



PERMISSION TO

indulge

Where to go to look and feel beautiful in West Chester

Kate Chadwick

When I was first offered this assignment—to visit eight West Chester salons and spas for a different service at each one—my initial reaction could be summed up in one word: *HOORAY*. Yes, please—I'd like a haircut and color, a mani/pedi, a massage, a professional makeup application—bring it. And then, almost immediately, came the second reaction: "Wait, what? I need a makeover over here? I look pretty good for my age, dammit." I think that second reaction was prompted by two different things: 1 - most women are trained to look at "me time" as something furtive that they have to apologize for; 2 - a lot of us have our own comfort zone when it comes to our look, and sometimes we're in denial about how "comfort zone" can equal "rut."

Of course, there's also the idea of inner beauty—how what's on the inside is what counts. And while I believe that to be an absolute truth, it's also true that feeling good about how you look on the outside goes a long way towards boosting your confidence. And confidence, as we know, is beautiful—downright sexy, even.

VIVA LA DIFFERENCE

LA DIFFERENCE SALON & DAY SPA

LADIFFERENCESALON.COM
830 PAOLI PIKE
610.429.1808

My first stop on the Beautify Kate tour was at La Difference, and the bar was set—high. When I pulled into the lot, I noticed a dapper gentlemen at the door, chatting with an older lady using a walker, and assisting her to her car. He held the door for me, and I thought



NEXT UP WAS THE HERBOLOGY EXFOLIATING BODY WRAP—MORE VIRGIN TERRITORY FOR ME. ”

"So gallant." Then, as I was sitting in the reception area, I saw him chatting on the phone, and then he marched right up to me and introduced himself as Dan Cosgrove, who, along with his wife, Christy, is the owner of La Difference. It's a sprawling, tastefully decorated space, a full service salon and day spa, and it was hopping at 10am on a Thursday morning. Every single staff member I encountered was professional and pleasant. After Dan fetched me a glass of water, I was ushered back to Anna for an eyebrow wax and an herbal body wrap. I'd never had a wax of any kind before, and was a bit apprehensive; I'm one of those "Oh, hey - my brows are looking a bit nuts

- let me pluck a couple" kind of girls. But with Anna's deft and efficient work, it was over quickly and painlessly. And not only did I love the new shape, every other aesthetician I encountered on my next seven visits remarked on them. Next up was the herbology exfoliating body wrap—more virgin territory for me. Anna ushered me into a darkened room with a massage table, and I was rubbed down with a light oil and fragrant herbs, then loosely wrapped in something similar to large sheets of plastic wrap, covered in a blanket and left to unwind and - well, baste, I suppose—for nearly an hour. Not only was the experience itself incredibly pleasant and relaxing, but the difference in my skin continues to astound me. My



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arms and legs tend to be a bit dry, particularly this time of year. That is no longer the case—even the somewhat scaly dry patches I tend to get on my upper arms have vanished.

I NEED A REMEDY

REMEDI DAY SPA

REMEDIDAYSPA.COM

16 S CHURCH ST

610.436.7546

My next visit was with Victoria Piotrowski at Remedi Day Spa. This little space is both snug and airy, with a bright, light ambience and serene color palette. I was originally scheduled for a peel, but after a thorough and informative conversation with Victoria, who is the spa owner and lead aesthetician, we decided to go with a microdermabrasion facial. This is a tool—think of it almost like a tiny electric toothbrush—except with a soft sandpaper-like feel. It's used to microplane away the dullness and when I tell you I left there glowing, I mean it. Victoria's knowledge was nearly dizzying; I never felt for

a minute that she wasn't fully-versed in the most up-to-date techniques. The best part of the experience was feeling that the service provided was utterly personalized to my specific skin type and issues. And while every place I visited had specific products for sale, I never felt like anything was being pushed on me. When I told Victoria that I am an over-the-counter skin care person, she offered specific suggestions for those products as well, which I—and my wallet—thoroughly appreciated.

AND WE'LL ALL FLOAT ON

EAST COAST FLOAT SPA

EASTCOASTFLOAT.COM

569 E GAY ST

484.881.3413

While walking into East Coast Float Spa, I Instagrammed a sign in the window that reads "Like Floating in Your Own Private Dead Sea." Within minutes, one of my followers commented "I go there twice a month—I love it—so relaxing." And you know what, Steve Turner

of Media, PA? You are correct, sir. I wasn't sure what the heck to expect here, but Ryan, the young man at the front desk, put me and the other waiting client at ease immediately. He showed us a brief informational video describing how it works and the health benefits involved, gave us a tour of the facility, and then we each chose our own "private Dead Sea." There are

three, each the same size with minor differences in décor. Each is

equipped with a changing area, an open shower, and then a floating tank. You enter the room, strip, shower, insert earplugs, and into approximately a foot of warm salt water you go and float your cares away. It was smaller than I anticipated, but tall enough to stand up in comfortably. There is a neck/shoulder pillow provided if you choose (and I did, because that is where I happen to store my tension), but you will float either

way. There is a tiny blue light in the tank which you can leave

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on or turn off, for a fully isolated feeling. (I left it on for the first half-hour, turned it off for the second.) I'm a single mom with limited alone time, and I have to say that while curling up with a magazine on the couch for a bit is nice, floating naked in a saltwater tank with absolutely zero distractions is just amazing.

SEE EMILY PLAY

EMILY ALICE

EMILYALICE.COM
35 S HIGH ST
610.696.3990

I think it's safe to say that every woman who wears makeup has a go to: that one thing she won't leave the house without, whether it's lipstick, mascara, or blush. For me, it's always been eyeliner—I feel naked without it. But I was actually excited to walk into Emily Alice's salon and put my naked face into her capable hands, and I had a blast. The space itself is great—a converted brick row house on High Street, the kind of place I've lived in. Bright colors, enthusiastic staff, and lively music contributed to the high-energy vibe. Jackie gave me a quick tour, then had me take a seat in the bright front room to wait for Emily, the owner/operator. The spa offers hair services, makeup, spray tanning, and an actual

"Brow Bar," devoted to the upkeep of the eyebrow. Sometimes we (okay, I) forget just how important a role the eyebrows play in "framing" your face; I think I've let the recent trend of eyebrows that look if they've been severely drawn on one's forehead with a Sharpie alarm me just a bit, but I ended up loving the look I left with. Do you remember when you were a teen and you and your friends would experiment on each other with makeup? That's what it was like hanging out with Emily, except she was a highly competent friend, who would stop what she was doing to check the foils on a client's hair color, or offer condolences to another customer who'd recently lost a family

most hairdressers, not only whips my hair into submission, but also serves as de facto therapist and friend. It's like an affair, which, thankfully, his husband fully understands. So I approached the idea of getting a haircut elsewhere with trepidation—it almost felt like cheating.

Thankfully, I went to the pros at Avante Salon and Spa. And wow—what an operation! The place is huge and was crazy busy when I arrived, with dozens of smiling, beautiful employees bustling about, beautifying dozens more clientele. They are a full-service salon (I went to the Bradford Plaza location—there are a total of three), offering everything

from hair care to manicures to massages. There was even wine and cheese available in the waiting area—a godsend, as I just happened to be starved right then. (Okay, I'm starved a lot.) I was taken care of by Aubrey, who assessed the hot mess that is my hair with a cool, practiced eye—if she was



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member. And while she did some things to my face that would never have occurred to me (lining my eyes in a copper color to bring out the yellow—what??), it worked and I loved it. Also, false eyelashes are the bomb. She suggested I come back for a more outrageous, rock star look another time. I can't wait.

ALMOST CUT MY HAIR

AVANTE SALON & SPA

AVANTESALON.COM
668 DOWNTOWN PIKE
610.429.1800

Disclosure: I've been seeing the same hairdresser for 10 years, and he, like

frightened at all, she didn't show it. My hair is naturally curly, tending towards frizzy at times, and I've been growing it out for about a year or so now. Aubrey not only deftly and efficiently cleaned up the dead split ends and shaped it perfectly, she then blew it out nearly straight at my request, giving it a fun, different-for-a-day look to go with my smokin' makeup. I always feel great after a haircut; somehow it feels like a weight being lifted, but I exited Avante feeling like a brand-new woman. Aubrey she sent me off with a little gift bag containing a coupon for my next visit and some shampoo and conditioner samples, which are already tucked into my overnight bag.

AND IT STONED ME

CALISTA GRAND

CALISTAGRAND.COM
1211 WILMINGTON PIKE
610.399.6677

I knew I wanted a massage at Calista Grand, and I selected a stone massage because it seemed like something really different. And it was. First of all, the space: it is at once REALLY large and yet inviting, like a tiny city devoted strictly to beautification. After checking in at the first floor front desk, I was escorted upstairs, to a dark, quiet waiting area with cozy lounge chairs, magazines, a tea service in the corner, and soft music playing. Karen took care of me, taking me into the massage room and explaining how the stone massage process works: hot stones—and, in a couple of cases, cold ones—are placed on and under the body in specific areas to target problems and pressure points.

In conjunction with the actual massage, the effect is very—grounding, somehow. I was given a choice of scents to add to the massage oil; I chose a light citrus fragrance. Karen and I had a brief discussion of any areas that I wanted to address (shoulders/neck), and what sort of pressure I preferred (I wanted to say hard but went with medium). Karen's years of experience were evident, as she soundlessly places rocks and stones between my toes, up my belly, and under my shoulders. The warm rocks used to massage my arms were placed in my hands to hold afterwards. It added an entirely new dimension to the massage experience, one I would definitely repeat.

EVERY LITTLE THING SHE DOES IS MAGIC

PETER'S SALON & EUROPEAN SPA

PETERSALONANDSPA.COM
1009 WEST CHESTER PIKE
610.436.6464

Another large, two story operation—clearly Peter's is yet another reason why the West Chester region is awash in beautiful women. (This includes my friend Jen Laurence, who, completely unaware that I was upstairs, texted me a photo of my

article in last month's *The WC Press*, which she was reading downstairs while having her hair done—what are the odds?) Peter's is a full service salon, with the first floor devoted to hair care, and the second to massage, makeup, and manicures and pedicures. I went upstairs and was taken care of by the porcelain-skinned Karissa, who retouched my makeup, and then gave me a manicure and pedicure.

I don't typically paint my fingernails—I am typing almost constantly, so it seems pointless—but you will rarely catch me with unpainted toenails. The difference in doing it myself, is in the indulgences a professional pedi offers: the swirling whirlpool foot soak, the sloughing of the bottoms of the feet, and the care that is taken when someone as talented as Karissa is on the case. She helped me choose colors, something light for fingers, and a deep, nearly plum red for my toes. Another bonus—base coats and top coats—who has time for such luxuries?! Professionals do.

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

BALANCE HAIR SPA STUDIO

BALANCEHAIRSPA.COM
150 E GAY ST
610.314.4300

Somehow, prior to my visit to Balance Hair Spa (on Gay Street, they have a larger spa in Exton), I'd managed to live to my age (none of your business) without ever having my hair professionally colored. Yes, I've been doing the box hair color thing since my late thirties when greys started popping up, but had never pulled the trigger on having it done by a pro. And now, I fear, I am completely spoiled, as Whitney at Balance is my new best friend. Not only is she a joy to work with—fun and funky and clearly in love with what she does—she's crazy talented. She talked with me for a few minutes just to get a feel for my personality before deciding what to do with me and whipping up her magic potions. Whitney doesn't "dye" the hair, per se, she paints it. And then she loosely wrapped it in plastic, not foil, but explained that was just to keep the caramel highlights from bleeding into the chocolate base colors. She's a chemistry geek and said she could have gone on and



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on about the methods behind her madness, but I trusted her implicitly. Owners Biff and Thomas stopped by to chat, and they were delightful, professional, and uber-charming, even inviting me—with my kids—to their Christmas parade open house. They gave me a gift bag containing their own signature shampoo, conditioner, and misting oil spray, all of which I've been faithfully using. To say I was thrilled with how my hair turned out is a colossal understatement, and Whitney again blew it out straight for me, but asked that I send her a photo of it in its "natural state" afterward. Which I did, because that's what you do for new best friends.

If you'd told me prior to this story what a rock star I would feel like by the end, I wouldn't have believed you. But I did. And while theoretically, I could have gotten all—or at least most—of these services at all—or at least most—of these places, it was fun doing it in pieces. Because just as each woman is beautiful in her own way, the different spas and salons in West Chester have things that set them apart, whether in services, vibe, or even décor. And each are there to enhance each woman's beauty, from the inside out. 