

SCRATCHPADS

Inspired by India

Unwind and be inspired by the environment of Lakshmi Boutique & Spa, as **SOPHIE NUTT** explores the tranquil space that offers detoxing and organic beauty treatments in the heart of the bustling capital...



Tucked away in central London, just a stone's throw from Oxford Circus, lies Lakshmi Boutique & Spa, providing an escape from the reality of city life. Taking its name from the Hindu goddess of wealth, fortune and prosperity, Lakshmi provides beauty and wellness services using organic products and an holistic approach.

The Lakshmi brand was founded over 30 years ago by Italian-born Franco Canteri, after he became inspired on a journey through India. In 1980, after taking part in an Ayurveda mind-body health course in New Delhi, Franco became fascinated by the concept and sought to produce cosmetics with extracts deriving from plants, herbs and flowers. Fast-forward to 2018 and his Lakshmi brand boasts a huge laboratory in Europe, distributes products all over the world and has garnered serious attention with its eco-organic formulations and tag line 'made with joy'.

Natural progression led to treatments using the product range, and the Lakshmi brand launched its first UK flagship store and spa just over two years ago, managed by owners, Nicole Furia and James Watson Trimming. In the warm, dimly lit environment where the air is filled with the scent of its own essential oils, it is hard not to feel utterly relaxed in the Lakshmi Boutique & Spa premises. Nicole and James welcome every client with an equally warming and soothing approach, as soft music plays in the background and voices rarely ever rise above a hushed tone.

Encouraging guests to further unwind, each client is offered a traditional herbal tea of their choice on arrival, which is then

served in a quaint china teacup and saucer. "We aim to provide a little safe haven; a break from everyday life," James explains. "We hope to give customers an experience and bring them closer to the real potential of nature through essential oils and body, skin and face solutions."

Natural love

Pinewood shelves line the walls, showcasing hundreds of Lakshmi essential oils and products, all produced in Italy and each catering to specific wellness needs. Aiming to make natural cosmetics accessible to the everyday individual, each Lakshmi certified organic product is easy to use so that anybody can enjoy the benefits that nature has to offer.

"Armed with his wisdom of Ayurveda, Franco decided to transport this into a product that is easy for a person who doesn't have the same knowledge," explains James. While the spa houses immense tranquillity that contrasts with the outside rush of the London hustle and bustle, its team of therapists works magic through detoxing treatments. "Lakshmi is a combination between Ayurvedic wisdom, aromatherapy, organic product and technology, produced in a simple way," says Nicole. "Clients can receive a very holistic and relaxing treatment that has positive effects on the body, whether anti-ageing, slimming, or to help reduce cellulite."

Through its treatments, Lakshmi aims to remove any stigma that organic products do not produce the same results as synthetic-based products. "The reality is, 200 years ago, people would have had to find a solution to problems with natural products,"

says James. While pointing to the wooden stand housing an array of oils, he continues, "We have around 75 essential oils that are extracted from plants and I would be surprised if anyone knew over 10% of them."

Hoping to change this absence of knowledge for natural products, James and Nicole aim to educate their clients as well as give them a relaxing and results-driven treatment. "Nowadays, people largely believe that a headache can be cured with a tablet, for example. We believe, however, that if someone has a headache, there is something wrong within their body," James explains. "So, the headache should not be fought – instead the problem can be soothed with essential oils. I strongly believe that with organic products, stronger results can be achieved."

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Not only is the brand focused on bringing natural and organic products to the forefront of minds through its treatments, but the entire salon and spa is as environmentally friendly as possible. The space is inspired by the products, which it houses with the wooden furnishings, clean off-white walls and the dotting of plants exuding a sense of unpolluted paradise. "We have created a natural environment for clients from our packaging all the way through to our furniture," comments James. "The packaging for our products is PVC-free and the boxes are all FSC approved. Our furniture is all built from real wood and is not treated with any varnish." James continues, "We try to preserve as much as we can – even down to the cleaning products we use on the floor. Everything we do, we try to do naturally. There are things nobody would ever know, as they can't be seen, yet we still enforce them in order to be as environmentally-friendly as possible."

Beauty at its core

It is the passion for a natural and organic lifestyle that drives all the decisions made at Lakshmi. Both Nicole and James reiterate the belief that external beauty stems from internal wellness. "We're not only natural but we also work to detox the body. Skin drinks everything that is put on it and we strongly believe that outer beauty comes from inner beauty."

This theory conveys as the spa's most popular services consist of detoxing treatments and sensitive skin facials. Within this two-floor retreat is a number of private treatment rooms, each featuring an inviting massage bed, selection of herbal teas, a colour-changing aroma diffuser and semi-precious stones ready for a Ratna Abhyanga hot stone massage. Guests can enjoy a range of treatments, one of the most popular being the Lymphatic Drainage Detox Full Body Massage with the Steam Bath Swedana and the Sensitive Skin Facial Rose. However, the spa also offers a free skin camera analysis for first-time clients to identify each individual's skin type and needs."

"We use skin camera analysis to find out about the client's skin and body so that every treatment is tailored to the individual," explains Nicole. "Some people have their own convictions about their skin type, which means they'll book a treatment that is not suitable for them. Maybe they had acne 20 years ago and they think they still have that problem; which may no longer be





the case. Sometimes you need to help clients to find the right solution for their skin type – our therapists know how to do this and, with the use of skin camera analysis, we can tell each client which treatment is best for them.”

The perfect match

Upon walking into the spa, clients are met with a wall of Faby nail lacquers; perfectly organised by colour. The sea of shades sees lines of holographic glitters through to ocean blues, ready for clients to pick any hue they desire to complete a hand or foot treatment. There is a line of Faby-equipped nail desks leading towards the back of the spa, where a plush space featuring two turquoise arm chairs invites guests to sink into a seat and immerse their feet into the brass ceramic bowls for an indulgent pedicure. For such treatments, it was important for Nicole and James to offer a nail brand to clients that matched the Lakshmi philosophy, and they were delighted to find Faby.

“When it came to expanding into the UK, we had to find the perfect nail solution for the spa,” explains James. “It was difficult to decide on the right solution for us, but we went to the Olympia Beauty trade show and came across Faby.” It didn’t take long for the partnership between one Italian brand and another to form. James adds, “Faby became our brand of choice because, as well as it’s amazing platform of colour choice, it is Italian, vegan and cruelty-free.”

Each of the therapists is specially trained in Faby hand and foot treatments and has been educated to the proper professional standard, James and Nicole stress. “We are really thankful that we have Faby educators to call on, courtesy of its distributor, Palms Extra, and know that they will teach each of our therapists how to perform the perfect Faby treatment when we need,” explains

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James. “We care about the small things when we treat clients. You have to be sure that each client gets an experience that they cannot find anywhere else.”

Due to Lakshmi’s international product distribution and popularity, the spa invites a diverse client base through the doors, creating an amazing atmosphere that is unique and humbling to witness. “Sometimes, we’ll spot an Italian lady walking on the other side of the road and then they read Lakshmi above the window and are ecstatic!” James laughs. It’s not only clients that warrant interest in the spa, however, as Nicole explains that the small team of seven therapists sees a range of nationalities that have been familiar with the brand for years. “We receive calls from therapists across the UK – Italian, Swedish, Russian and Dutch – that may have moved here for work or other reasons, but have been familiar with the brand already for many years. They’ll call us up and exclaim, “Oh, finally you’re in the UK,” Nicole proudly reveals.

It’s clear that what Nicole and James have created with Lakshmi Boutique & Spa is a community of loyal customers. Through the natural, detoxing treatments on offer and the organic legacy of Lakshmi, it’s easy to see why business is rife in this small holistic haven in the capital. **S**

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