A person is standing in a lake at sunset, with their arms raised in a gesture of joy or relaxation. The sky is filled with soft, golden light and scattered clouds. The water reflects the warm colors of the sunset. The overall mood is peaceful and serene.

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THE OSTHOFF RESORT & ASPIRA SPA

Elkhart Lake, WISCONSIN

THE OSTHOFF RESORT HAS 500 FEET OF SANDY BEACH FRONTING

A NEW FOUND TREASURE

The Osthoff Resort and Aspira Spa

By *Terry Herman*

Although known for its cheese, verdant plains and glacial terrain, the state of Wisconsin is also home to a number of formidable resorts and spas, many of which I've reviewed. Recently, I had the pleasure of traveling to Elkhart Lake, WI to review the Osthoff Resort (a AAA Four Diamond luxury resort) and its brand new Aspira Spa.

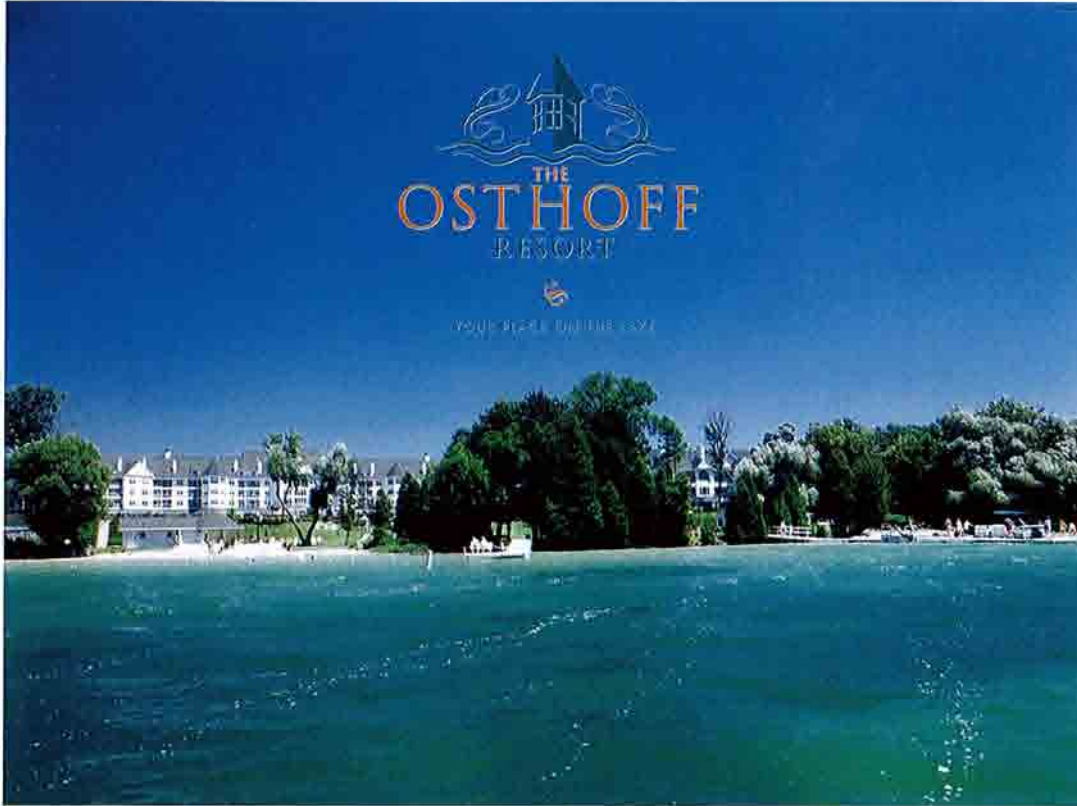
FIRST THINGS, FIRST ~ THE RESORT

Perched on the shores of pristine glacial Elkhart Lake (named by the indigenous Potowotomi Indians because its shape resembled an elk's heart), and surrounded by lush forests that flourish on the moraine, the Osthoff Hotel was originally built in 1886. The Osthoff would become the preferred vacation destination for the well-to-do traveler, who wanted exquisite scenery, luxurious accommodations, and a place to escape to from the wretchedly hot summer days of their heat-retaining concrete cities.

During this time, luxury resorts such as the Osthoff, were being built all over the U.S. because of a demand by those who preferred staying in the U.S., versus traveling great distances overseas to Europe. These turn-of-the-century resorts had the finest of everything and were considered equal to, if not better than, many of their overseas "cousins". After the halcyon days of this quaint little town's unrivaled resort and tourism growth began to wane (in part because of historical, economic and urbanization factors), by the mid-1950's, this picturesque town's tourism trade began to fade; all of the area's resorts would be affected, including



THE ELKHART LAKE ONE OF THE PUREST LAKE IN WISCONSIN



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the town's "grande dame" Osthoff Hotel. Reluctantly, the Osthoff family sold its beloved hotel. The new owners would then convert the property to a popular summer performing arts camp, where it continued operating until the late-1980's. By 1989, another group of investors purchased the camp, and decided to give new life to the Osthoff, and rebuild it as a luxury resort.

In 1995, the Osthoff Resort reopened its doors, reaffirming itself as a luxurious resort and preferred vacation destination. The current owners (a privately held corporation) didn't compromise the integrity of the original architectural design, which is quintessentially and quaintly Bavarian-esque, and which honors the founder's heart and homeland.

Even the resort's present-day meandering grounds, accentuated with gazeboes, "set-a-spell" benches, waterfalls, lush greenery, stoic evergreens, and beautiful flora, transports its strolling guests to a bygone era, where simpler was better, and when quiet was a customary respite for the weary body, mind and soul.

In mid-2004, ground was broken for a multi-phase round of new builds and upgrades, which included an entire new wing of rooms (condominium suites), expanded conference and meeting space, expanded ballroom, a new gourmet restaurant, and a brand new full-service spa.

In November 2005, construction was completed; the resort could now boast of a new wing with forty-eight suites (up to 2,300 s.f. each, complete with kitchen, dining and living areas, balconies, Euro-designed walk-in showers and whirlpools), bringing total accommodations to two-hundred-forty-five suites and guest rooms (three floors); a ballroom that can accommodate up to one-thousand; an updated, techno-state-of-the-art meeting and conference center (easily accommodating up to six-hundred); a fabulous gourmet restaurant, Lola's on the Lake (named after resort General Manager, Lola Roeh); this new restaurant serves traditional-nouvelle fusion cuisine paired with impressive wines (the restaurant comes complete with a beautiful hand-planed wooden bar, and serves lunch and dinner; the resort's other restaurant, Otto's, offers lighter fare, including a children's menu); and, a new full-service spa, Aspira Spa.



THE ASPIRA SPA IS A STATE-OF-THE-ART FACILITY PROVIDING

THE BEST THING

THE SPA



The spa's logo is a pyramid of three individual open "spirals", spiraling outward to the right, symbolic of renewal and continuum of body, mind and spirit.

Aspira Spa's ("infused with spirit") design is sensory-driven symbolism. Its menu of services offers treatments that are traditional and non-traditional, with many being exclusive to the Midwest. The spa's logo is a pyramid of three individual open "spirals", spiraling outward to the right, symbolic of renewal and continuum of body, mind and spirit. The spa's design concept and treatments are based on the five elements of Chinese philosophy. The individual elements also have corollary colors (wood/green or blue, fire/red, earth/yellow, metal/white, and water/black), and other characteristics such as seasons, substance, direction, motion, emotions, etc. All relate to each other and are interconnected.

Aspira Spa's architectural design, incorporating these elements, is visually stimulating and impressive. The spa's main areas are a convergence of three individual circles, where the body, mind and spirit can meditate, experience water and the fire's warmth, or "feed" the mind with reflective resource material. Throughout the spa, organic substances include indigenous stone, mahogany and walnut wood, (artisan-planed, reminiscent of gentle waves of water), copper water vessel (reflective light and warmth), fireplaces and soy candles (emanating light and warmth). The organic substances reinforce the connectivity of these five elements, including the body, mind and spirit, and aspects of Chinese Feng Shui (air, water, balance, harmony). On the treatment side, the spa further correlates these elements by associating a treatment efficacy to a specific element. The following table reflects this correlation.

Element	Color	Season	Aspira Spa Effect
Wood	Green or Blue	Spring	Energizing
Fire	Red	Summer	Cooling
Earth	Yellow	Transition/Between	Releasing/Detoxifying
Metal	White	Autumn	Relaxing
Water	Black	Winter	Toning

The spa's holistic approach to healing includes treatments that are based on global therapies, indigenous to Asia, the Pacific, North America, the Middle East, and Europe. Aspira Spa's extensive and unique treatment



THE PERFECT ENVIRONMENT FOR GUESTS RECEIVING TREATMENTS

offerings are all geared towards aspects of the five Chinese elements, and include massage therapy, balneotherapy, chromatherapy, reflexology, body treatments (referred to as “dynamic envelopments”), facials, therapeutic rituals (referred to as “Aspira Spa Complements”), and salon services.

Another unique aspect to the spa is that it offers its guests the option to take their treatments in the privacy of individual spa suites, which are separate from the spa's individual treatment rooms. Each spa suite includes a private whirlpool, fireplace and treatment area; however, the larger spa suites also include private lavatories, shower facilities, and sofas; these large rooms also accommodate tandem treatment options. Guests reserving the larger spa suites also receive a choice of beverages, nuts and fresh fruit served to them post-treatment, or they can order spa cuisine from the Café and have it served to them in the spa suite. The suites can be reserved for up to four-hours, and can accommodate up to four people. The suites are ideal for couples, groups of friends, or wedding parties.

The spa's exclusive treatment line is by Phytobiodermie (www.phytobiodermie.com). This Swiss company's products incorporate organic and natural ingredients that synergistically conform to the color principles of the five elements to restore, rebalance and rejuvenate. Phytobiodermie was the first company to esthetically incorporate these five elements, using light therapy (chromatherapy) and lymphatic drainage.

The choice of the line and methodology was recommended by Raoul Sudre the President of Aspen Management Corp. who was the Consulting firm chosen to do the Osthoff Aspira spa.



My treatments at the spa included the Lomi-Lomi massage, foot reflexology and the Chromalift facial. Although I've read about the Lomi-Lomi massage and heard others

describe how they felt after getting one of these massages, I had never experienced this unique massage therapy, until I found myself at the Aspira Spa. So, I decided to be adventuresome and bear it all. My therapist was exceptional, her technique incredible, and her explanations about the individual techniques was very informative. I asked her where she had learned these techniques? she replied that Aspen Spa Management had sent their International Trainers before the opening and had taught the staff all the exotic treatments offered on the Menu during an in-depth three weeks long Training seminar.

Although I've had foot reflexology before, I was also impressed with the skill level of my therapist; however, the use of different colored essential oils on the various segments didn't seem to impact the treatment's efficacy. The Chromalift facial was a rather unusual treatment experience, and one I hadn't experienced before my visit to the spa. Overall, the treatment aspects rendered a noticeable, albeit marginal, visible result (a slight improvement (lifting affect) to the definition along my lower jowl area). Phytobiodermie recommends a consecutive series of between three to five treatments for optimum results (each one focusing on additional color therapy, mask and “acupuncture” techniques; the latter according to the product's website); the company “guarantees” visible results with just one treatment.

The treatment utilizes several of Phytobiodermie's proprietary pieces of equipment; the “Biodraineur”, which gives a pulsating (and suction) massage, which stimulates draining the lymphatic system of toxins; the “Chromapuncteur”, which emits variable colored light (vibration); the “Biostimulateur”, which vibrates and is concentrated on “acupuncture” and reflex areas for energy flow. The products used were gentle and non-irritating, with a pleasant aroma.

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COVER STORY

THE ASPIRA SPA PROVIDES A HOLISTIC, ORGANIC APPROACH

GLOBAL THERAPIES



My next venture to Aspira Spa will definitely include the Moroccan Hot Oil Massage, the Hammam treatment and the Chromatub treatment (this deluxe hydrotherapy tub, with over two-hundred and fifty micro-jets, also incorporates color sequencing to each Chakra, and an underwater hand-held massage by the technician, and additional hot and cold needle-pointed jet action stimulation). With so many treatments to choose from, it's tough making a selection.

Spa Miscellany: Opened November 2005. Approximately 20k s.f. Twenty-five staff. Twenty-two treatment rooms, including two wet-rooms; five junior spa suites and two royal spa suites. All towelings, robes and slippers are a blend of organic cotton (60%) and organic bamboo (40%) (inherently anti-bacterial). All hair and nail treatments are done in the salon, a separate area within the spa. The co-ed wet area includes an amply sized whirlpool. There are separate women's and men's locker/changing areas, each equipped with its own sauna and steam rooms. The spa's beautiful multi-purpose exercise room is appropriate for Yoga, mat-Pilates and other low-impact routines. And, the separate spa

TO THE SPA EXPERIENCE OFFERING GUESTS THE "SPA SUITE" CONCEPT

Café offers healthy and inventive organic cuisine (following are a few flavorful recipes), which incorporates homemade or locally grown commodities. The retail boutique offers its treatment and salon products, as well as the Aromafiora brand, candles, bath salts, oils, and soaps; artisan-crafted jewelry, made of natural and organic materials, round out the product offerings. Fitness area, indoor and outdoor pools and whirlpool.

Unique: The Aspira Spa concept and design. Global therapies. Spa suites, with expansive views and French doors opening onto private patios.

Futures: With this area's rich heritage of indigenous Native American Indians (the Potowotomi Tribe), Aspira Spa is working on incorporating various tribal-based rituals, which honor related aspects of spirituality, while nurturing and healing its guests. Themed spa packages, including special events and speakers, are also slated for the near future.



Spa Consultant: Aspen Spa Management Corp. The company was involved at all levels of the development of the Spa, closely working with C.E.O. Lola Roeh from Design to Menu creation, choice of equipment and of course not the least important: Selection and Training of the Staff.

Overall Favs: In addition to my experience at Aspira Spa, wonderful accommodations, including my tippy-toe-access-only bed (beyond comfortable), and the exhilarating shower head (one of the better ones I've experienced in sometime). Dining experiences at both Otto's and Lola's, with the latter being extraordinary. And, the staff guest-care was exemplary.

What to Do: Activities for singles, couples or families will vary, depending on the season. The draw in spring is "Jazz on the Vine", a series of live jazz concerts, featuring some of this musical genre's best. Summer fun translates to swimming, fishing,

canoeing and picnicking, with golf courses and tennis courts nearby. During the summer into early fall, there's also natural-track auto racing, Road America, which is part of the pro-am international racing circuit (often referred to as the Heartland's equivalent to the Monte-Carlo races). In the fall at the resort, it's the annual Harvest Moon Ball; the spectacular fall colors of the area's deciduous trees is another "must-see". Year-round antiquing is also an area draw. In December, there's an "Old World Christmas Market", reminiscent of the traditional Austrian and German Christkindlmarkt at the resort. Traditional dining celebrations for Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, Easter, etc. are a huge draw to the resort. Special themed all-inclusive packages celebrating traditional holidays are also offered, as are weddings, engagements, graduations, etc. And weather permitting, the season of winter brings to the area cross-country skiing, sledding, skating and hockey on the frozen lake, and snowshoeing. And, regardless of the season, the Osthoff Resort's beautiful landscaping changes to reflect nature's seasonal best.

Accolades: For seven consecutive years, receiving the coveted AAA Four-Diamond Luxury Resort rating. Chosen by "Meetings MidAmerica" magazine as one of the top forty-five meeting destinations in the Midwest.

Resources: Elkhart Lake is one-hour north of Milwaukee, WI (flying into Milwaukee's General Mitchell International Airport, the resort offers shuttle service); total travel time to the resort from downtown Chicago is less than three-hours.

This is an exceptional experience and highly recommended.

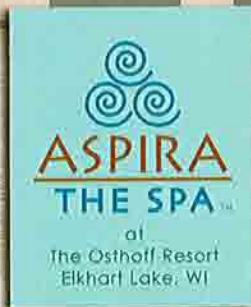
Five Loofah Rating!

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