

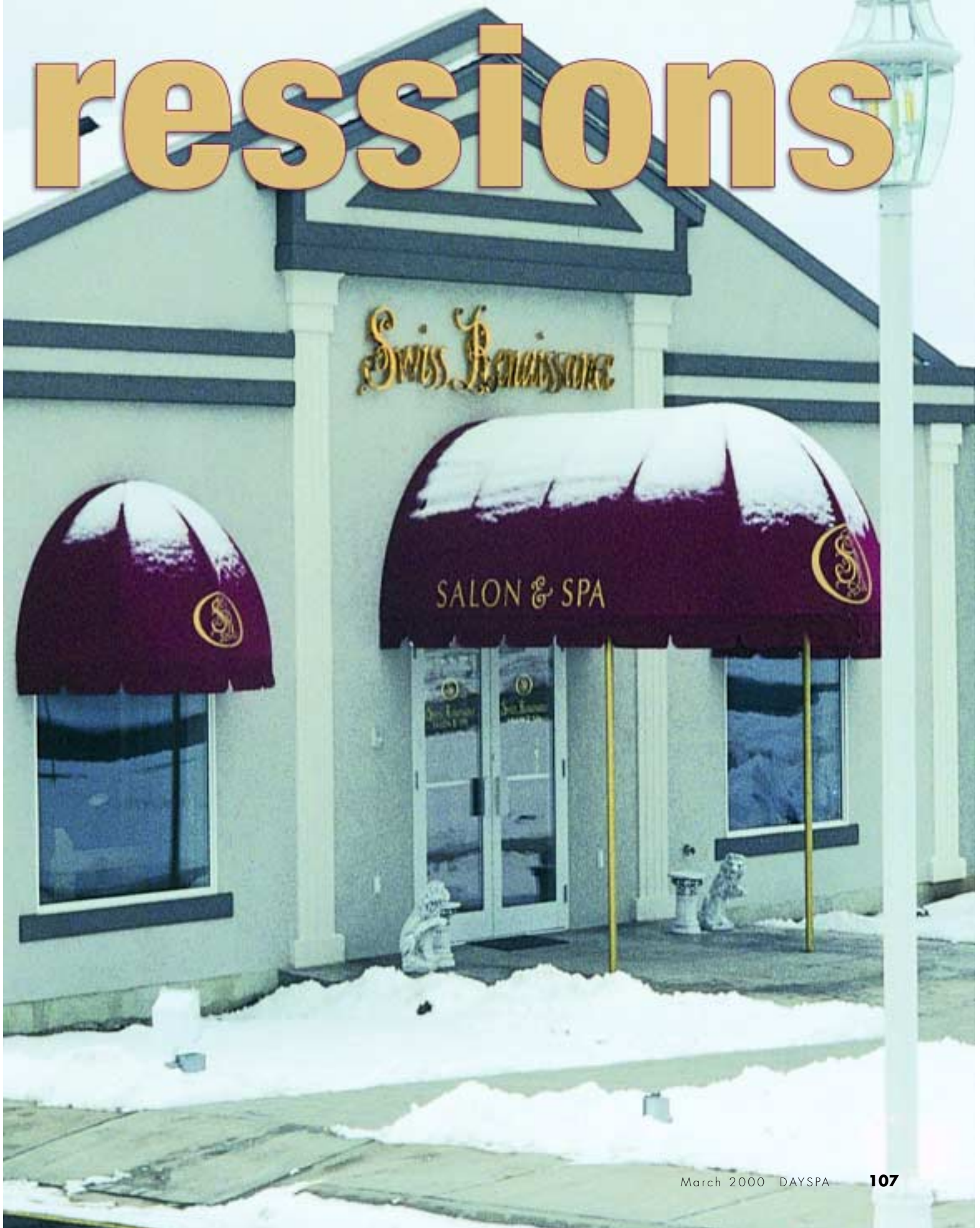
Make a lasting impact with an inviting spa exterior.

By Andrea Sercu



Having fallen in love at first sight, Sue and Hans-Rudolf Guenter-Schlesinger understand the power of first impressions. So when they decided to open the Swiss Renaissance Salon & Spa in Logan, Utah, the two agreed to give exterior elements as much attention as they lavished on the interior décor. The result was not only beautiful but effective. From its formal boxwood hedges and cobbled walkway to its *trompel'oeil* Greek portico columns and hand-lettered calligraphy sign, this stately spa truly entices clients before they even reach the front door. Unfortunately, this kind of focus on exterior design is far from common in the day spa industry. Few spa owners give outside elements the consideration they deserve, according to many spa designers. To make the kind of first impression you'll need for success, consider these basic design elements.

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1 Know Your Objectives. Plan the exterior elements of your spa to attract a targeted clientele and to reflect the specific selling message and themes

that represent your business. Before you can effectively design the outside, you must establish your business philosophy, the types of services you will offer and the type of clientele you want to attract.

When Adam Broderick of the Adam Broderick Image Group decided to move his business into a former bank building in Ridgefield, Connecticut, he hired Cynthia Vocell, principal designer at Cynthia J. Vocell Associates, Boston, Massachusetts, to help him out. Vocell's challenge was to create an upscale-yet-unpretentious look that would capture the cosmopolitan New York City commuter as well as the

local sophisticated suburbanite. Under the designer's and the salon owner's direction, the building was transformed into a sleek, multi-level structure with oversized, curved windows and an uncluttered airiness that exposed attractive portions of the spa's interior to passersby. Although exterior alterations demanded a considerable investment, the spa became an instantly recognized landmark in the community and proved its value by quickly capturing its target market.

2 Provide Parking. Because nothing turns away clients faster than inadequate parking, spa owners should address



parking concerns before signing a lease. Also be sure to check zoning restrictions; if the location isn't zoned for retail or service businesses, you may never be able to

provide adequate parking. If parking is a problem, there are solutions you can explore such as valet parking, a shuttle service or renting spaces in a nearby parking garage. Jay Gaskill, owner of Dunhill Barber, an upscale gentleman's day spa in Irvine, California, has even considered an off-site car detailing service, which would cater to his executive clientele and solve the lunch-hour parking crunch at the same time.

Cindy Angelly, spa consultant and owner of Spa & Salon Systems, Houston, Texas, suggests looking into buying or leasing nearby property for parking. "You may want to consider a lot that belongs to a commercial business that isn't open on weekends to supply additional parking during weekend rushes," she offers.

3 Plan and Post Signage. Exterior signage is critical. It should be consistent with your overall design concept and capture the essence of your business in a succinct way. "Outdoor signage is like the cover of a book," says Vocell. "It must entice you to look inside."

The arrangement of letters, shapes, colors and materials all contribute to the ultimate message you send. The main sign at the Adam Broderick Image Group features columns on either side to signify a neoclassical yet contemporary theme. "Take an element from the inside décor and use it on the outside," suggests Vocell.

Linda-Anne Kahn, owner of Beauty Kliniek, San Diego, California, notes the



Courtesy Adam Broderick Image Group

The large cylindrical windows of the Adam Broderick Image Group offer a tantalizing view of the salon/spa within.

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importance of including your full name and some element that identifies your business. Use buzzwords such as “spa,” “retreat” or “wellness center” to define your purpose, but keep the sign uncluttered, well-lit and easy to read.

The materials used to make the sign can also help convey your spa’s overall tone. Warm woods with green lettering, for instance, are appropriate for an aromatherapy spa in Aspen, Colorado, while a neon sign would better suit a trendy, upbeat spa on Miami’s South Beach.

If your spa is in a strip mall, you may profit from having your own individual sign in addition to the central sign that posts all of the strip mall businesses. However, keep in mind that strip mall landlords typically have last say over signage. In fact, spas in all locations are subject to strict codes raised by developers, landlords and city ordinances that may limit the size of the sign, the form of lighting and even the height of the lettering.

When a strict planning board and historical council in Boston prohibited Vocell from installing even a small awning for Giuliano, a second-floor Newberry Street spa, she came up with a creative alternative: a light camera to project the spa’s name and logo down onto the busy sidewalk. “Anyone walking by who saw the projected image immediately looked up,” Vocell explains, adding, “Always think in terms of how you can separate yourself from the crowd.”



You may also be able to make use of doors, sidewalks and window spaces to supplement your main signage. Kahn had her spa’s logo etched into her glass

door and displays a portable bulletin board to promote facials, massages, packages and new treatments.

4 Frame with Foliage. Foliage serves several purposes: It provides a natural buffer between your building and an asphalt parking lot, brings definition to your front entrance, and adds softness and texture to the structure. Vocell recommends using trees and shrubbery indigenous to your area.

Think in terms of the overall shape the landscaping will create with respect to your building. Combine plants of different sizes, textures and colors to enhance the building’s exterior. A low-growing hedge, for instance, can soften a stucco veneer, while flowers may add a touch of color under a window.

Tenants in upscale strip centers who pay high common area maintenance (CAM) fees typically already enjoy well-kept landscaping, but may not have the privilege of planting boxwood hedges or tall palms in front of their suites. Nevertheless, a few special touches, such as potted palms at the entrance, may be permitted. At Beauty Kliniek, Kahn received her landlord’s approval to remove the ordinary shrubs outside her spa and replace them with lavender and other herbs. She then added a bench. With these small changes, Kahn created a cozy garden area that hinted at the aromatherapy services waiting inside.

5 Make an Entrance. Make the main entrance of your spa the focal point.



Courtesy Giuliano

A light perched on the second floor projects the spa’s name and logo onto the sidewalk, letting passersby know the day spa is on the floor above.

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Although multiple entrances are useful for accommodating employees and VIPs, it's important to clearly designate one door as the front entrance. When Beauty

At Beauty Kliniek, Kahn, an avid feng shui follower, chose a rounded awning rather than a square style; according to feng shui principles square awnings send

“poison arrows” and interrupt the positive flow of the exterior. In addition to helping frame a building and/or windows, awnings can be used for main or supplemental signage. However, be warned: Landlords and local city ordinances usually have a say about what type of awning you can install.

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7 Open Up with Windows. If you think of your spa's exterior as its body, then its windows are its eyes and should allow clients to see into the “soul” of your services. At the Adam Broderick Image Group, Vocell brought in the outside by using eight oversized, custom cylindrical windows on both levels of the spa. The designer and the spa owner deliberately situated the spa area on the first floor, where every client could get a feel for the services.

Vocell and other consultants say many spa owners make the mistake of pushing the “sell” message too far in their window space. Instead of packing these areas with product, try creating emotion with small, informative displays that emphasize treatment, still leaving some viewing room for elegant interiors and services in progress.

Because windows are expensive, you might want to reserve them for key places, such as the front lobby or a relaxation room looking out onto a zen garden. At Dunhill Barber, passersby peering through the window see a lobby with a complimentary beverage bar, a bar rail on the front desk, a shoeshine stand, sports games on television monitors, a

Kliniek expanded from 5,000 to 11,000 square feet, Kahn purposely made the front entrance a double-door portal to distinguish it from the two other single-door entrances. Clodagh of Clodagh Design International in New York City, believes your front door should be instantly recognizable, touchable and provocative. While in London, Clodagh realized the value of a signature door when she asked a taxi driver to take her to the Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon and Spa, which she helped design. “I couldn't remember the address of the spa so I described the red door to the driver and he immediately knew the exact location,” she recalls.

Clodagh likes to design tactile door handles to help connect with the client from that first moment of entrance. When clients reach the door at Nemaocolin Woodlands Resort & Spa, the handcrafted bronze handle alludes to the hands-on treatments offered on the other side.

6 Stand Out with Awnings. Awnings call attention to your spa, whether it's on a busy street or in a strip mall. At Swiss Renaissance, the Guenter-Schlesingers chose a burgundy awning to offset the gray hues on the building.



Courtesy Bellissima Day Spa

The trees that frame the entrance to Bellissima Day Spa in Escondido, California, bring a soft beauty to the spa's exterior.

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humidor and a putting green. “They see what we consider the sex appeal of our shop,” says Gaskill.



Spa, the owners placed an Italian fountain between the boxwood hedges at the spa’s exterior. At the Nema-colin Woodlands Resort & Spa in Farmington, Pennsylvania, an 80-foot reflecting pool complete with a rippling tide and wooden bridge gives clients a soothing welcome.

If you have or are planning an unusually large window space, make sure you use appropriate materials to cut heat and air loss. Double-paned, low-heat glass will help tolerate temperature changes. Also, consider installing window alarms.

Designing a beautiful and functional exterior doesn’t have to blow your budget, but you do have to carefully consider all the elements that clients will see as they approach your spa. After all, you have only one shot at creating that first, and lasting, impression. ♣

8 Add Calming Waters. Water can also play a leading role in your

spa’s exterior, sending a calming, nurturing message before clients step foot into the spa. At Swiss Renaissance Salon &

Andrea Sercu is a contributing editor for **DAYS SPA**.

Courtesy Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon and Spa



The distinctive red door at Elizabeth Arden Red Door Salon and Spa in New York City is a familiar landmark with residents and tourists.