunning new spa garden, complete with decking to complement the existing outdoor pools, has been an extremely successful investment. With over 20 years' experience in spa and wellness design, award-winning spa designers Sparcstudio were drafted in to realise the project.

"We worked closely with Danny Pecorelli and the spa team to really enhance the overall spa guest experience," explains Sparcstudio's Beverley Bayes. "A key element of the new scheme was to create an environment that was conducive to socialising, relaxing, eating and drinking. This included the ability to provide an external food and beverage offer."

To this end, a large circular deck area, with an elegant, retractable, up-lit sail awning that provides year-round cover as well as an attractive night-time focal point, was designed to cleverly house a dedicated bar and barbecue area.

Sparcstudio has achieved a cohesive and romantic

ambience in the new garden through the inclusion of hidden niches and screening to create subtle private zones, including an exclusive members' area.

"Escapism is a must at our spa and it really doesn't matter what time of year it is, people love to spa outside," adds Dixon. "In October there can be 30-40 people enjoying the spa garden. The deck and new furnishings have allowed us to deliver a fantastic *al fresco* spa experience throughout the seasons."

A blossoming menu

An essential part of the refurbishment programme has been the adoption of a new philosophy to convey the spa's benefits. "We went back to look at how we express The Spa's unique values," says Dixon. "Our mantra today is: 'Choose, Sow, Blossom'. Our guests can 'choose' a particular spa experience, break or treatment. 'Sow' is all about them rejuvenating in their time with us. Then we want them to feel they have 'blossomed' when they leave.



"Pennyhill Park and Technogym share the same focus on design and quality, providing guests with tailored, five-star wellness experiences that use the latest technological innovations"

Andrea Bianchi
UK managing director,
Technogym





Dixon smiles. "That's why we have invested in bespoke oversized treatment couches, designed by Southern Beauty to be much wider and longer than standard, to help comfortably treat six-foot-seven rugby players. Our luxuriously proportioned treatment rooms and walk-in showers are fully appreciated by the players."

The Spa focuses on presenting a great offer for all men, not just performance athletes. "We have a separate male menu and we try to push fitness and spa together, as booking a treatment after gym work really relaxes you. Men generally understand the benefit of massage, but once they try a facial and discover how relaxing it is, they will book again."

"We see a lot of couples coming in together and booking treatments – not necessarily together but at the same time, so they can have lunch beforehand or dinner afterwards. Men are comfortable in our spa, it works really well for them," adds Dixon.

Wellness expertise

The 130sqm gym features the very latest Technogym ARTIS range, including nine cardiovascular stations, 12 strength stations, three Kinesis stations and a dedicated ARKE training area. "Spas today need to incorporate wellness, fitness and relaxation in a meaningful way," explains Dixon. "Technogym is the perfect fit for Pennyhill Park. Its track record of training champions and the stylish, ergonomic design of its equipment fits in so well with our surroundings."

According to fitness manager Greg Strong, The Spa's membership of around 500 people, as well as hotel guests, are looking for extended wellbeing services and a smarter approach to fitness. "We are seeing our Pilates, yoga and Tai chi classes grow significantly, alongside an increased take up of kettlebells and Last Man Standing circuit classes," he confirms. "We have seen a 20% increase in gym usage since the arrival of our ARKE wall and ARTIS Technogym equipment."

▷ From above: The Themis restaurant is the 'social heart' of The Spa; natural materials create a warm welcome in the nail bar

The Spa's extensive treatment menu reflects this philosophy. "We work in close partnership with some great brands to create a menu that is natural, holistic, organic and luxurious," says Dixon. For the last 12 years Natural Products has helped us to develop our own range of aromatic, natural, handmade organic spa products, as well as seasonal gifts."

Elemental Herbology has been working with the spa team for three years, providing what Dixon refers to as a 'wow' factor to the spa's offer. "Their beautiful treatments are a great way to tie into the seasons and our scenic location," he enthuses. "Elemental Herbology's treatments and rituals really anchor our guests back to nature through different elements, beautiful smells and visible results."

In September, prestige Spanish brand Natura Bissé launched at Pennyhill Park. "We are excited to launch our new Natura Bissé signature range of four bespoke luxury facials and a body treatment, which feature crushed diamonds and rose essence," says Dixon. "These treatments really bring that extra touch of luxury and results to our menu."

Real men love spa

When they are on-site, the England rugby players are also partial to some downtime at The Spa. "The team are very welcome to use the spa and do come to us for physio, pool work and ice therapy," reveals Dixon. "Often, after they have completed their stringent training during the day, they use Thermal Heaven to relax their muscles. They are very much at home here." "Our spa is proof that real men have treatments,"



"Elemental Herbology loves working with the team at Pennyhill to bring true harmony to the guest through our balanced treatment selection which answers all modern day stresses"

Louise Riby
Managing director,
Elemental Herbology

Clockwise from below: The England rugby team prepare for action; the romantic ambience of the spa garden at night; a guest relaxes on a heated ceramic lounger



▷ Our guests really enjoy setting their own fitness goals using the MyWellness App to get a true picture of their daily movement and weekly summary of their exercise.”

As well as looking after the guests, staff wellness is also on the agenda. “We have just over 500 staff in total so we work closely with our fitness team to ensure that our wellness offer is extended to everyone,” explains Dixon.

Healthy figures

Pennyhill Park’s continuous investment has translated into a tangible uplift in sales. “We are proud that we achieved record sales this year for the hotel, but also the spa has performed extremely well,” reveals Dixon. “We have doubled sales in food and beverage through people enjoying the new spa garden and *al fresco* lunches, drinks and snacks poolside.

However, the peaks, troughs and swings in demand are never far from Dixon’s mind. “We are seeing a real change in how people book,” he notes. “Instead of people ringing in to book a spa day for four months time, now they call to book for tomorrow. We have adapted our bookings to be as flexible as possible, but we have also had to look further to ensure the team translates this flexibility into service.”

Filling the treatment page, he adds, is an interesting challenge. “In a typical week, The Spa would undertake 70-90 treatments per day, which on Friday, Saturday and Sunday rises to 120 treatments including our new Rasul,” he says. “Therefore, my team has to balance the three guest streams making bookings: day spa, hotel and membership. We have to be able to open up space to create bespoke treatment time so that we can always say ‘yes’. Optimising this matrix makes a

big difference to generating revenue, especially when it can translate to an additional ten treatments a day.”

Heading South

The team at Pennyhill Park is currently working on plans for a significant spa development at the group’s South Lodge hotel in West Sussex.

“Our challenge is for the spa team to continually develop,” says Julian Tomlin. “Succession planning is so important and our plans for the new spa at South Lodge will involve individuals from our team here at Pennyhill Park to get the opening right and champion our superb service standards.”

Excellence is a theme that resonates with Tomlin. “Whether it’s a rugby team creating the best athletes in the world, or a spa team striving for excellence in service and delivery, it’s all about discipline and focus,” he says. “A spa can offer the best facilities in the world but it will always come back to the people who make it come alive. When you get the right people together, then you’ve got some magic.” ●●●●●

SPA STATISTICS

The Spa at Pennyhill Park, Surrey, UK

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www.thespa.uk.com

Owners: Pecorelli family

Managing director: Danny Pecorelli

General manager: Julian Tomlin

Spa manager: Darren Dixon

Opened: 2002

Refurbishment: £1.2 million

Garden and deck design: Sparcstudio

Sauna installation: Dröm UK

Spa area: 4,180 sqm

Treatment facilities: 21 treatment

rooms, relaxation rooms,

Leighton Denny nail bar and

Mii makeup studio

Gym: 130sqm complete with

Technogym ARTIS equipment,

and Junckers studio floor

Wet spa: Eight ozone-treated indoor

and outdoor pools; Thermal Heaven

offering nine experiences and Rasul

Other facilities: Themis spa restaurant,

lounge and retail boutique, private spa

member’s lounge

Product partners: Elemental

Herbology, own-label ‘The Spa’ Natural

Products, Natura Bissé, Leighton

Denny, Mii, Clarisonic, and St Tropez

Specialist suppliers: Dröm UK,

BC Software, Camellia Tea House,

DaleSauna, Southern Beauty, Ellisons

and Technogym