

EYE / LIFESTYLE

Colonics and Liquid Fasts in the Desert – Fashion’s Favorite Detox Spa Has a Glow Up

We Care "is like going home," says Donna Karan, one of the resort's lifelong fans.

By **BOOTH MOORE**

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We Care Spa in Desert Hot Springs, Calif., specializes in liquid fasting and detoxing. COURTESY IMAGE.

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Down a dirt road in Desert Hot Springs, Calif., about 12 miles outside Palm Springs, We Care Spa has been welcoming the Hollywood and fashion crowds for 38 years.

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and experience an enlightening regimen of daily colonics, sludgy detox drinks and sound baths at the 100-acre oasis, which has undergone a luxury glow up.

"It's like going home," says Karan, who has been to We Care more times than she can count. "It's definitely a cleanse, but in the cleansing aspect is a spiritual aspect and it gives you the time and space to work with some of the most brilliant people."

"The first day you miss food, day two you are so hungry you could eat your arm and day three you could starve yourself for the rest of your life," says Ariana Lambert Smeraldo of **Los Angeles' Lily Lodge**, who is the go-to florist for The Row, Staud, Carolina Herrera and others, and has been to We Care about a dozen times. "It's like Olympic without Olympic."

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Drinks at the We Care Lobby Bar

Visitors enter **wellness** nirvana by walking over a subterranean glass vitrine of healing crystals into a relaxing, light-filled living room where all the action is centered around the lobby bar.

The only cocktails here, however, are the liquids that are the building blocks of the We Care program, including the powdered Organic Detox fiber drink with aloe juice chaser designed to ease things along; blood purifying and liver detoxifying teas; mint, lemon and citrus waters, and the nightly vegetable soups that are so eagerly awaited by hungry guests come 5 p.m. you'd think they'd been flown in from Noma.

We Care has always held a certain mystique in Southern California, in large part because of the daily colonics, which involve having a tube inserted in the bum to flush water, coffee, almond and other things into the bowels, and force the release of

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Of course, in today's hyper wellness age, when green juice is available at the local 7-Eleven and moms are micro-dosing, people are more attuned to these kinds of things, and the daily 30-minute colon hydrotherapy sessions are taken in stride by most guests, albeit with a few snickers.

We Care Spa

Founder Susana Belen, now a sprightly 86 years old, started the program in 1986 to get her own health back on track after a difficult divorce, then began teaching fasting and detoxing to friends and family at her two-bedroom adobe style home, which is still part of the spa property.

Friends told friends, and they wanted to come, too. So Belen added on to her house, growing We Care organically. Designers and models began visiting to prepare for fashion weeks, and stars to prepare for runway shows. In what was a decidedly organic

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her in 1990 to head up the business side, and took the spa in a more upmarket direction. She added luxe amenities such as the sparkling main pool and pool bar, state-of-the-art gym, infrared sauna and steam room, and spruced up the grounds with a medicine wheel, meditation pyramid and ancient labyrinth.

Susan Lombard

There are now 28 guest rooms and suites across a sweeping desert landscape with mountain views, bougainvillea trees and Buddha heads. Rooms have oversize soaking tubs, circadian light systems, yoga mats, rebounder trampolines and weights for those who have workout energy, which does return for most after a couple days of fasting.

Two new villas are set to be finished by the end of the year for those seeking a bit more privacy.

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We Care Spa executive suite.

"Donna would come here way back when we were in my mom's tract home," Lombardi remembers. "After we expanded a little, there was one room in the corner, and I decided to put \$70,000 of slab stone in it and make it nice for Donna. And the next thing you know every customer with money wanted it... That showed me the demand was there."

"I'm so proud of them," says Karan. "[Susana] is amazing. What she created, and her daughter with all her love who has even larger potential, there's no place like it."

The beauty and wellness options have also expanded in recent years. There are more than 40 treatments to choose from, including Agent Natur facial, mud detoxifying, system recovery wraps with castor oil targeting gut health, Shamanic healing, and a medical colonoscopy in an outdoor tent. Clients can come from sun and nutrition to

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partaking, I would be doing something wrong."

We Care Spa body treatment.

"Back in the day, it was more like the hippies sharing rooms and sharing the bathroom. We'd be on the phone with them explaining what a colonic is and why," says Lombardi, still a fashionista decked out on a recent afternoon in the desert in all-black Chanel. "But as people kept coming and having such a great result and the word got out, to where we are today, their expectations have changed and they want to know is the product freeze dried, does it come from Mexico," she adds of how the consumer has become educated and eager to take the product home, which has led to more offerings in that department, too.

In the past, people came to quit smoking, now they often come to quit sugar — and improve their mental and physical health, she says.

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We Care Spa sound bath.

"We don't really promote it as weight loss, but weight loss is a side benefit. The other is the inner peace you get when you are here long enough to do inner work, get grounded, have some visions and some direction in your life, and understand autophagy," she says of the theory that fasting leads to cellular recycling. "That's why you leave here and feel great, or the person with arthritis forgets their cane and we have to mail it to them. We are like the intensified version of the intermittent fast. So it's a lot more than weight loss."

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We Care Spa grounds.

Since COVID-19, interest in the spiritual side has boomed, she says. "It's like opening up Pandora's box. If you are going to a therapist during the workday, you leave your laptop for an hour then go back to it. It's a whole different thing if you're here for three, five, eight, 10 days, peeling off the layers. If you work with a therapist while you're here, you can dive into level 10, so everyone is booking that and wants it."

In the high season, which in the desert is winter and early spring, there's often a waitlist of two to three months to reserve a room at We Care. But the spa is looking for its next locations, perhaps in Florida or Mexico.

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Suzanne Belen

And Belen is still in her element every day, taking walks on the grounds and teaching her "Seven Steps to Health & Rejuvenation" classes to groups that increasingly include more Millennials and Gen Zers, girl trip takers and mother-and-daughter duos, too. "It's her mission to help people one-by-one, and then I get to use my creative and business brains, so we make a good team," Lombardi says.

"Every single day someone stops me and says thank you, I changed and I feel good. Why am I going to stop doing that?" Belen says when asked about retirement. "I'm helping a lot of people. Nothing special, I don't teach science, I tell them what I know. It's common sense."

We Care Spa, 18000 Long Canyon Road, Desert Hot Springs, Calif., wecarespa.com;

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