

# Made to Order

By J. Elaine Spear

Born from day spa owners' desire to differentiate their businesses

from an increasingly saturated market, customization continues to gain ground in the spa industry. Ranging from high-tech DNA-based products, to luxurious body polishes that treat the senses and the skin, customization continues to play a growing role in attracting and retaining a loyal following. "I believe that customization creates a stronger relationship with clients because you can formulate products that specifically address both their skin type and condition," says Cheryl Goodheim, owner of The Works in Carlsbad, California. "Customization also fulfills the desire by clients to have more experiential input, including a product's fragrance, color and how it feels on their skin."

Photos By Michael Block



### Gene Therapy

On the most scientific level, DNA research has made sensational breakthroughs in unlocking the mysteries of life, especially in the areas of disease and aging. In terms of skin care, it's now providing day spas with the means to offer customized skin care based on their clients' DNA profile. Dermagenetics, owned by GeneLink in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, is the latest to enter this advanced sector of esthetics, which is backed by favorable scientific studies. To provide the service, the spa technician uses a simple testing kit to obtain a client's DNA sample by swabbing the inner lining of the cheek. The kit is then sent to the Dermagenetics lab where a genetic profile is performed.

"We've been using Dermagenetics since February 2005," says Alyx Korner, spa director of SonaMedSpa in Atlanta. "The Dermagenetics DNA profile shows our clients their propensity for: 1) collagen breakdown, 2) photo-aging, 3) wrinkling, 4) skin aging and 5) damage caused by environment pollutants. Each of the five categories is rated by color to indicate whether a person needs average (green), moderate (yellow) or intense (red) skincare support." Based on these findings, the lab formulates a nighttime reparative product that can be used in conjunction with most skincare regimens.

### One-of-a-Kind Service

There are some basic approaches to customization that can be used by all spas. The Sanctuary Spa on Kiawah Island in South Carolina, for instance, is part of a golf and tennis resort. Even though it doesn't offer high-tech DNA products, it does speak to clients' yearning for more personalized experiences in a very "spa-like" way.

The Sanctuary Spa's tagline is, "your personal haven," and the service menu reflects this personalized approach. The Custom Facial, for instance, is available in seven protocols: 1) rejuvenating, 2) soothing, 3) equalizing, 4) hydrating, 5) revitalizing, 6) balancing and 7) clarifying. Add-on treatments—a Black Cherry Anti-Oxidant Peel or Refining Eye and Lip Treatment—are positioned as custom options to "personalize your facial retreat." All Spa Medleys (packages) have also been carefully designed to include at least one custom service.



“As a massage therapist, I truly appreciate the uniqueness of each person and the needs he or she presents,” says Robin Jones, spa director. “As a result, our menu has been designed to accommodate each person’s special needs in a very clear and succinct way. When guests first enter our spa, our front desk people are trained to find out what they want and expect from their spa experiences. Our service providers then use this information as a basis for their own consultations, and ultimately deliver services that speak to the personal needs of each guest.”

### Customized Complexes

Recognizing the importance of customization, some manufacturers are making it extremely easy to personalize spa therapies. For many years, for instance, Aveda, based in Blaine, Minnesota, has encouraged clients to choose the aromatherapy blend that will be used in all their treatments that day. Aveda clients also have the option of taking their spa or salon experience home with them by purchasing select retail products that can be custom-scented with their chosen blend.

Taking this concept to the next level, Biotone, based in San Diego, now offers Signature Customizing Complexes such as Green Tea & Lime Leaf—an antioxidant blend that helps soothe anxiety, improves circulation and restores depleted energy—to personalize massages, body polishes and wraps, along with retail products to support these therapies. Blending bars are also coming into their own; the Natural Body Spa chain, based in Atlanta, stocks its blending centers with 50 different essential oils to custom-blend body oils, lotions, shampoos and other personal-care products.

### Custom Niche

Acqua Beauty Bar is a trendy, New York City-based boutique and spa that carries a number of products ranging from Yon-Ka and Deborah Lippman to Bambini Soul. At this luxe establishment, clients are treated to unusual service details such as chilled jade stones and delicious vanilla rubdowns. When it comes to customization, though, founder Jamie Ahn has created her very own niche market by developing a menu of custom-blended body polishes that pleases her clients and piques the interest of the press.

“We make a variety of scrubs including salt, sugar, adlay (Asian wheat), bamboo salt and even enzymes mixed with fresh coconut,” says Ahn. “Whenever possible, we also add an element of fun for our clients by incorporating fresh melons, strawberries, papayas, mangos or pineapples that we purchase at local organic markets. Depending on our clients’ needs and preferences—adlay has a powdery consistency, for instance, while bamboo salt is quite abrasive—we custom



## From the Pantry

The popularity of customization in the spa industry is in full evidence at Universal Companies in Abingdon, Virginia. The company’s recently launched Spa Pantry division provides a large supply of ingredients for many custom-blending possibilities. “We have a lot of different powders, muds, salts, sugars, oils, gels

and extracts that can be used by spas to customize their treatments,” says Susan Tipton, copywriter for Universal. Instead of a regular order form, the Spa Pantry offers owners the opportunity to check off a pre-printed “grocery list” that breaks down products by aisle—or rather by category—such as active powders, exfoliants, herbs, carriers and butters.

To make the transition to customization a cinch, Universal Companies will soon release a Spa Pantry book with more than 60 recipes to help day spas get started on a more personalized path. Far from the simplistic recipes found in some health food stores and on the Internet, the recipes provided for Spa Pantry products promise to pique the interest of even the most spa-savvy clients with enticing names such as Rose Ritual Facial, Mineralizing Moroccan Mind Soak, Wine Lover’s Escape and Mint Chocolate Decadence Pedicure. Each recipe includes ingredients for each step, and a suggested service protocol.





blend their scrubs just prior to their services.” Ahn also custom blends retail body polishes—sans the fresh fruit, of course!

## Eastern Customs

For spas that are strongly dedicated to customization, a comprehensive approach to personalized services can be expressed in many different ways. For instance, companies like Tara Spa Therapy in Carmel, California, and Body Bistro in Beverly Hills, California, use the principles of ayurveda to deliver custom services that help balance a client's personal constitution or *dosha* (vata, pitta or kapha).

Similarly, Phytobiodermie and AmorePacific have products, protocols and techniques based on the Five Elements of Chinese medicine: wood, fire, metal, earth and water. Once a person's dominant element is ascertained, a customized spa experience can be crafted to help balance his or her energy, or *chi*.

“At our new AmorePacific Beauty Gallery and Spa in New York City, we tailor our treatments to our client's energetic or elemental disposition,” says Georgia Sturges, director of training and development. “Our service providers ask a series of questions designed to help them gain a sense of that person's general disposition. Based on these findings, they determine where they may be lacking, or be excessive in one or more of the elements. A very fiery person, for example, is extremely passionate and intense. We help balance that person's disposition through ‘water’ products and touch.” AmorePacific customized services are supported by an Asian Botanical Mixing Bar with unique and rare ingredients such as bamboo sap and wild yam. Estheticians use this bar to custom-blend masques at the time of treatment.

## Perfect-Fit Products

Supported by high-quality custom ingredients and education, Mukha Custom Cosmetics and Skin Salon in Columbus, Ohio, has a complete blending center where all treatments and retail products are formulated on the spot. “We use Colorlab, based in Rockford, Illinois, to formulate products for a person's skin type and skin condition—whether it's oily, dry, mature, sun damaged or acneic,” says Sanito Mendoza, Jr., owner. “We're the only ones offering a custom treatment and product program in the Columbus area, and the results have been phenomenal, especially when it comes to word-of-mouth marketing. When people enter our spa, they realize right away that it's no ordinary place.”

Mendoza also relates that to ensure topnotch delivery and products, Mukha has an extensive apprenticeship program for all estheticians that lasts anywhere from six months to a year. “After



they complete this program,” says Mendoza, “they’re fully qualified to care for our clients and custom-blend their products.”

Lori Terwilliger has owned Nuances in Rockville, Maryland, for 10 years and is thrilled that the spa world is embracing the concept of customization. “I use the Wilma Schumann Skin Care line because it’s modular and allows me to treat each condition, from rosacea to sun damage,” she says. “The results have made a profound impact on my business; I have 100% client retention.”

Julie Erickson-Bez, owner of 305 West in Fallbrook, California, also uses Wilma Schumann for her one-year-old, 450-square-foot day spa’s customized skin treatments. “I think if you’re going to customize your services you need products that are non-reactive and can be used in various combinations,” she says. “We find we can layer these products and absolutely no one has reacted negatively to any of them.”

“We use Skin Blends, based in Hayward, California, to provide a total custom experience for our clients,” says Julie Crispo, owner of DermaPlus in San Francisco. “I don’t pre-mix anything, so clients do have to wait to have their products filled and refilled. I also have clients try samples before actually buying the product. This gives me the opportunity to adjust the formula if need be, and have them experience the difference before making the commitment. While it’s admittedly time-consuming, it’s definitely worth the effort. Invariably, within a few days of mixing a sample, the client will return to purchase the full-size product.”

Skin Blends offers a comprehensive selection of products including base blends, additive blends, professional treatment products such as enzymes and face blankets, and products that help improve the appearance of acne and rosacea. “I use Skin Blends to create everything from serious skincare products to fun, spa-like ones such as a chocolate raspberry massage cream that I created for the massage therapist in our practice,” says Claudia Miro, owner of Face Forward Skin Care in San Mateo, California. “Using a customized approach to blending has effectively set me apart from my competition, whether that comes from another skin therapist or ready-made products sold at places like Sephora, Macy’s and even Walgreens. The products that I custom-blend for my clients are extremely results-oriented, and when they run out, they have to purchase their refills from me.” ♦

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## Personalized Retail

While there are many ways you can custom-blend products for clients, it’s also helpful—and far less labor intensive—to provide ready-made customizable products that can be independently selected and purchased by your clients. One example is the Aroma-Rest Therapeutic Sleep Pillow by Genesis Therapeutic Systems, based in Paducah, Kentucky. Developed by Matthew Wallis, D.C., who reportedly has the largest chiropractic practice in the State of Kentucky, the Aroma-Rest is made with Visco-Elastic contoured memory foam that was originally used by NASA to cushion the neck and keep it in a perfect state of alignment. It also contains a patented aromatherapy cartridge that fills the air with natural essential oils. There are several aromas to choose from for specific maladies, and special blends can be created in a custom cartridge upon request. For example, lavender and tangerine help the body relax and enjoy a more restful sleep; peppermint and eucalyptus assist with cold and sinus pain; and ginger eases joint pain.

