

Robed in Style

Get the scoop on how to find the right robes and slippers for your spa.

Q I've carried the same brand of robes and slippers since opening my spa eight years ago. I'm not satisfied with either, yet I haven't had the time or energy to invest in researching what else is out there. The spa is currently being renovated, so I'm thinking now is the perfect time. Can you offer advice on finding a style of robe that will appeal to all of my clients? What other considerations should I keep in mind when choosing a new brand of robes and slippers? I'm afraid there are a lot more options today than there were eight years ago.
—*Disrobed in Austin*

A Dear Disrobed in Austin: There are many ways to find the next generation of robes and slippers for your spa. The headaches the impending decision is causing may decrease exponentially if you remember that there is no single best robe/slippers combo. There are, however, a few choice robes and slippers for your clients. Start with what you know, which is namely your old line of robes and slippers. Then decide what features, if any, you liked and what features you would change. This is a good place to start, as you clearly have strong opinions about the robes you currently have.

Speaking of change, you mentioned that you are undergoing a renovation but did not elaborate. If this is a cosmetic update, such as paint and wall coverings, then the change in your line of robes may be limited to a new color. If you are completely renovating your spa and revising the spa menu, changing the physical design, adding medical or hydrotherapy features, and increasing the total square footage of the treatment and relaxation areas, then you may elect to reflect that change in your choice. Remember, although this may feel like an inconsequential detail



while you are in construction, once the dust settles, you will be better able to appreciate the significance of your spa's robes and slippers. To that end, you cannot afford to neglect doing your homework. Robes are an intimate feature of your facility. They are a cloak of membership for your guests as well as a symbol of privacy, protection, and comfort for them while they are under your care. Nothing comes between your guests and their robes, so don't skimp on quality.

Narrowing in on the right choice is much less daunting when you approach it systematically. In an effort to conserve your time, it could be helpful for
continued on page 38

continued from page 36

you to delegate some of the primary research to your managers or lead therapists. Not only will this give them a sense of ownership over the process, but it will also free up your time and allow you to be more objective when approaching the final decision. Here are a few simple steps to create a systematic approach:

- Get feedback from your therapists and your guests as they see the selection process from different angles. For example, an ultra-plush robe may be viewed by your therapists as a positive representation of your spa's quality and their tip potential. You, however, may see it as an outrageous operating expense. Your guests may consider it to be a pocketless garment that is prohibitively warm from late spring through early fall. While there may be truth in all of these perspectives, your best decision will be made when evaluating them all in aggregate.
- Also, take a minute to ask your current robe supplier what new things it has to offer. You might be surprised. Your lack of energy and time might mean that there are gems to be found right under your nose.
- Shop the market to see what types of robes your competition is offering.
- Attend spa and fitness trade shows to see the latest styles and textiles available.
- Surf the internet, send out emails, and ask for sample material or sample robes and slippers. This is a small investment for a company to make if it is going to capture your business.

In essence, you are evaluating the status quo and using that as a base to conduct a needs analysis. This analysis should give you a running start on the best-fit criteria for your spa.

You may also be surprised at how efficiently you can pare down your options when you eliminate those that don't fit your expectations, such as the ones that are too expensive, have too large of a minimum order, are too heavy or lightweight, come in the wrong colors, have a long lead time for ordering, are from difficult purveyors, etc. When it comes to selecting robes and slippers, remember to focus on the factors that directly affect your needs versus the sales features that the company is randomly touting. Unless there is absolutely no difference, purchase with quality in mind more so than money and you will save over the long run.

Also, don't overlook the needs of your male clients. Often, spa robes are selected by women for

women, leaving men out in the cold. This is especially critical now as co-ed relaxation areas are becoming more popular in spas. No one wants to sit around holding their robe closed when they are trying to relax. A large range of sizes to accommodate the smallest woman to the largest man is an appropriate way to select your stock. By all means keep the spa robes the same color and style for both genders, which will minimize gender camps in the public spaces. And if a 5'3" gentleman comes in and all your small men's robes are in the laundry, he can still get a robe that fits without announcing to the world that your locker room attendants got it from the women's storeroom.

The same theory applies for spa slippers. At this juncture, decide whether your slippers should be

continued on page 40

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU:

IS THERE A DEVELOPMENTAL, EQUIPMENT, FINANCIAL, OPERATIONAL, OR OTHER SPA QUESTION THAT TROUBLES YOU?

Email questions to q&a@americanspamag.com. Your question and the answer may appear in an upcoming "Problem Solvers" column.



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continued from page 38

reusable or disposable. If they are disposable, you will need extra storage areas for storing clean slippers. If they are reusable, you will need facilities to sterilize and store them. Most importantly, if you are moving from one type of slipper system to another, your renovation is a perfect time to reconfigure the space to support your operational needs.

In short, slippers and robes are essential elements of your spa. They speak volumes about your spa and what guests should expect, and they justify your price points. As a result, you need to invest the time and energy into this important decision. Fortunately, you can have trusted affiliates do much of the legwork for you. Be creative and discerning and know that the right robe will help you and your staff initiate the guest experience you want to convey.—*Peter C. Anderson and Michele A. Chandler*

Peter C. Anderson is a principal at Anderson and Associates, a spa consulting firm based in Santa Monica, CA. He is also on the board of advisors for the Medical Spa Program at the University of California-Irvine. Michele A. Chandler heads up the Toronto office of Anderson and Associates. She brings 20 years of financial, operational, and water-treatment managerial experience to the firm. You can email Anderson at peter@anderspa.com and Chandler at michele@anderspa.com.

Get Outfitted

Here are some companies to consider for fulfilling your spa's robe and footwear needs.

Bath Accessories Company
(800) 995-2284
www.bathaccessories.com

Gilden Tree
(888) 445-3368
www.gildentree.com

Okabashi
(800) 443-6573
www.shoesthatloveyou.com

The Madison Collection
(877) 662-3476
www.themadisoncollection.com

Beech Sandal Company
(877) 771-8637
www.pedicuresandals.com

JMT Group
(866) 568-8368
www.jmtbeauty.com

Robeworks
(888) 772-ROBE
www.robeworks.com

Top Hat Imagewear
(800) 452-3331
www.tophatimagewear.com

Comphy Co.
(323) 225-8234
www.comphy.com

Kashwére
(818) 773-8090
www.kashwere.com

Sensi Sandals
(800) 537-5238
www.sensi.com

Ty Robes
(305) 805-8085
www.tyrobes.com

Cosmopro
(866) 698-6580
www.cosmopro.com

Knothe Apparel Group
(212) 282-0412
www.knothe.com

Spa Walk-Abouts
(800) 908-1111
www.flappers.org

Yeah Baby
(888) 972-6325
www.yeahbabypl.com

Cypress
(866) 347-7623
www.cypressbathrobes.com

Monarch Robe & Towel Company
(888) 757-7623
www.monarchrobe.com

Telegraph Hill Robe Company
(888) 398-7010
www.telegraphhill.com

Zendals
(973) 584-0168
www.zendals.com