TRULY ELEMENTAL

Wood to water spa cures that engage the power of the elements

By Becca Hensley
Ancient alchemists once sought to change lead into gold. Metaphorically, that’s what happens to us after the perfect spa treatment. We’ve been transformed to our best self: balanced, calibrated, polished and purified. Our dimmed light becomes gilded.

In bygone times, nearly every culture believed that the world was composed of a universal spirit explained as various combinations of nature’s elements—generally: fire, air, water, wood and metal. Some traditions also added the notion of aaka-sha, also called aether or quintessence. This can be translated to heart, sacred space or heaven, though some called it the energy that comprised the stars.

As a pattern, the elements, more energy than things, followed a circle meant to symbolize the journey from birth to death—and back again. The flow went something like this: water quenches fire; fire melts metal; metal chops wood; wood cleaves the earth, earth absorbs water—and so on. Shamans used this concept to help balance and heal the human body. They relied on how the elements were associated with body parts, colors and personality traits to treat patients accordingly. Guided by nature, the healer worked to realign the elements within each person to create optimum balance—just as our favorite spa therapist does for us today.

Want to pay homage to the earth’s curative powers? Sample some of these “elemental” spa treatments, found at a variety of mindful resorts around the world.

**METAL**

In a ritual that combines a variety of earth’s elements, **Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay** offers Blessings of Bali at its Healing Village Spa, a two-and-a-half-hour symphony of the senses. In a key part, participants wear a vest made of Balinese coins (metal), meant to capture the healing vibrations of a crystal sound bath to distribute the purifying buzz throughout the body. [fourseasons.com/jimbaranbay](http://fourseasons.com/jimbaranbay)

**Gold** is the standard at **The Spa at Pebble Beach**, a Forbes Five Star sanctuary on California’s Monterey Peninsula. With 20 treatment rooms, a salt wall, warming fire pit and more, it provides an alternative to days on the golf course. Indulge in the 24-Karat Gold Facial, an 80-minute treatment that utilizes metal, peptides and plant stem cells for a hydrating, lifting, final effect. [pebblebeach.com/the-spa-at-pebble-beach](http://pebblebeach.com/the-spa-at-pebble-beach)
AKASHA (QUINTESSENCE)

In Sedona, an Arizona hamlet said to be on an energy vortex, L’Auberge de Sedona, A Destination Hotel embraces the vibe. The L’Apothecary Spa, set on Oak Creek amid the red rocks, leads a Moonlit Meditation in a dedicated outdoor spiritual space, as well as Star Bathing sessions: nighttime sky spotting experiences sure to heighten all five senses and bring lasting peace. lauberge.com

Yield to the sound of the universe. This vibration is known by the ancients to help heal our bodies. Set on the same frequency that helps the flowers to bloom, Chable Resort Yucatan’s Song of Heaven experience tunes up your mind, body and spirit. Utilizing a customized mix of specialized vibratory techniques with tones, percussion and chants, the session cleanses and refreshes the energy. chableresort.com

WATER

Embrace self-healing at The Retreat Blue Lagoon in Iceland, where a stylish haven has been hewed into the seductive nooks and crannies of an 800-year-old lava flow. Here, you can submerge in watery nature, move from room to room until the grand finale, where you can self-administer mineral lava-infused salt, algae and silica to impart the ultimate reward for your skin. bluelagoon.com/accommodation/retreat-hotel

Be like water. Just being around H2O frees us from what binds us. Set on the waterfront in Newport Beach, The Spa at Balboa Bay Resort takes advantage of its location to stretch out 10,000 square feet of indulgences. Stay on mermaid theme here and partake of a Sea Shell Massage, a 50-minute treatment in which tiger-striped seashells rhythmically provide relief. balboabayresort.com/wellness

EARTH

The Incas have long used the pink salts mined from Maras, a town near Cusco. In honor of these salubrious gifts from the earth, the Aqlla Spa at Sumaq Machu Picchu celebrates the earth’s yield with its Maras Body Massage. Employing ancestral salts for a prodigious scrub, the treatment continues with a papaya and lemon body mask, plus a dousing with indigenous herbs. machupickchuhotels-sumaq.com

Hawanawana Spa at Four Seasons Lanai sits on this one time, all island, pineapple plantation’s southeastern coast. With just one town, no stop lights and a languorous ambiance, the untrammeled isle evokes the spirit of old Hawaii and its mana (or soul energy). That makes it an ideal spot to sample earthy spa offerings, such as Lanai Tai Signature Scrub (which uses pineapple) or the calming Ti Leaf Relief Wrap. fourseasons.com/lanai
AIR

There’s more to a city’s sound than traffic. Tuck in to Swissotel Chicago’s new Vitality Suite, a sanctum meant to awaken your inner serenity. With a “well-being wall” that features personalized workout, healthy snacks, a Kneipp shower and a la carte pillow menu, the 1,700-square-foot haven is the first suite in the world to boast Sound Bath Meditation recordings by renowned instructor Sara Auster to elicit the deepest level of inner peace. swissotel.com/hotels/chicago/suites/vitality-suite

Spring Creek Ranch, a 1,000-acre refuge located minutes from both Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, elevates rejuvenation to new heights (literally) at its Wilderness Adventure Spa. Set a thousand feet above the town of Jackson amid wild terrain and unpolluted mountain air, the secluded haven deeply immerses guests in nature. Try the Sacred Space Massage enhanced by the scent of pine and the sound of birdsong. springcreekranch.com

FIRE

Leafy Polanco captivates as one of Mexico City’s swankiest neighborhoods. Nearby, the National Museum of Anthropology presents peerless exhibits and artifacts that showcase ancient cultures, from Aztec to Maya. Combining both moods, W Mexico City’s Away Spa does the unexpected by providing a Temazcal experience (essentially a traditional spiritual sweat lodge) right in the middle of the city. marriott.com/hotels/travel/mexwm-w-mexico-city

Amid the millions-of-years-old red rocks, sunbaked sands and human-looking Saguaro cacti of the Sonoran Desert, The Boulders Resort & Spa melds into the terrain near Scottsdale. Once the purview of ancient cultures, this ancient landscape exudes a prodigious energy. Yield to it at the spa where an authentic tipi sets the scene, celebrating past inhabitants and their practices. Partake of a shamanic ceremony, which includes sage burning to cleanse the spirit. theboulders.com

WOOD

According to American folklore, the walnut is a symbol of wisdom and inspiration. Drawing on the region’s abundance of local black walnut trees, The Ritz-Carlton, St. Louis spa rolls Missouri Black Walnut sticks over tension-filled muscles to unravel, stretch and elongate them. The energetic, rapidly executed massage uses a customized free flow to achieve its unraveling goals. ritzcarlton.com/en/hotels/st-louis

Traditionally dressed Maasai warriors carry a rungu, a wooden baton, considered sacred. Pertaining to power and status, the carved, wooden club has many uses in East Africa. Discover how quickly it de-stresses safari weary muscles at Four Seasons Serengeti. In a treatment called Kifa, the therapist uses a heated Rungu and Tanzanian baobab oil. foursseasons.com/serengeti/spa/masses