

After the rain...

The benefits of Swiss Alpine plants are applied at a new spa in the heart of Nicosia. ZOE CHRISTODOULIDES takes some time out to relax

After the rain comes sunshine, or in this case, after the rain comes absolute bliss. This, you see, is the catchy name of a spa first thought up in Switzerland that has now opened in the heart of our capital. Not just any old beauty centre, this is a franchise that has been given rave reviews worldwide in top glossies like Vogue and Marie Claire.

It began in 2001 when a Swiss IT manager grew tired of the frantic world of internet speculation and thought up the idea of a retreat in the centre of Geneva. The basic concept was simple; people overwhelmed by the stresses of the city could just take a break in the spa with well-being solutions perfectly suited to the tired body.

The venue opened its doors in 2002 and since then has spread its wings with branches in France, Croatia, Korea, Taiwan and Russia. Now brought to life smack in the middle of Nicosia, how did our capital become home to this little haven?

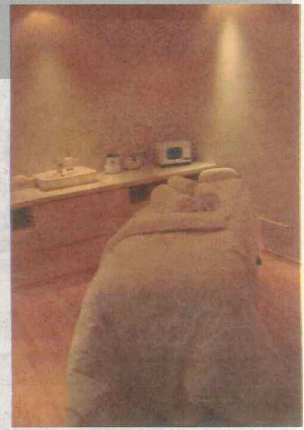
Owned by Alexis Michalias, the young entrepreneur explains that the idea of such a spa "caught his interest" because he was keen on the idea of introducing a new kind of philosophy to wellbeing here on the island. On a par with international trends he explains, "it was about time we had something new that embraces the concept of not just looking good, but feeling really special."

Now here's the interesting part - After the Rain in

ments available, all based on the protocols of the newest medical research in cosmetic treatments. But it won't all be done in a cold atmosphere as relaxation and a good old pampering remain the name of the day. Already starting to sound rather different to most beauty retreats in the capital, innovation is paramount.

When it comes to After the Rain, what's different to many other spas is that all local staff have undergone intensive training at the mother company in Geneva, followed by more training in Nicosia under the auspices of the Swiss professionals. "The point is that a true quality spa brand has protocols," says Michalias. "There's specific logic and concept behind everything we do and in whatever country you choose to visit an After the Rain spa, the applied methods will be the same."

Browsing the list of treatments of offer, I'm taken by a whole range of appealing names. Mysteries and Alchemy; The Milky Way; and Botanical Garden are but a few. And these are just the names of facials. When it comes to full body treatments there are all sorts of alluring things on offer with a whole range of exciting ingredients used. There are body scrubs with brown sugar, cocoa beans and grape seed oil. Then there are body wraps with seaweed, plants, volcanic mud and essential oils. It's a tough choice to decide on just one

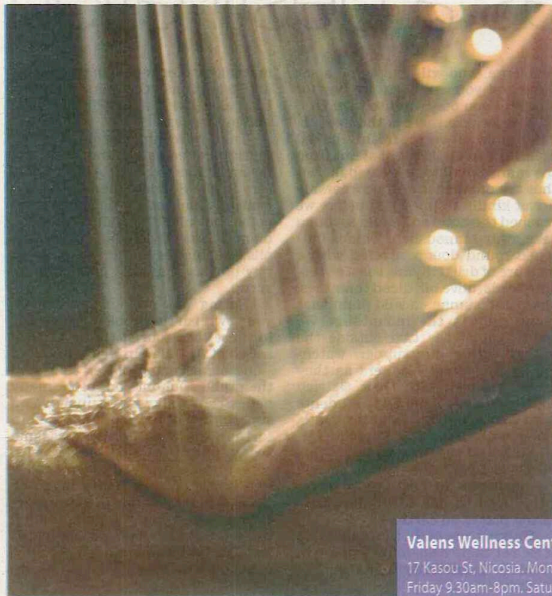


complimentary steam bath session awaiting you. There I was, escaping the weather on a day when it was quite ironically raining cats and dogs, being escorted through various candle lit corridors that led to the relaxation area. Ten minutes of steam, fifteen minutes of unwinding to the sounds of rushing water coupled with soft music, and I was as happy as anything. Let's not forget the fresh juice that awaited me accompanied by a selection of antioxidant teas. "We aim to offer a complete five-star service that follows a specific flow, it's about being totally pampered and made to feel a special way before the treatment begins," explains Michalias.

When it comes to the facial, it's all highly customised to suit your individual skin type from start to end. The trick is to be a little open minded as you let those in the know tell you what will best suit you. Mine was all about purification and rejuvenation to clean the skin and make it glow with all the trademark spa products used being natural and made from Swiss Alpine plants.

I'm then dutifully informed that the base creams have been formulated by Pierre Bottiglieri - one of the most famous creators of cosmetics in the world. I say 'base' creams because everything used once you're in the treatment room is enhanced by individually chosen elixirs which act like boosters especially geared towards your skin needs.

On first sight, the warm, candle-lit room looked like a rather friendly science lab, with all sorts of concoctions stored in little glass jars that really jolted my curiosity. Once you decide on the treatment with the therapist and the mixing begins, there are all sorts of treats in store including being pampered with a facial herbal tea tonic and beautifully massaged as key pressure points are targeted. The average facial lasts for one hour but if you're in need of blackhead extraction, you can book a 90-minute appointment. If this is what it feels like after the rain, I'm happy for it to absolutely belt down more often.



Valens Wellness Centre

17 Kasou St, Nicosia. Monday-Friday 9.30am-8pm. Saturday 9am-4.30pm. Tel: 7776677. Email: reservations@valens.com.cy. www.valens.com.cy



After The Rain's spa uses unique ingredients. Above and top right: some of the treatment rooms Cyprus photos Christos Theodorides

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Nicosia is actually incorporated within a larger building under the umbrella term of Valens Wellness Centre. To avoid any confusion, it's a space that aims to offer more than just the Swiss service, with a 'medispa' and nail spa soon to open up. The 'medispa' aims to offer non-surgical medical aesthetics. Although Michalias wants to keep hold of some surprises when it comes to the treatments that'll be on offer, what he does let on sounds rather intriguing.

"We've acquired the latest technology to give clients body and face treatments controlled by a group of doctors of international standing, including a Harvard fellow," he says. There'll be anti-ageing treat-

therapy. A bit like mission impossible, I finally opt for a good old facial. "Facials are the spa's speciality," explains Michalias. "It will be an experience like you've never tried before." That's more than enough.

Of course, if you've got more time on your hands there are always full-day treatments to indulge in, or special packages for you to enjoy with your other half. Maybe you'd like to get all loved up in a chocolate bath and body massage with cocoa bean essential oil. There's even a special range of treatments for men, with cleansing facials and back massages that combat stress.

Now here's the really good bit. Before you undergo any treatment, there's a half hour