

From Times Online

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Dolce vita in Kensington

After a brush, scrub and a polish Rachael Scott is ready to perform high kicks at a female-friendly, paparazzi-free hotel in London

The Baglioni in Kensington has transposed a certain sophisticated Italian lifestyle to London. Everything about the stylish boutique hotel is decadent, from the décor, to the food, to the blissful experience of a signature massage in the Rejuvenation Spa.

Christina Aguilera was ensconced in one of the Baglioni's bullet-proof Presidential Suites during her London tour and had a treatment in the spa. If my therapist Joanne can loosen the limbs of such a high-maintenance diva then my aches and pains should be a doddle.

The spa is small – just four rooms – but a dizzying array of signature treatments based on Oriental, Ayurvedic and European therapies is on offer all devised by celebrity wrinkle expert Dr Mario Luca Russo who runs the Rejuvenation Clinic in Harley Street.

After a session with Joanne I reckon I could have performed a few high kicks and back flips for the crowds at Wembley Arena. She tailored my ESPA treatment to stimulate my poor circulation and ease my aching joints and she certainly put the dance back into my step.

First I had a body brush to kick-start my circulation, followed by a full body exfoliation using Invigorating Salt Scrub, a blend of menthol, grapefruit and lime that would help to increase blood and lymphatic circulation. Then my face was exfoliated with Refining Skin Polish, a cream rich in plankton, a natural source of vitamins, minerals and proteins.

Joanne left me to shower off the exfoliators and returned armed with beautiful oils. Balancing Face Treatment Oil with extracts of frankincense, neroli and macadamia that would help fight signs of premature ageing was applied to my face and Fitness Body Oil, a blend of rosemary, peppermint, eucalyptus and clove bud, to my body.

True to form, these ingredients eased muscular tension, soothed stiff, tired joints and left the skin feeling soft and nourished. My two-hour treatment was rounded off with an acupressure scalp massage leaving me feeling quite delirious.

The Rejuvenation Spa may be small, but what it lacks in space is made up for by the undivided care and attention of the staff.

A female concierge escorted me to my executive suite overlooking Kensington Gardens, which could only be described as a studio bachelor pad with its fireplace, sofa, retro espresso machine and a plasma TV with more than 100 movies and 1,500 music tracks. *Billionaire Italian Couture* and the *Orient Express* magazines lay on the coffee table.

Pictures of Italian film heroines during their prime don the walls and large gold and black urns flank the four-poster bed. An opulent mix of red, gold and black furnishings stand on a lacquered parquet floor. The room is sexy and dark, so dark that it takes me ten minutes to work out how to change the sophisticated mood lighting.

Axel Rose partied in the underground nightclub, Boutique 60, recently and Michelle Pfeiffer likes the Baglioni because the paparazzi forget to stalk it. Its popularity with celebrities probably explains the mirror with lights around its edges in my room and

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the vainglorious mirrored bathroom, so spotless and shiny I felt guilty having a shower.

In brief

USP Recently awarded AA Hotel of the Year in 2006 the hotel is especially mindful of single female travellers offering an automatic upgrade on availability, private check in at your room, free room service, a bouquet of flowers on arrival, a Laura Elos beauty gift box and use of the hotel's chauffeur driven Maserati Quattroporte to take you shopping.

AMBIENCE Classic five-star luxury meets contemporary elegance.

EXPERIENCE Tailor-made, masterfully executed treatments incorporating Western and Asian techniques in an opulent, but tasteful boutique setting. There's also a gym with personal training on request, steam room, Jacuzzi, yoga sessions and a hair and make-up artist. Treatments in your room on request.

FOOD The Brunello restaurant, named in Tatler's 'Best Newcomer' in 2005, has black and white pictures of famous Italian film goddesses on its walls, huge black Venetian glass chandeliers and a waterfall in homage to Italy's "piazze" cascading on to large gold lilies. Gold velvet padded walls hide behind black drapes and large comfy armchairs consume guests at the American style cocktail bar before their palate is spoiled by a delicious Italian dinner of duck confit with red chicory and creamed lentils, home made scallops ravioli with ginger sauce and fillet of beef with truffled mashed potatoes.

IN CROWD Milan's beautiful people needing a home from home. Famous people wining and dining other famous people or hiding from the tabloids. Fellini would have been proud.

WALLET WATCH Salt and Oil Body Scrub £45; Full body massage including face and scalp £95; Executive Park View Junior Suite from £429 - £525 per night. The Presidential Suite is £1,900.00 per night.

NEED TO KNOW Baglioni Hotel London, 60 Hyde Park Gate, Kensington, London SW7 5BB (020 7368 5700; www.baglionihotels.com)

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