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After five years on the drawing board, the innovative SK clinic+spa in Bury St Edmunds finally opens its doors.

Sarah Ward tracks the development of a new brand to watch...

They say the best things come to those who wait, and this is certainly the case with an exciting new spa in Suffolk's bustling market town of Bury St Edmunds. As the name implies, the SK clinic+spa is something a little different; a refreshing concept that refuses to be pigeon-holed.

Housed in a former chapel in the centre of a thriving town, SK is too chic to be described as a 'clinic' and too exclusive to be typecast as a high-end salon offer. In fact it's a hybrid that is absolutely clear about who it serves and what it stands for. Above all, SK is a haven for the very latest professional skin services. Its unique concept of tailored treatments amid luxurious surroundings aims to appeal to three distinct types of client: those looking for relaxation, pampering and wellbeing; those seeking answers to skincare concerns; and those who enjoy regular grooming but want enhanced treatments.

"My passion lies in skincare," confirms SK's Director Daniela Chandler, who is also the Director of Skincare for Pevonia UK. "I have been fortunate enough to run a brand like Pevonia, that has a whole philosophy about results for the skin. So when it came to setting up another business, it had to come back to that passion. "Ultimately for me it's all about treating people and giving them the results that

they want from skincare, massage, waxing, hair removal and so on. Whatever service or treatment they choose, they can expect the very best at SK."

Inside SK

The chapel has been sympathetically restored to its former glory on the outside but completely transformed inside to offer cool, über-contemporary interiors and treatment spaces. The spacious reception area, accented with whites and greens, offers a retail display showcasing SK's chosen product lines: Pevonia Botanica skincare; Leighton Denny nailcare; Creed Fragrances; Edwin Jagger grooming for men; and French cosmetic range T LeClerc.

Behind reception a corridor leads to the quiet spa treatment rooms designed for massage therapies including signature, aromatherapy, sports, Thai Yoga and Stone Spa, as well as complementary therapies including reflexology, Indian head and Reiki. In this area there is also a dedicated hydrotherapy room and the private pedicure room for Biarritz Pedi-Spa treatments. Customers are asked to disrobe once inside their treatment room; there are no separate changing rooms.

As SK's designer Clinton Pritchard of Mass Design explains, the customer journey is reflected in the tonality of the décor: light and bright at the beginning, graduating to dark and subdued. "As a spa customer you can relate that journey physically with entering the building from the noise, daylight and bustle of the street outside, travelling through the space to the boughs of the experience – a place of isolation, tranquility and serenity," he says. "To achieve



this ambience we have controlled the lighting, noise and definition of the treatment spaces. Entering a space like this is like a tunnelling approach – a tunnelling effect. What we are trying to create here is a sense of departure for our guests, an escape from the normal distractions of everyday life."

Serene green

The sympathetic décor throughout SK is achieved through a neutral palette of calming greens. "I have worked from a green base as a marker with degrees of shade and combinations of greens and luxurious textures. This palette is warm, interesting and distinctive but also selective and unique enough not to look like every other spa that's around at the moment," explains Pritchard.

Throughout the spa, accents of style and contrast are achieved with contemporary finishings, lighting and imagery depicting 20th Century icons such as Audrey Hepburn and stylish monochrome images of men and women from *Vogue*. Upstairs, the treatment spaces are a much more social affair and here customers can relax in the spacious, sunlit lounge before



"Right from the beginning we knew we had to decide the values of the SK brand to embrace the future"

Daniela Chandler, Spa Director



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“We conduct a needs analysis on every customer, as everyone has different goals”

Tonia Reed, Spa Manager

indulging in a raft of professional maintenance treatments including waxing, threading, ghd spa hair treatments, handcare and, for the men, a robust menu of hot towel shaves, mini facials, and nasal and ear hair burning.

Personal service

SK, short for skin, proudly offers a menu of the very latest results-driven beauty treatments and holistic therapies, all delivered with devotion and thoughtfully personalised for every customer. “Everything had to be unique and excellent, so we knew we needed a unique Spa Manager for SK’s flagship. Tonia Reed fitted the bill,” explains Chandler. Reed brings

an impeccable 23-year track record in the business, as a experienced spa manager with start-up and business development expertise.

During the 12-month programme to gut, restore and refurbish the chapel, Reed and Chandler work tirelessly to recruit and prepare the team, organise the interior fit-out

and furnishings and to refine, test and retest the treatment menu. “We had a fabulous time putting the team together,” enthuses Reed. “My team are like my warriors. I’ve got some real givers, natural nurturers, who enhance and deliver the feeling of wellbeing that is key to every SK experience.”

The business finally opened its doors in July with a start team of 10 therapists, which, Reed confirms, will grow to a full complement of 35 staff as the business takes off. “Our service is memorable because of our uniqueness,” states Reed. “Everyone on my team appreciates that every customer is unique and so their individual needs are unique. Their therapeutic skills have

been honed to be the very best; in fact no two treatments will ever be the same. We bespoke everything, even down to wax treatments. A simple leg wax will come with some shiatsu on the head and some acupressure on the feet.”

Needs analysis

Reed is keen to stress that her team is also passionate about delivering results. “For our results-orientated customers we get prescriptive. We conduct a needs analysis on every customer. It could be to reduce the lines around their mouth, or improve their lip shape or simply time to relax and de-stress – everyone has different goals.”

As a complimentary service SK offers the latest Beau Visage skin diagnosis prior to a comprehensive list of facial treatments, including Pevonia’s High Performance Freeze-Dried and Prescriptive facials. “Beau Visage gives an in-depth analysis of the skin, a starting point so we can bespoke any given treatment, then track the results and ensure that we are achieving what we set out to do for each individual,” explains Reed. “Our therapists have a 100% belief in our treatments and products so there is no need for >



Team 'SK' celebrate a successful opening

hard selling. We can also track our customer's improvements over three months in order to show real progress."

SK's personalised service has been carefully formulated to win the spa an appreciative and loyal base of customers. As well as specialised facials there is an impressive range of eye, lip and bust enhancing treatments, body wraps, polishes and detox remedies. Furthermore, a raft of enticing Me Spa packages are available to extend spa time, including Beautify Me, Relax Me, Detox Me and Hens & Me (four hens... 'me' goes free).

Planning for success

The development of the SK brand actually began over six years ago. "Back in 2001 we selected our team of professionals to start this venture," reveals Chandler. "We met our designer Clinton Pritchard around this time at a spa industry event and just clicked. Peter Anderson, who was our in-house spa consultant for Pevonia, also played a key part."

"The original operating concept for SK was to offer guests a unique service mix consisting of a spa, therapy and rest areas – providing significant facilities for pampering and relaxation," remembers Spa Consultant Peter Anderson of International Spa Design.

"This winning combination of facilities would provide a more complete and unique 'day spa' concept than any of our competitors in the region," he says. "The ambience, once inside the building, needed to be welcoming and sophisticated for the effective delivery of a wide choice of international treatments."

Test of time

Pritchard, formerly of Zynk Design and now Managing Director of his own design consultancy Mass Designs, also brought his branding expertise to the SK development team – which also included co-owner Paul Mason, Pevonia UK's Managing Director. Together the team began to define the new business, leaving no stone unturned.

"There was a very clear determination by Daniela and her team about what they wanted to achieve, so I was charged with creating an appropriate environment for their operational requirement," remembers Pritchard. "Creating a subdued, contemporary look and feel is tricky, of course. There isn't a predetermined scheme that sits in a drawer that you pull out



for spa clients. Every business needs a tailored response, as every new spa has different attributes."

Pritchard is keen to stress that some spa interiors try too hard, opting for a look that is too fashionable. "New spas could very easily fall into a boutique-style look of the moment," he says. "You know: that managed mishap-ness look. However there's a great danger that this approach will not stand the test of time. Initially your interiors may appeal to different people because you have a look and feel that reflects other aspects of their lifestyle choices, but actually in the fullness of time they will quickly become dated.

"Of course you need to be aware of lifestyle styles and trends, be respectful of them, but you have to find a channel that contributes something else as well – so your décor is distinctive, with its own brand and personality."

Timing is everything

Once the team had defined the new business, they took the difficult decision to wait until the take-up of spa services had become more established in the UK. "We decided that SK was an abbreviation of skin and that was ultimately what we represented. For a successful launch, we knew we would have to understand intimately the demographics, the culture of the town and, of course, the constraints of the building that would eventually house the business," remembers Chandler.

Over the ensuing years, Mason and Chandler's work as directors of Pevonia UK provided a unique vantage point over emerging spa consumer trends. "We did not want to compromise the SK project in any way," stresses Chandler. "Our focus for the past six years has been to position our first business, Pevonia UK, as a complete and premium spa

spa statistics

SK clinic+spa

Opened: July 2008

Investment: undisclosed

Spa Director: Daniela Chandler

Spa Manager: Tonia Reed

Spa team: 11 therapists

Spa area: 3,500 sqm set across two floors

Designer: Clinton Pritchard, Mass Designers
T: +44 (0) 20 8560 7050
W: www.massdesigners.com

Spa Consultant: Peter Anderson, International Spa Design
T: +44 (0) 7715 322563
W: www.internationalspadesign.com

Treatment rooms: 10 treatment rooms; pedicure room and hydrotherapy room

Suppliers: Pevonia Botanica skincare; Leighton Denny nailcare

Treatment expertise: specialised facials, eyes, lips and bust treatments; body wraps and bespoke treatments; hydro massage; Stone Therapy, hot towel shaves; threading; male grooming; hand and foot care

Special spa packages include:

SK-Indulge me, day packages from £95

Contact: SK clinic+spa, Victory Chapel, 4 Northgate Street, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP33 1HG

service, not just a product supplier." This strategy has paid off, as Pevonia now partners notable spas such as Monart [County Wexford, Ireland], Thermae Bath Spa [UK] and The Retreat [at Aphrodite Hills, Cyprus] and has a select number of other key salon and spa accounts across the UK.

"Hindsight is a wonderful thing," smiles Chandler. "Four years later we have so much more experience of the spa industry and what consumers really want. With this knowledge we've been able to move the original concept forward from a typical day spa – a completely robed environment with heat experiences and so on – to the unique offer we have today." And as Chandler points out, during this time a whole raft of medi-spa treatments has come to the fore. "Now we can now offer the very best of these new services at SK clinic+spa, which would not have been possible if we'd launched the business earlier," she concludes.

SK clinic+spa is a brand in its own right, carefully positioned to offer several potential formulations depending on location and market. "In future we could have an SK spa which is more about luxury and pampering with the added spectrum of results," says Chandler. "Alternatively, we could look to a business that is more suited to a high street location delivering excellent beauty maintenance: an SK Express for example. Right from the beginning we knew we had to decide the values of the SK brand to embrace the future."