

american spa

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Inside Miraval Group's Recent Mindful Rebirth



When [Hyatt](#) acquired [Miraval Group](#) in early 2017, it stoked fear in some that the beloved Arizona destination spa would lose its magical magnetism. While it made perfect sense that Hyatt would want to tap into the ready-made wellness space, it remained to be seen how the acquisition would transform the brand. Fortunately, the powers-that-be have recognized a good thing and are committed to expanding the reach of the beloved destination spa.

Here, Simon Marxer, director of spa and wellbeing for Miraval Group, shares the inner workings of the brand and how it is focused on continuing to deliver “meaningful stories” to guests.

American Spa: What is your company's mission statement?

Simon Marxer: At Miraval, we're guided by our philosophy of a life in balance. From our innovative spa treatments to our enriching wellbeing classes to our flavorful and healthful cuisine, we believe in teaching our guests how to live a mindful and more balanced life long after they leave our properties.



Treatment room at Miraval Life in Balance Spa

AS: What sort of training do you offer spa management to help them achieve your company's mission for its spas?

SM: Miraval has long had the reputation of being a thought leader in spa, and we pride ourselves on constantly innovating and creating interesting best-in-class treatments for our guests. Part of that involves making learning and development a top priority for our therapists. I have always felt that the model of a "teaching spa" helps our therapists grow, and in turn, helps our business grow. Recently, I developed and enacted leadership training focused on creating a climate and culture that supports the team in the spa and enables them to provide the best possible Miraval experience for our guests. We begin the course with a stay at Miraval to immerse them in the Miraval experience and help them see the

resort from the guests' perspective. From there, we emphasize taking the time first to understand and observe when the impulse can be to dive into the work. This stage is critical to learning the culture of the resort and the people who make it up. After that, we separate the training content into several parts. The first is an emphasis on productivity. We teach our staff to identify their priorities and track their own progress. Second, we emphasize cultivating a culture of support within our spa, and we place just as much emphasis on this as we do financial performance. All of our achievements flow from this focus on the experience and the people who create it. I believe firmly that we can only reach our potential when we help those around us to discover their own.

AS: What sort of education and training do you offer brand-wide to your spa team?

SM: The training offered is formally presented in the training module and the immersion experience. Our therapists also spend time with the Miraval Group revenue management team led by Cecil J. Hopper. Cecil and I spend a great deal of time working with spa leaders, helping them to understand our performance indicators and how to best optimize their time in order to meet their goals. Understanding and working towards these metrics is an important part of the training for leaders at Miraval. We work to teach the fundamentals and to achieve the best possible guest experience while optimizing our resources, resulting in measurable results.

AS: In what ways, if any, do the spas strive to be eco-friendly?

SM: Miraval is committed to the preservation of our planet and is proactively involved in conserving our precious natural resources. We employ initiatives, policies, and practices in order to sustain our organization and grow into the future with an environmentally responsible and ethical approach. Our initiatives include pools using sodium chloride systems, LED lighting, solar power, a laundry process that minimizes water and chemical use, and waste water treatment. We also work with our vendors on being mindful about minimizing packaging and about recycling programs. We choose partners that prioritize environmental stewardship, and we request bulk packaging be made available for our consumable products and orders. All this is done in an effort to remain conscious of our impact on the environment and on the natural resources that represent a large part of the Miraval experience.



Lap Pool

AS: What do you do to keep your spas at the forefront of industry trends and development?

SM: One of our foundational strategies is to always look to make trends, rather than to follow them. The driving force behind our approach at Miraval is to create one-of-a-kind experiences that are unlike anything available elsewhere. Our philosophy has been to focus on experiences that both tell a meaningful story and, most importantly, direct one's focus within and to the present moment. With this goal in mind, we develop treatments that provide a unique and personal experience for our guests that aligns the spa experience with the overall Miraval experience. We want our guests to use our treatments to learn about themselves and feel their best. Also, what sets Miraval apart is that we place a large emphasis on harnessing our therapists' gifts and talents to develop our treatments. All our experiences begin and end with the talents of those who touch our guests quite literally during their stay. We achieve innovation by finding inspiration in our team and working tirelessly to enable their success. If we help them realize and utilize their gifts, they will provide the ideas and experiences that will keep us at the forefront of innovation, creating trends instead of following them.

AS: What do you think Your clients want in a spa experience and how, as a company, do you meet those needs?

SM: When it comes to the Life in Balance Spa at Miraval, our guests are looking for something that is not available anywhere else, and most importantly, they are looking for a more personal experience that leaves them feeling renewed or transformed in some dimension from the person who first arrived on property. We seek to provide spa experiences that support a subtle shift of something within—a subtle shift of awareness, of attention, of sensation, or of perspective. By designing unique spa experiences that turn attention inward and to all that is held in the present moment, we support our guests' desire to experience a sense of transformation and renewal.



The spa suite lounge at Miraval Arizona.

AS: What sort of elements do you maintain brand-wide, and how do your spas honor their varied locales?

SM: We strive for the experience at Miraval to be an imaginative, authentic, and meaningful wellness experience. Miraval Spas seek to offer our guests a journey of transformation and self-discovery. We want them to be moved by their experience. We seek to nurture and connect with guests while at the same time directing their attention within. We bring the practice of mindfulness to each service, being in the present moment. Each Miraval location should have unique local products and services that

correlate to indigenous elements and culture. For example, [Miraval Life in Balance Spa](#) at Monarch Beach Resort harnesses elements of the ocean in its treatments, and [Miraval Arizona](#) uses ingredients inspired by its desert surroundings. We plan to integrate a sense of place in every future Miraval that we open. We strive to feature the unique attributes of service providers and unique elements of every Miraval location.

AS: How do you appeal to spa-goers from various cultures?

SM: I think one of Miraval's strengths is that there is no prescribed experience or predetermined structure. Instead of offering up a plan for living well, which would be rich with cultural bias, we endeavor to offer choice, to meet people where they are and offer as much or as little as our guests choose. Our goal is to provide a range of offerings and experiences so that our guests can create an individualized experience. As we explore development outside of North America, we will certainly encounter some elements that will need to be adapted to the local culture. However, the individual nature of the Miraval experience lends itself well to the cultivation and support of wellbeing anywhere.



The spa entrance creates an inviting oasis at Miraval Arizona.

AS: Do you work with specific spa product, equipment, and retail brands across your portfolio?

SM: There are several brands that have long been part of the experience in Arizona, such as Laurel, Red Flower, and EmerginC. They will continue to be present across the Miraval portfolio. In addition to these brands, we will offer local products that celebrate the destination. Fundamental to our brand is to embrace the uniqueness of each destination and honor the gifts of our team when creating the Miraval experience at each location. These aspects of our philosophy shape our spa offerings and the vendors with whom we partner. If we have done our job well, we have brought what you love about Miraval to a new location and added to the experience in unique and unexpected ways.

AS: What do you think is your company's most distinctive spa and why?

SM: This is not unlike asking which of your children is the most unique. I couldn't say, as they are all distinct in their own way. Each property brings a specific intention to the Miraval mission, and therefore, they are all equally distinct.

AS: What is the most exciting spa in development and why?

SM: I am incredibly excited about the spa experience we recently debuted at [Miraval Austin](#). I can say with complete conviction that the property's spa director David Preslar, assistant spa director Kayla Fournierat, and I have given everything we have to create what I believe will be a spa menu that honors and elevates the Miraval spa brand. We have created some of the most compelling service offerings, and I can't wait for our guests to experience them.