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SERENITY, LUXURY AND  
AN EXOTIC NEW SPA  
ARE THE HALLMARKS AT  
GLENMERE MANSION.

By Deborah J. Botti

**T**he early Sanskrit word Shambhala means “a place of peace, tranquility and happiness.” Eastern and Western explorers have sought, but never found, Shambhala. That’s because while focusing their search in inner Asia, they ignored Orange County.

For it is a sense of serenity that one is initially greeted with while coursing the winding drive, flanked by lush lawns and plantings, that leads to the top of the hill upon which Glenmere Mansion rests, surrounded by 150 bucolic acres. Yes, you could be in Tuscany. Or Bavaria. Or even Shambhala.

There’s a fountain that marks the circular driveway at the entrance to this built-to-last Italianate estate, with pink walls and azure shutters true to that region. The views to Glenmere Lake are nothing short of spectacular – views that could be in Europe or the Pacific Northwest. But this tranquility is here. Ours. “This is like your rich uncle’s estate – the rich uncle you wish you had,

but never did,” says Alan Stenberg, who owns and runs this resort with his partner, Dr. Daniel DeSimone, a retired New York City orthopedic surgeon whose specialty was limb re-attachment.

“Dan calls this destiny; I say, ‘Be careful what you wish for,’” he laughs. “Somehow, though, Glenmere needed two guys to come along who appreciated its historical significance, who love to entertain and were able to recreate a setting that enables people to become a part of history, and live it.”

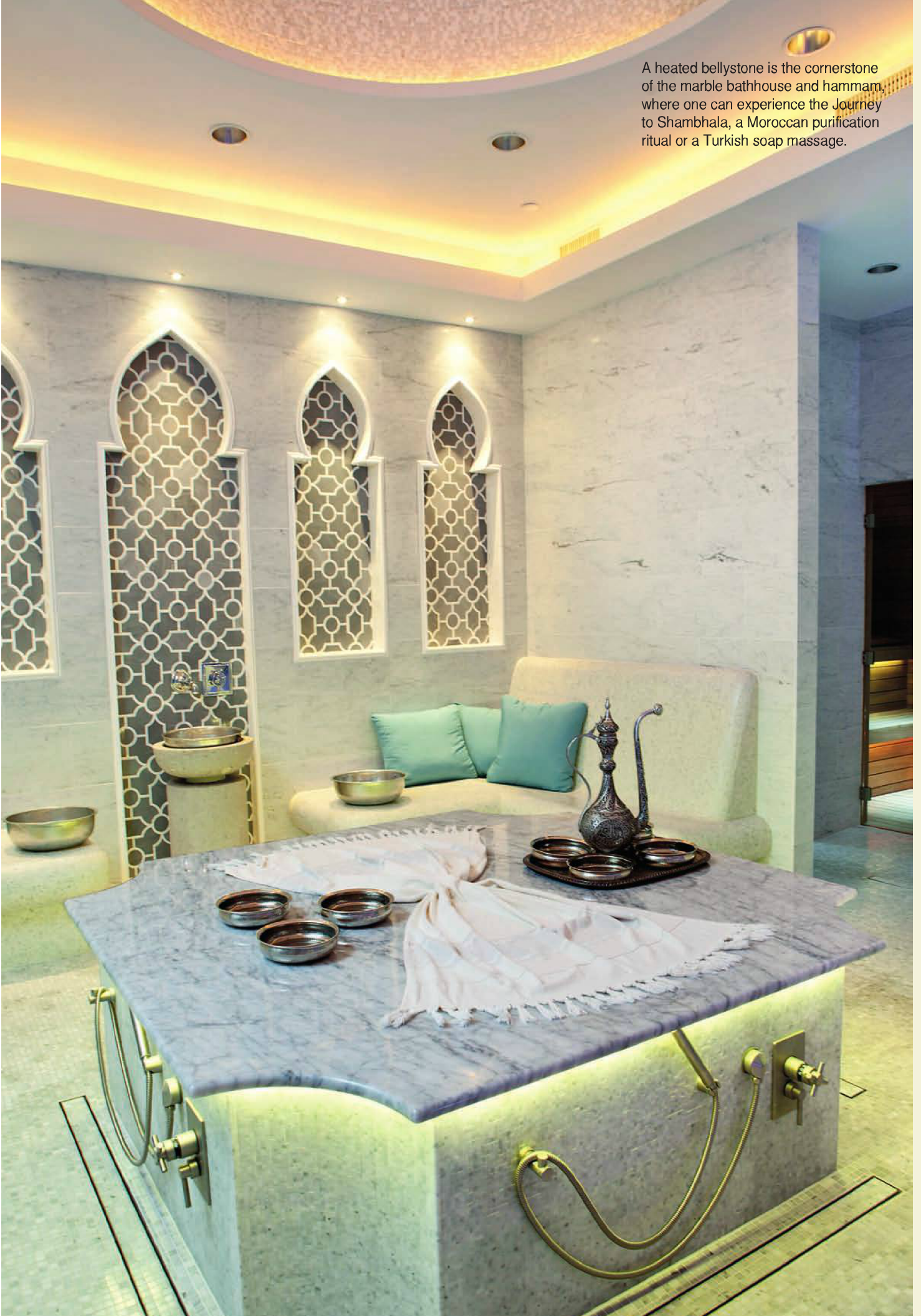
That history now includes the availability of a centuries-old Turkish/Moroccan ritual in a state-of-the art bathhouse and hammam for overnight and day guests. “There were just mud floors and walls when I arrived,” says Jason Scharff, director of the spa that opened in March. “We changed plans 100 times during the process. ... I’m sure the construction workers weren’t happy to hear, ‘Tear that wall down.’”

One of several spa suites where guests are offered such services as reflexology, a Mediterranean salt wrap or a honey-papaya stress-release treatment.

Photography  
by Anthony Puopolo



A heated bellystone is the cornerstone of the marble bathhouse and hammam, where one can experience the Journey to Shambhala, a Moroccan purification ritual or a Turkish soap massage.







The reception area offers a separate entrance for day guests. There's a boutique that features spa products and the handiwork of local artisans.





The pedicure-manicure room has two massage chairs from Italy, and even the nail polish features all-natural ingredients. The subdued lighting and neutral colors make this an inviting space for either gender.

But the resulting 8,000-square-foot spa, designed by Bill Pendergast of Pendergast & Terach in Central Valley, gives a grand, yet serene, feel. There is even a treatment called Journey to Shambhala. “When the water is poured on you, it’s almost choreographed, like a dance,” says Stenberg.

“I had two people cry this week because the experience was so fabulous,” says Gina Becker of Scotchtown, who greets all spa-goers. She had worked for the previous owner, Richard Mandel, as a wedding coordinator. She and her husband, who knew the architect that Stenberg and DeSimone hired, came to dinner after the renovations were completed. When she learned of the spa’s opening and its need for staff, she knew she was the right candidate.

“I feel I’m supposed to be here,” says Becker. “These rituals are really an experience that you won’t forget. ... Let’s face it, you can always get just a massage.”

## ACCOLADES

Glenmere Mansion is in the Relais & Chateaux guide, a collection of the top 500 worldwide hotels and restaurants.

“We were invited to join in our first year open. That has not happened since the 1950s,” says Alan Stenberg of the protocol that typically takes a few years.

Last year, Glenmere was voted No. 1 Romantic Hideaway in the World for 2011 by Hideaways International. It was also noted as one of the Top 10 Boutique Hotels in Gayot Hotel Guide 2011, and has caught the attention of the Robb Report, Wine Spectator, Architectural Digest, Vogue and Zagat.

Glenmere’s new spa has already been on the cover of American Spa Magazine, which Stenberg says is the bible of the spa indus-



try. He says they were faced with the double dilemma of creating something interesting and appealing to the community that was still sophisticated enough for their fine-tuned hotel guests who travel the world.

“They gave me the opportunity to create this magical place,” says spa director Jason Scharff, who interviewed more than 200 applicants before hiring the staff of 11 massage therapists and aestheticians.

“There has to be a passion for what they do. I needed to sense their energy, and what they would bring to the guests,” he says. “And it doesn’t matter if you’ve been doing it for two or 20 years. When you’re good, you’re good.”





A relaxing library eases guests into the spa world before, and in between, their treatment. Photo at right, Alan Stenberg, right, owns and runs the resort with his partner, Dr. Daniel DeSimone, a retired New York City orthopedic surgeon (Sargent Photography photo).

From the beginning, the commitment to being something out of the ordinary has been their painstaking – albeit occasionally frustrating – mission.

“Dan came upon the house, saw a big pink mess on top of a hill,” says Stenberg.

Although the house was not officially for sale, about six years ago, their real estate agent tracked down the owner, Mandel, and, with the backing of silent partners Peter and Alison Klein, a deal was struck. Stenberg says he grew up with Alison, his oldest friend in the world, on Long Island.

“Mandel kept the roof on,” says Stenberg. “But he didn’t have the means to restore it.”

Knowing that the major renovation they planned would not allow them to honor prior wedding contracts, Stenberg insisted that Mandel put money in escrow to refund the couples’ deposits.





With the assistance of architectural firm DeGraw & DeHaan, professional artists and artisans, and scores of local contractors, Stenberg and DeSimone returned the estate to its Gilded Age glory, and then some.

Not that there haven't been obstacles along the way – from a temporary renovation halt by the DEC to early perceptions of being too hoity-toity. Make no mistake: This is a luxury resort with all that entails (room rates begin at \$650 a night, and the two-bedroom penthouse tops at \$3,500). Total confidentiality is guaranteed to its celebrated guests, of which Stenberg says there have been many. Perhaps the rumored guest list is the root of the off-limits misperception. Stenberg says even their accountant recently shared that she had heard locals weren't welcome.

But nothing could be further from the truth, he says. The public is welcome to make reservations for the spa or Frogs End Tavern or Supper Room. And there have been many locals who have discovered spending a night or two at the hotel is easier than driving hours to someplace less exciting, he says.

"I now know every birthday and anniversary in Orange County," says Stenberg of his dinner guests, who range from struggling young couples with retail jobs to seasoned professionals.

The 32 panels that accent all four walls of the Supper Room are eglomise – French reverse-painted mirrored glass – a two-year undertaking by Cornwall artisan Staszek Kotowski. This exacting process involves painting the foreground first on the back of glass panels, then the background is added – which means the glass exposed to the dining room can easily be cleaned. Orange County views, on the top portion, were married with Tuscan vistas below.

Stenberg says the mansion's footprint was intact – including hallways, most rooms and the central open cortile. However, a few rooms needed to be redone. What was the original Plate and Silver Room – complete with safes to lock up the sterling – is now the China Room that showcases the owners' private collection of some 35 sets of china in built-ins. The room, open to the public, can accommodate 32 for a private celebratory dinner – and the china is available for use.

In the Supper Room, 32 eglomise panels – French reverse-painted mirrored glass – were created by Cornwall artisan Staszek Kotowski.







Warm water, natural water buoyancy and massaging water jets relax guests in the Aqua Vitality Pool.





Although restoration, and not resort, was their original intent, because each of the 18 original bedrooms had their own bathrooms and closets – very rare for 1911 construction – an escape for others seemed a natural.

The walk from the mansion to the spa includes a 100-foot loggia – a hallway of sorts with an entire glass wall that opens in the spring and summer to reveal meticulously manicured formal gardens.

Marina Case Alario of Red Shutters in Warwick, the interior designer, created a relaxing library that eases guests into the spa world before, and in between, their treatment.

The piece de resistance, however, is the bathhouse and hammam. The eye is immediately drawn to the bellystone in the center of the 1,000-square-foot room, and then sweeps around the periphery, noting an array of cool tiles and spa fixtures, finally coming to rest at the Costa Rican waterfall that accents the vitality pool. “The bellystone is heated to 105 degrees and accommodates a single or duet – a couple or even mother-daughter. Guests can wear a swimsuit,” says Scharff, the spa director, who was also a massage therapist for 10 years.

A detoxifying blend of essential oils is used in combination with the heat of a dry sauna. A cool mist will tighten pores. There’s an application of black soap infused with eucalyptus or orange blossom and a warm-water rinse back on the bellystone. This 2½-hour (\$440) treatment culminates with a 60-minute massage. The bellystone is also where the Moroccan Purification Ritual is performed (\$195) or Turkish Soap Massage (\$195).



Herbal steam is said to create such benefits as improved circulation, tension relief, detoxification, clearing of respiratory passages, soothing aching muscles, cleansing, and promoting sound sleep. Below, the heated stone can accommodate one person or two.

