

# AMERICA'S MOST WANTED SPA ARCHITECT

*TAG Galyean is it • by Roger Cox*

**M**y massage therapist at The Greenbrier resort spa ushered me into a private dressing room, where I changed into the requisite robe and slippers before undergoing the spa's signature series of treatments, beginning with a soak in the resort's historic mineral baths. From there my odyssey called for a sauna, a Swiss shower, something known as a Scotch Spray, and a massage.

Ordinarily I would have accepted these ministrations for the pampering they are, but on the following day I was having lunch with Tinsley Azariah Galyean (TAG), the man behind everything from the spa's Neoclassical outlines and rhododendron-inspired color scheme to its menu of treatments.

Already an award-winning architect when he undertook the Greenbrier project in 1986, Galyean went on to design spas for The Broadmoor, The Aspen Club, and La Quinta Resort, to name the most prominent. His work has made him the nation's most sought-after spa designer. So at a time when practically every upscale hotel and resort has decided it has to have a spa, this seemed like an auspicious moment to talk to the man who, more than anyone else, has set both the stage and the tone for this accelerating trend.

Galyean agrees to meet at the restaurant in The Greenbrier's golf clubhouse, which is only a few miles from his studio in Lewisburg, West Virginia. Though he's casually dressed, his impeccably manicured short white beard and antique pewter wire-rim glasses suggest a man sensitive to image and attentive to details. Confident without being pretentious, he begins our conversation by admitting that for years he had pursued The Greenbrier as a client but the resort's developers wanted nothing to do with him. "They said, 'If you're

Sipping tea, donning spa robes. It's all in the line of duty for this architect.



from West Virginia, you can't be good enough for us," Galyean remembers.

Raised in the state's capital city of Charleston, Galyean left to follow an educational orbit: through England, where he was an exchange student; California, where he studied fine arts and creative writing at Stanford University; and finally New York, where he obtained his architecture degree from Brooklyn's Pratt Institute. He then returned to his hometown to establish TAG Architects, Inc., a firm that over the years has won a dozen Architecture Institute of America design awards.

Not until 1986, after Galyean had sold his enterprise to become an independent consultant, did The Greenbrier relent by offering him a chance to redo its indoor swimming pool. "It was the first thing they'd ever done that was on budget and on time," he told me. "It got great reviews, so they said, 'Let's upgrade the mineral bath department.'" So for the next two years he lived and worked at the resort.

Although spas have since become a commonplace element in the resort landscape, Galyean says that 15 years ago he had few places to turn for guidance or inspiration. None of the "destination spas" (The Golden Door, Palm-Aire, Canyon Ranch), provided an appropriate model. "There was no resort-amenity spa," he says, "so we invented it."

At The Greenbrier that meant creating a modern context for the historic mineral baths. "We wanted a look-good, feel-good experience delivered in traditional Greenbrier

style. There's a lot of evidence of it up there: the private dressing rooms, the use of same-gender massage therapists, and the color scheme, inspired by the rhododendron terrace just outside."

The spa's menu of services goes well beyond the baths and massages

replied. "It was part of the original mineral bath department, and we upgraded it. In the hands of a good therapist those hoses can do a terrific job. Like it or not, people come away from that treatment saying 'You gotta try that.' They think about it. They talk about it."

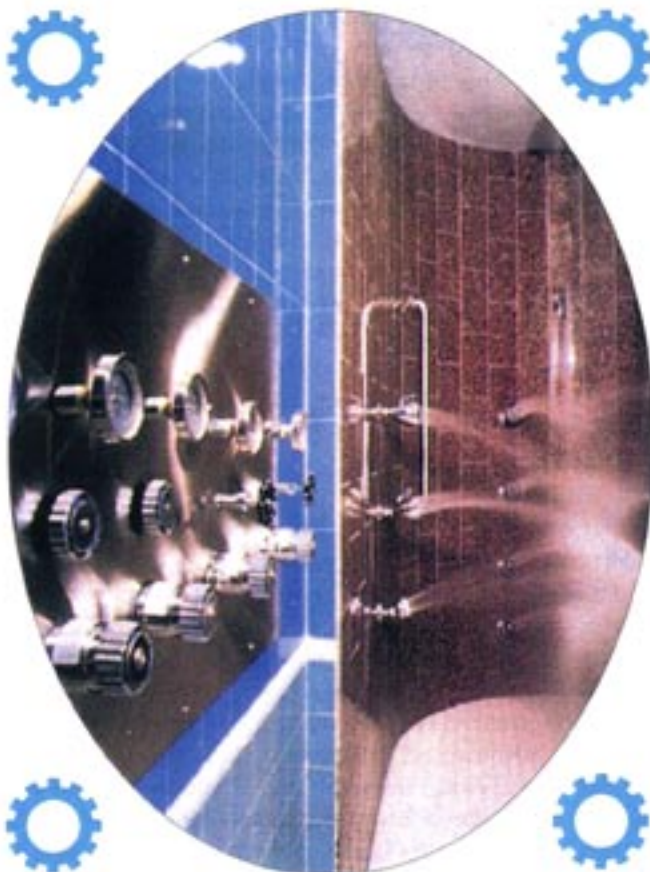
About the time Galyean was finishing up his work at The Greenbrier, its owner, CSX, bought Rockresorts and asked Galyean to head up its development on the Hawaiian island of Lanai. When CSX sold Rockresorts two years later, Galyean got yet another shot at spa development, this time working with Guinness Enterprises.

Guinness had just purchased Champneys Health Spa in England with the intention of opening Champneys spas worldwide. The company charged Galyean with researching the burgeoning spa phenomenon, both by visiting other spas and by conducting focus groups in Europe and the United States.

"The first thing we realized is that there was no vocabulary for discussing any of this,"

Galyean remembers. "People used the term 'spa' to mean anything from Baden-Baden to La Costa or even the hot tub at the Holiday Inn. I think we invented the terms 'destination spa,' 'resort-amenity spa,' and 'hotel spa' or 'urban spa' just so we could have a conversation." Although Guinness abandoned the project, Galyean's severance agreement gave him rights to all of the research.

Since then he has continually raised the bar with his spa designs



Beyond the wall of controls stands TAG Galyean's signature shower at The Broadmoor, featuring multiple shower heads encircled by warmed granite walls.

to include the now typical aromatherapies, mud packs, and body scrubs. By far the most peculiar option, however, is the Scotch Spray, which Galyean devised as a signature treatment. It essentially consists of standing naked in a tiled room as a massage therapist uses two high-pressure hoses to train ribbons of sometimes hot, sometimes cold water up and down the muscles of your body. I asked Galyean to explain the rationale behind it.

"It's outrageous, isn't it?" he

## TRAVEL PEOPLE

for The Broadmoor, La Quinta Resort, and now The Lodge at Pebble Beach. "I insist through all of this work that we speak to the regional, natural, environmental, and historical aspects of wherever we are," Galyean says. In crafting his designs he works closely with Monica Tuma, spa creative and operations adviser, who has a background in European spas and resort management. "I use her in a couple of roles," he continues. "She helps create each resort's unique treatments and plans all of the back-of-the-house stuff to ensure that the spa can be run properly."

continues, "and so does the very way the spa is laid out. You ought to be able to go from, say, a heat therapy to an inhalation room without experiencing any sort of jarring environmental changes. And you also need a restful spot to just be between and after treatments. A spa needs to be a place where you feel comfortable walking around in your bathrobe."

One of the most frequently overlooked features is the ceiling of a treatment room. "You do a lot of looking up when you're in a spa," Galyean notes. At La Quinta, he designed many of the rooms with

industry's still so new that we don't have all the answers."

Not having those answers has consequences. "There are going to be a lot of bad spas built," he pronounces. "It's inevitable, because most developers lack experience and are in a hurry."

Staffing the spas is even more critical. "There are probably six spa directors in the country qualified to head any of the high-profile spas we're talking about," he says.

Galyean himself refuses to be rushed into making critical decisions. In order to have the luxury of thinking things through, he limits

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Both Galyean and Tuma remain conscious of the resort's individuality. "Where some designers are busy creating their own signatures, we design in such a way as to create the property's signature."

At The Lodge at Pebble Beach, for example, Galyean devised a shower that is essentially a waterfall followed by misters. "This," he explains, "somehow feels like Monterey to me."

All of his design work takes place long before a spa director is hired, but that hardly diminishes her (most spa directors are women) importance. Galyean sees a close analogy to restaurants. "You take a great room and lousy food—or a great spa and lousy service and lousy treatments—and it won't succeed over time." Great spas, like great restaurants, pay attention to hundreds of little details.

Very often, the better the design, the less it intrudes on your consciousness. "Textures, scale, color, and lighting each play a role," he

vaulted ceilings; some treatments are actually given outdoors beneath blue sky or desert stars. Even for the average massage room he favors wall sconces and routinely installs dimming switches.

While Galyean has sometimes designed fitness centers in conjunction with spas, he personally believes the two should be kept separate. "Fitness is routine, high-energy, sometimes down and dirty. If I'm getting ready to blow a hundred bucks in a spa to be in some spiritual realm for a while, I don't necessarily want to enter through the door of fitness. Even putting fitness people in the same locker room depreciates the spa experience."

His own aesthetic sense aside, Galyean recognizes that there are practical problems with his hard line. "There are challenges because some people want these two features more integrated," he tells me, and then becomes lost in his thoughts. "This is useful for me to think through," he continues. "This

himself to two projects a year despite receiving several offers a month. Last year he designed the spa at The Lodge at Pebble Beach, and 2000 brings a luxury-spa addition to Florida's Turnberry Isle Resort & Club.

He finds himself in the midst of an evolving genre. "The whole spa deal is growing and changing into something beyond just a feel-good experience. Now we also have people coming in for lifestyle adjustments that combine massage, exercise, and nutrition," he says. "Spas are increasingly becoming an element in urban hotels as well. So we need to figure out how to cater to all these different audiences."

The man who probably knows more about building spas than anyone in the country is still looking for answers. ■

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