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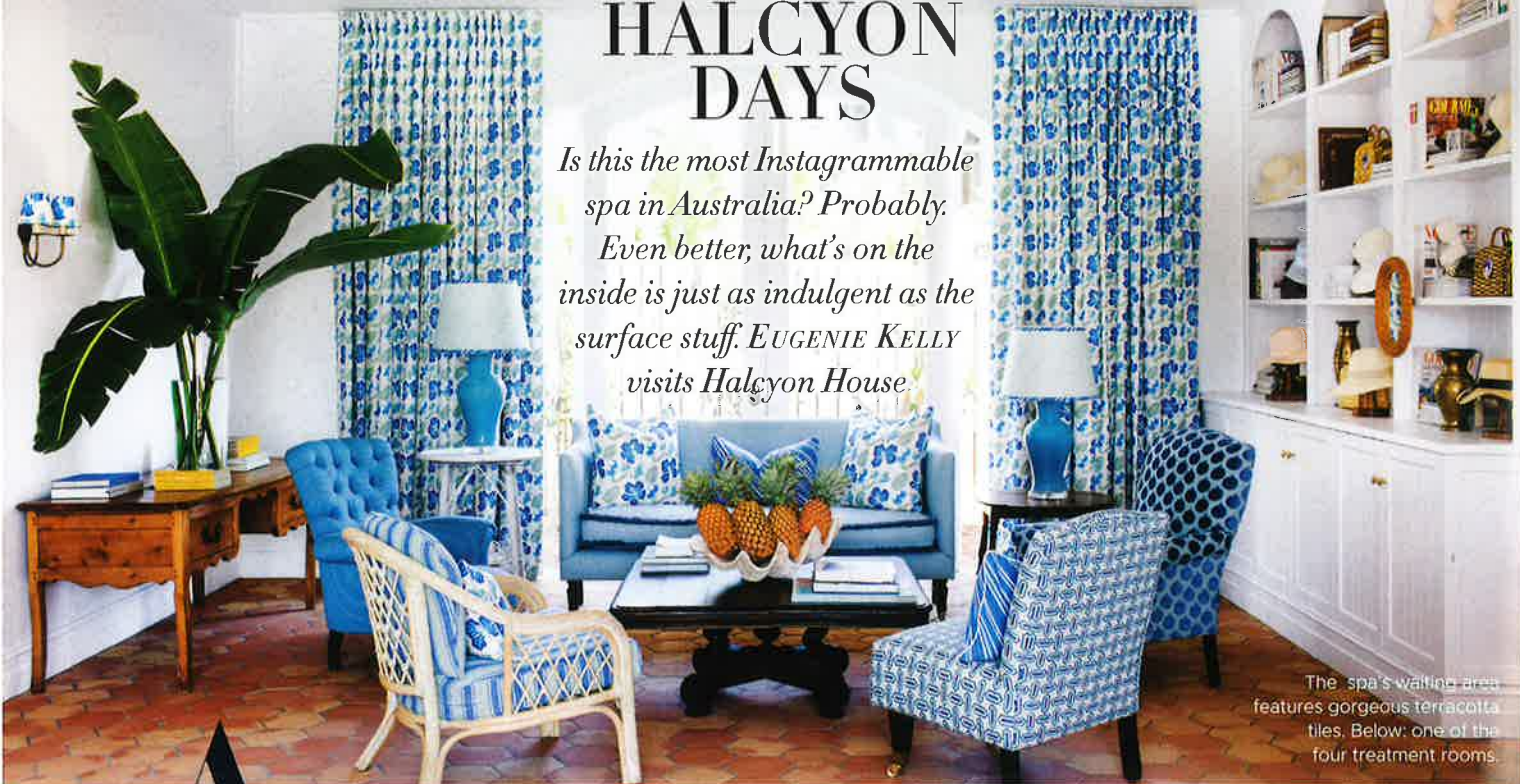


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HALCYON DAYS

Is this the most Instagrammable spa in Australia? Probably. Even better, what's on the inside is just as indulgent as the surface stuff. EUGENIE KELLY visits Halcyon House.



The spa's waiting area features gorgeous terracotta tiles. Below: one of the four treatment rooms.

ALPINE FRESHNESS. Japanese Zen. Provençal warmth. Country-house elegance There are countless distinctive spa decor styles out there to choose from when we're looking for a haven to retreat to. And where once designers resorted to a muted white palette (the assumption being this would have the most calming effect on anyone who walked through the door), they have realised style nuance and distinctive design make us just as happy.

Colour, music, scent, lighting: it all has a massive effect on our experience. Likewise, layout is paramount. We recently experienced one of the best facials we've ever had at what is reputed to be the most luxurious spa in Europe. But we've been scarred by the fact that its waiting area is in the thoroughfare between treatment rooms and a gym. Being ogled, clad in just a bathrobe, by half of Paris parading past to the treadmills is not ideal.

Since it opened in May 2015, Halcyon House in Cabarita, on the far north coast of New South Wales, has been unofficially crowned Australia's chicest boutique hotel, emerging butterflylike from an epic refurbishment, the amazing interiors the handiwork of Brisbane-based interior designer Anna Spiro. Originally a 1960s surfside motel, it was gutted and redone, with Spiro giving it her trademark maximalist, mismatched whimsical treatment and filling it with antiques, art and custom pieces.

So how does one take that eclecticism — particularly the brightly coloured fabric-covered walls — and parlay it into a spa, a space that requires an air of calm? Well, here inside this double-storey wellness space, there's a softer 'boldness', if that makes sense.

"The palette used here draws on the ocean," explains Spiro, who worked with architect Virginia Kerridge to ensure guests would feel

rested. "It's peppered with shades of blue, turquoise, pale pink, coral, beige and seafoam." Good sense, considering Halcyon's location: steps from the beach, a row of pandanus trees framing the building.

The spa's waiting area features soaring white bookshelves filled with books you actually want to read, while comfy fringed couches make for a chic chill-out area. Holidaying shoppers will relish a fossick through the boutique: think Lucy Folk jewellery, Matteau swimwear, Heimat Atlantica bags ... and excess baggage fines.

If your blood pressure sky-rockets from how much you've just spent, head into one of the four treatment rooms for a much-needed massage incorporating Halcyon's custom-blended aromatherapy oils. Or, if you're a steam room aficionado like us and appreciate a relaxing take on detoxing (in light of how many proseccos we've no doubt been putting away), head for a session in the navy-tiled steam bath. Its unique dome shape — rarer in Australia than you might think — makes it very Turkish hammam.

Spa manager Alessandra Viel (whose CV includes J.K. Spa at J.K. Place Capri Hotel) and spa consultant Naomi Gregory (think Koh Samui's Kamalaya and Yaukuve Spa Sanctuary at Kokomo Private Island in Fiji) have devised treatments that are simple but effective: scalp massages, salt body glows and radiance-boosting facials — something to fill a spare hour between a surf, a cycle to Kingscliff village or a lazy lie by the pool.

If we had a morning to fill, our pick would be the five-hour Halcyon Day of Youth (\$495): a steam bath, body exfoliation, radiance facial, massage and two-course lunch at the restaurant, Paper Daisy.

And therein lies the secret of a truly great spa. You don't always need spartan surrounds and starvation diets to remind you what it's like to feel good again. Prosecco, anyone? ■

