

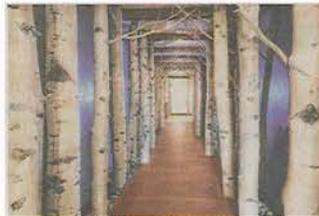


ED PEACO/FOR THE NEWS-LEADER

The men's lounge at Cedar Creek Spa. There's a separate women's lounge as well as a bridal suite with a salon.

Big Cedar creates spa haven

Cedar Creek Spa aims to provide total relaxation



EDWARD C. ROBISON III

The entrance hallway is lined with aspens, conveying organic, clean and soothing feelings, spa manager Barbara Reffitt says.



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The candle-lit Grotto Pool is the centerpiece of the spa.

By Ed Peaco
For The News-Leader

On a chilly, blustery late-autumn day with the wind roaring against the ears, the peaceful entryway of Cedar Creek Spa at Big Cedar Lodge offered a welcome relief, a stillness.

A long hallway lined with aspen trunks led toward the source of dreamy ambient sounds, muted shimmers and waves of soothing tones. Footsteps down the hall would lead toward ever more calming states, deeper within the spa.

Big Cedar, a haven of outdoor appreciation, outdoor recreation and outdoor fitness, has built its reputation by cultivating an atmosphere of rustic elegance with comfortable accommodations, including a spa. But this spa, Cedar Creek Spa, which opened in mid-November, is a new achievement of interior design, services and amenities. It represents a big commitment in a different direction: in.

Indoors for pampering and relax-



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Cedar Creek Spa manager Barbara Reffitt suggests guests carve out plenty of time for their spa visit.

CEDAR CREEK SPA AT BIG CEDAR LODGE

» 612 Devil's Pool Road
» Exit west on Missouri 86 exit off U.S. 65, about 9 miles south of Branson
» 800-225-6343
» Details and rates: big-cedar.com/Page/Spa.aspx

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ation.

Inward for tranquility and renewal.

This path to inner peace proceeds full circle back to nature.

Big Cedar's mission has always been to look through guests' eyes to envision experiences of optimum satisfaction, and the spa is one more way to carry out that mission, spa manager Barbara Reffitt said.

"It gives them a chance to totally unwind from the stress and pressures of everyday," she said, "... to find relaxation, to find that serenity they need in a vacation to go back into the world."

Features

Inside the spa, grand staircases curl along a two-story wall of glass looking onto the wooded grounds. Guests will find four pools — one on the women's side, one on the men's, a private pool and patio for a couple and the Grotto Pool — as well as lounges, steam, ice, warm robes and towels, and services for massage, facials, nails and hair, plus the Ozarks Rain Experience.

The bridal suite stands out for its spaciousness and trappings: a bank of makeup stations, a wall-length mirror, tables for serving refreshments and a private patio with an outdoor wood-burning fireplace.

The salon, easily accessed from the bridal suite, is equipped with styling chairs, manicure stations, pedicure chairs, an antique barber chair — and a fireplace.

Women's and men's lounges are equipped with sauna, steam room and hot tub, and they present views of woods and a creek. The 11 treatment rooms have fireplaces.

The centerpiece of the spa is the candle-lit Grotto Pool, a stunning space of hand-built stone walls and a timber ceil-



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A two-story wall of glass allows spa guests to look out at the wooded grounds of Big Cedar Lodge from inside the spa.



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Janis Auner, a frequent Big Cedar Lodge visitor, said she was impressed with the fitness center as well as the spa.

ing, with lighting from the pool's floor undulating with the movement of the water and an atmosphere of soothing heat. For contrast, there's an ice room nearby for cold therapy.

Reffitt said couples often use the Grotto Pool as a meeting place before and after receiving their services on separate sides of the spa. "It's a great way for couples to connect," she said.

Bringing the outdoors inside, the Ozarks Rain Experience re-creates different kinds of precipitation. The guest reclines on a comfortable table while eight shower heads deliver the desired intensity of rain, from misty to stormy. The treatment includes sugar-scrub exfoliation. At the end of the service, an

attendant applies a moisturizing body butter, wraps the guest in a warm robe and escorts the person to the Grotto Pool, Reffitt said.

The staff

One of the standout features of the spa is the tone of voices among the staff. They speak quietly and in a most ingratiating way. With such a conversation partner, you have no choice but to ease up and let tension go.

Before the therapists apply any treatment, they are prepared to set clients at ease, if that's what they need. Massage therapist Erin Story said she always explains what to expect with the requested service.

"They may need a little humor," she said, "or sometimes just a mothering feeling, that warmth."

Esthetician Todd Alden, who works on the men's side of the facility, said the spa serves as its own stress-reducer for guys.

"The environment itself when you walk in here is just so breathtaking that it takes people to where they just let go," he said. "We don't have to do a lot to get them to that point." Alden said he often hears a client wonder aloud, after his first treatment, why he waited so long before indulging.

Attention to detail

Reffitt suggested visitors carve out plenty of time — a full day, an overnight or longer — to enjoy the spa and other activities at Big Cedar. Book early, arrive early and bring your bathing suit so you can enjoy the amenities of the spa that come with the services, she said. As an example, a 60-minute massage costing \$145 plus a 20 percent service charge enables a guest to use the sauna, steam room, hot pool and the Grotto Pool. The spa services sampler offers choices among a host of 30-minute treatments, two for \$150, three for \$210 or four for \$260.

Beyond the spa, Big Cedar and neighboring Top of the Rock offer fishing, boating, horseback riding and golf, plus extensive menus of lodging and dining.

Janis Auner, a Drury University professor who was staying overnight with her husband at Big Cedar, said she was impressed with the spa. The frequent Big Cedar visitor noted touches such as ideal temperature in the pools, fireplaces in the treatment rooms and a warmed robe after a service.

"It's just typical Big Cedar," she said. "A lot of attention to detail, and, of course, everyone was very friendly. That's important, because you don't want to feel intimidated when you're in a spa. It was really a wonderful experience, and I've done a lot of spas."

She had high marks for the fitness center as well. The building once housed a conference center with mounted game on the walls. This feature remains, creating a distinctive fitness-center décor that Auner said she enjoys. She also praised the views and the organization and efficiency of the facility.

Fitness manager John Bennett said he and his staff often work one-on-one with guests. He said he plots workout regimens that guests take home, and he welcomes follow-up questions after the guests have departed.