

# COUNTER

INTELLIGENCE

Spring/Summer 2015

BEAUTY NOTES AND DESTINATIONS

SPA

## CLEAN SLATE

Detox spas can now be found all over the globe, but the Texas version is speedy, down-home, and still based solely on liquids.

BY DANA WOOD

LET'S SAY YOU'RE A HOUSTON-based petroleum exec. When you're off the job you're really off, which means drinking too much, eating too much, and generally grabbing life by the antlers. And paying for it with acid reflux, excess pounds, and a shrinking supply of energy.

For Tracy Boulware the toxic combination of work stress and after-hours indulgence came to a head about 10 years ago and led her on a tour of every hardcore detox spa in California, plus a few in Mexico. "It was a game-changer," she says of the practice. "I felt the way I did when I was a teenager."

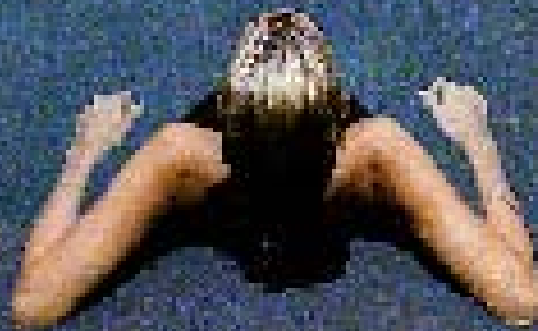
But the realization that not everyone west of the Mississippi had easy access to these life-affirming programs inspired her to create a retreat of her own. **Deer Lake Lodge**, albeit one with a Southern spin: short stays to accommodate the spa-curious, a lecture curriculum focused on raw food, and wall-to-wall positive affirmation.

"Texas is a state of mind: breathing room and wide-open spaces," Boulware says. "We try to channel the spirit of the Dixie Chicks and the Junk Gypsies."

Tucked in piney woods one hour from Houston, near Lake Conroe in Montgomery, Deer Lake Lodge is a study in 21st-century sustainability. Yes, antlers abound, and there's a rooster nearby that functions as an alarm clock, but the spa facilities, eight suites, and three cabins have been constructed from repurposed shipping containers insulated with recycled denim. The bedding is organic, the lights are LEDs—even the rainwater gets recycled.

Although losing weight is a core goal for guests, Boulware says the most

**HABIT FORMING**  
Modern-day temples of wellness draw repeat visitors, who check in on a seasonal or annual basis.



important benefit of a stay at the lodge—be it three days or more than a week—is the chance to disconnect and learn from her carefully selected crew of wellness and spirituality gurus.

I am not a gag-down-every-concoction, swallow-every-pill kind of detoxer. But I should be: When I kick off my spa stay, I have a worrisome fondness for malty craft beers and an unsightly band of pudge just north of my jeans. I'm not overweight, but I'm soft where I don't want to be. I've also been struggling with fatigue, despite getting plenty of sleep. I check into a Barbie-size cedar cottage and am reminded to go to the Fasting Lounge to meet the other inmates—I mean, guests.

There will be no solid food during my stay, but I'm told I'll be so busy with yoga, lectures, spa treatments, and private health coaching that I'll have plenty to distract me from the fact that I'm not eating. With that in mind, I catch the last few minutes of a talk on iridology by Cheryl Lemoine-Kainer. In my pretrip reconnaissance of the spa's website I seized on iridology as a science—wait, is it a science?—that I'd like to learn more about. It's the study of the iris of the eye, and it ostensibly gives clues to one's physical, mental, and emotional health.

First, spa director Carrie Youngs Harmon needs to walk

me through the borderline-terrifying Daily Drinks and Supplements Plan. There are three liquid meals, two juice snacks, and nine supplements per day, including fiber (a.k.a. laxative), enzymes, and greens in capsule form, plus probiotics to repopulate the intestines with healthy flora after a colonic. (Most guests get one a day.) It's a lot for me, someone who has a hard time remembering to take basics like vitamin D.

But it's nothing next to the Deer Lake Lodge Detox drink, which we are to guzzle twice a day. It's a DIY concoction built around olive oil, apple juice, and a posse of powders: detox, green, and mineral. I'm told I can toss in a splash of water or add "taste enhancers" such as cinnamon at my discretion. Please. When a drink kicks off with a blob of oil, a truckload of cinnamon can't bring it back from the brink. I'm eternally grateful on day two, when another gagging guest teaches me to swap out the olive for coconut oil and the standard greens for ones that are chocolate-flavored. Bingo. We're back in business. And then there's the soup. "This is where it gets exciting," says Youngs Harmon, my menu shaman. "The soup is dinner, the only real meal of the day." Vegan, earthy, and genuinely delicious, it's so

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 108]



#### A TEXAS TALE

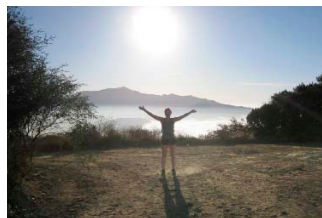
Deer Lake Lodge brings as much charm as possible to a food-free vacation.

## THE DETOX DESTINATIONS

### SHA WELLNESS CLINIC

ALICANTE, SPAIN

In this Mediterranean shrine to macrobiotics, calorie counts are notoriously low (the most spartan regime clocks in at a mere 500 to 700 a day), so it's no surprise that guests put weight loss at the top of their wish lists. Classes in tai chi and laughter therapy help to distract from the deprivation. [shawellnessclinic.com](http://shawellnessclinic.com)



### THE ASHRAM

CALABASAS, CA

There's loads of *omm-ing* at this legendary house of holism. The Ashram stays hot by not bending with the times too much. Still, the fitness program is much tougher than it used to be—the hikes are longer, the hills higher—to accommodate the superfit guests. [theashram.com](http://theashram.com)



### WE CARE

DESERT HOT SPRINGS, CA

With a return rate of 85 percent, and booked up a year out, We Care is the mack daddy of destination cleansing spas. It's starry—guests are used to seeing Cameron Diaz or Matt Damon in their bathrobes—but in a low-key way. [wecarespa.com](http://wecarespa.com)



### RANCHO LA PUERTA

BAJA CALIFORNIA, MEXICO

One clear sign a boot camp has got it going on? Wellness guru Frank Lipman makes it his destination for a yearly reset. Farm-to-table classes—offered in the buzzy culinary school, on the property's six-acre organic farm—teach all the organic essentials. [rancholapuerta.com](http://rancholapuerta.com)



### PALACE MERANO

MERANO, ITALY

Following the principle that everyone is at least a little toxic, the staff doctors at the Espace Henri Chenot at Palace Merano restore order via anti-allergen diets and bioenergy treatments such as cupping and tendon-muscle massage. [palace.it](http://palace.it)



### RANCH AT LIVE OAK

MALIBU, CA

There's more than one way to skin a detox cat, and for the Ranch it isn't through colonics. The path to clean and lean includes 1,400 "nutritionally dense" calories and up to 10 hours of exercise per day. The mantra here is about habits you can take home. [theranchmalibu.com](http://theranchmalibu.com)



### VIVA MAYR

MARIA WOERTH, AUSTRIA

Food allergies are enemy *nummer eins* at this fashion flock fave, which just underwent an extensive renovation. Viva Mayr puts guests through rigorous testing to determine sensitivity to things like histamine-generating red wine and cheese. Once they're removed, you can get slim, trim, and gorgeous. [viva-mayr.com](http://viva-mayr.com) D.W.



# Clean Slate

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 52] anxiously awaited it earns its own spot on the daily schedule.

Instead of a hotel minibar, there is the detox version of a first aid kit in my room: Curamin, a natural headache remedy for caffeine withdrawal; ginger pills for nausea; and a holistic sleep aid for 3 a.m. empty stomach insomnia. It's like a mini We Care, minus the Liv Tyler sightings.

Following my pills and potions debriefing, I'm off to gaze longingly at Lemoine-Kainer in a private iridology session. Twice she tells me that iridology is an "alternative health science," not some mumbo-jumbo hocus-pocus. Merely by sizing up my eyeballs she determines that I'm eating too much dairy and that I've inherited less than stellar lungs, which dashes my hopes of resuming my Gwynethesque Saturday night cigarette ritual.

I cram several universally blissful spa treatments into my short stay, including a facial peel that scorches my face with paprika instead of dermatologist-approved acids. Paprika: great for cooking, even better for singeing off a few layers of dead, flaky skin.

But here's what isn't even remotely blissful: colonics. I "get" colonics. I believe in their value, and I attend a class on the matter so I'll know what to expect. I just don't want to actually get a colonic. Still, I buck up and am humiliated when a staff member pops in to check on me. I can't abide stall-talking in a corporate bathroom setting, and I don't want to shoot the breeze while I'm lying on a colonics bed, either.

Moving on now. *Omm...*

In the evening, after listening to life coach Mark Scherer riff on Language, Emotions, and Well-Being (the net-net: Don't talk smack about yourself), I spot Boulware in the Fasting Lounge. She tells me that others—the mysterious others—feel energized by fasting, as if they could leap tall buildings in a single bound. And several of the experts booked to talk to us this weekend boast of not eating for weeks at a pop, à la Christian Bale prepping for *The Machinist*.

Theoretically, if the body isn't using all of its resources to break down the mountains of hard-to-digest calories we shovel in every day, energy should be freed up for other activities. I don't disagree with the theory; I skip breakfast constantly and still manage to run a few miles or slog through a cardio tennis class. But that's self-imposed intermittent fasting that lasts maybe 15 or 16 hours, max. This is a

different level of not eating. There will be no leaping over anything this weekend.

I'm distracted from my growing hunger, sort of, by excellent classes given by a trio of charming health nuts. There's meditative yoga with Tera Binding (she hypnotizes me later, too, which I'll get to in a moment), an overview of holistic living with raw-foods chef April Ree, and a twofer on antioxidants and something called "earthing" with Zachary Nasr.

From Ree I learn to scrutinize PLU (price look-up) codes on fruits and veggies. Organic has a code starting with 9. The code for conventional produce, which is not ideal, starts with 4. Dastardly genetically modified stock kicks off with the number 8. "Eight we hate," Ree says.

Nasr, a nutritional counselor, Reiki master, and electromagnetic frequency consultant, puts the fear of God in us about EMF. We're cell tower-surrounded by it, he says, and we need to "ground" ourselves for protection. How? Go hug a tree, babe. Or, better yet, buy special sheets at Earthing.com and layer 'em under your Pratesi.

Binding and I slip off to our hypnotherapy session. I have a very specific problem I need help with—my fear of driving on the highway—and I'm hoping she can get me over the hump. Wielding a clipboard, she's full of questions. She wants to know if I've had any past traumas that could be contributing to my anxiety, and how much I'm driving now.

After coaxing me through a guided meditation—I'm on the highway, en route to a beach 15 minutes from my home in Florida—I feel refreshed and rejoin the group. Will I be able to zip down to Miami after a single session? We'll see. But at least I'm more optimistic about it actually happening.

In my more immediate future is my re-entry into a world involving Dunkin' Donuts at Bush Intercontinental Airport. And when I get back to Florida a few hours later, it's time for the big reveal: After three days of what I consider near-starvation, I step on my scale and see that I've lost...one pound.

Since most Deer Lakers lose quite a bit more than that—the average is 1 to 1.5 pounds per day—I blame it on the fact that I was a total colonic wuss. (I got only one instead of the three I was prescribed.) Still, here's what I've gained: seriously reduced sugar cravings, a flatter stomach, more energy, and the knowledge that I can get by on way fewer calories. But I kinda need real food. It can certainly be healthy, organic real food, but this girl's gotta chew. ●