



PRECIOUS ME-TIME

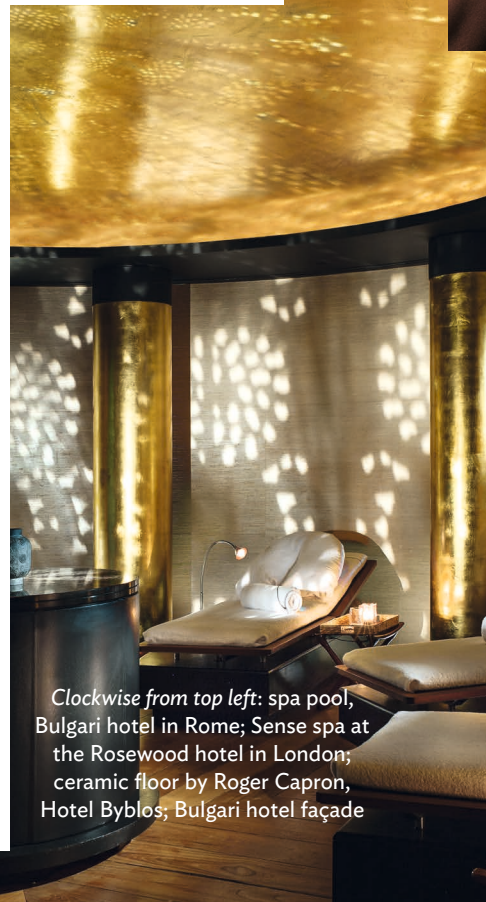
FROM BULGARI'S ONYX BATHS TO DIOR'S GEMSTONE-CLAD TREATMENT ROOMS, THE NEWEST LUXURY SPAS ARE GOING BIJOUX, SAYS KIM PARKER

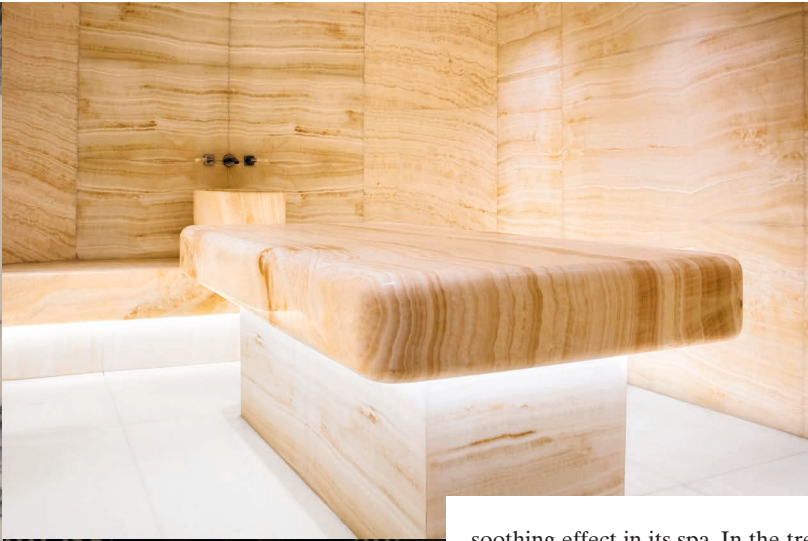
"THE ONLY WORD ELIZABETH KNOWS in Italian is Bulgari," Richard Burton once said, referring to his then-wife Elizabeth Taylor's passion for jewellery. Bulgari's newest spa speaks a language the actress would understand. The wellness centre in the fashion and jewellery house's latest hotel, which opened in Rome this summer, is one of several new spas that are dispensing with the unobtrusive concrete-and-driftwood interiors and going all out in a blitz of precious stone. ACPV Architects, the Italian design team behind all Bulgari hotels, drew on the maison's jewellery heritage to transform the 16,000-square-foot space into "a new gem in the Eternal City". Columns of rare arabesque marble surround the 20-metre swimming pool, accompanied by sculptural bronze fountains forged with the same lost-wax technique as ancient jewellery, plus handmade Venetian glass lamps glowing with real gold leaf. Here, spa-goers wallow in green onyx baths, and receive Augustinus Bader facial massages administered with cool slivers of jade.

A unique, gem-filled experience is also guaranteed at Dior's new spa, unveiled in April at the iconic Hotel du Cap-Eden-Roc in Antibes, which happened to be another of Elizabeth Taylor's favourite things. The "quiet luxury" cream-and-gilt decor scheme (punctuated with the maison's signature toile de Jouy fabric) extends to its treatment areas, which are clad in pearl-tinted onyx – a gemstone that's not only beautiful but helps to disperse a muscle-relaxing warmth throughout the body. Even the treatments contain jewels, such as the Escale à Eden-Roc massage, where cabochons of sodalite, seraphinite and aventurine are deployed to de-stress achy limbs.

A couple of hours away in Saint-Tropez, the recently refurbished Hotel Byblos harnesses the light-diffusing properties of onyx to

Clockwise from top left: spa pool, Bulgari hotel in Rome; Sense spa at the Rosewood hotel in London; ceramic floor by Roger Capron, Hotel Byblos; Bulgari hotel façade



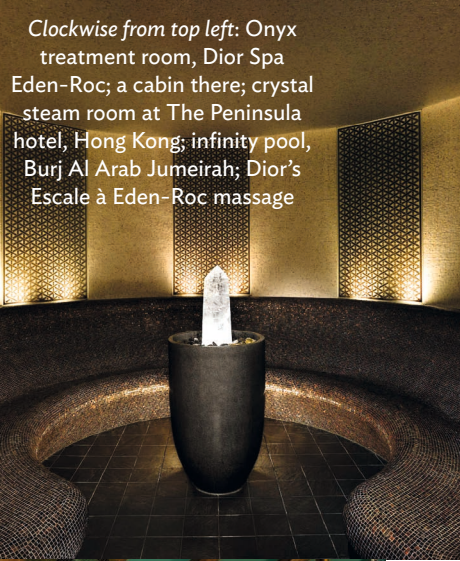


soothing effect in its spa. In the treatment rooms, wall panels of the semi-opaque stone disguise devices that can adjust the level of ambient light, creating a cosy and restful atmosphere.

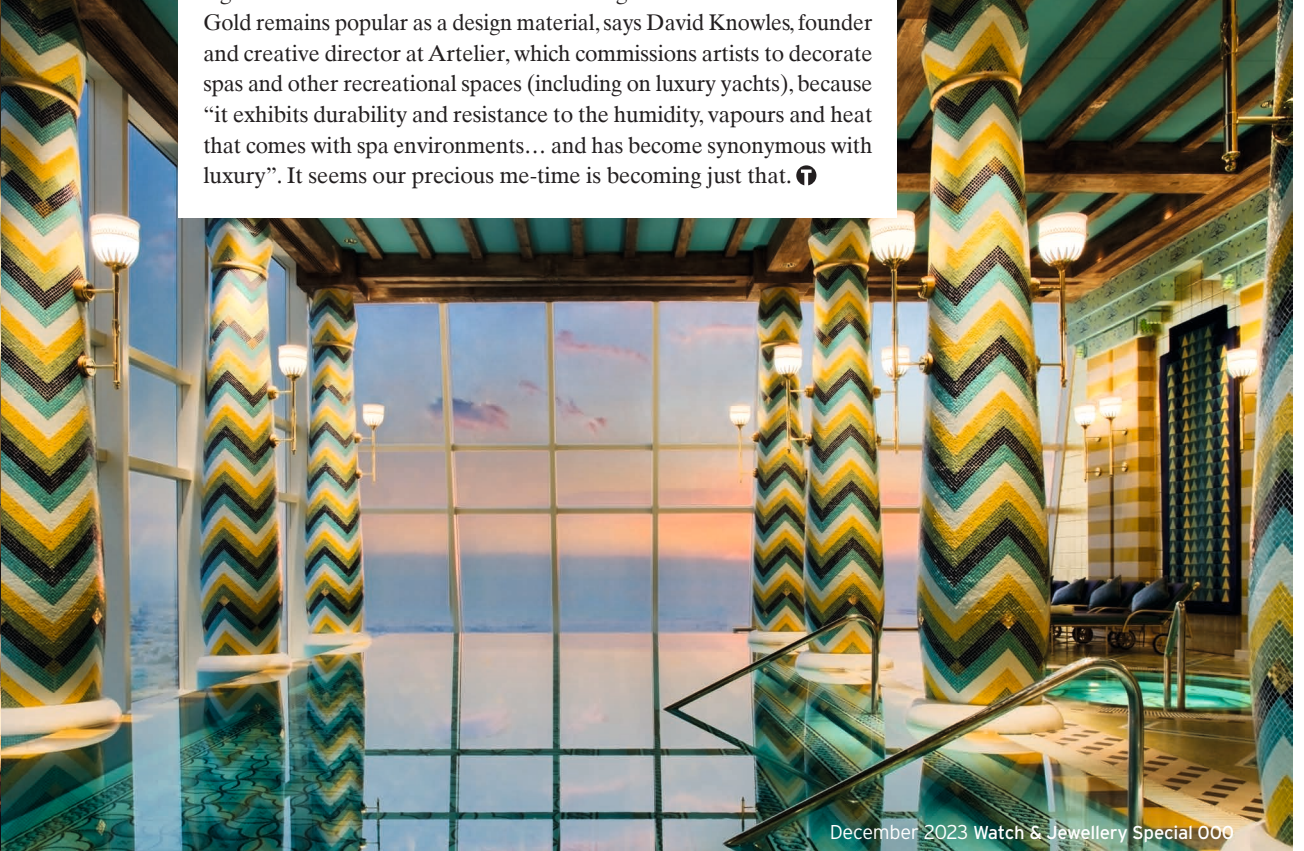
Other spas have utilised precious crystals in innovative and healing ways. At the Regent Phu Quoc resort in Vietnam, pioneering massage beds are filled with quartz that is pulverised into a soft sand that cocoons the body and creates a feeling of weightlessness. Meanwhile, at the storied Peninsula in Hong Kong, an enormous rock crystal shard is the focal point for meditation in the elegant steam room. “Crystals have long been used for their powerful spiritual and wellbeing properties,” explains Jessica Grant Sloyan, director of spa and wellness at Lucknam Park Hotel & Spa near the Cotswolds, adding that the beautiful amethyst geode affixed to the ceiling in the spa’s thermal cabin was chosen to deliver a sense of “grounding, peace and tranquility”.

Over in Dubai, the Burj Al Arab Jumeirah hotel has nearly 20,000 square feet of pure gold (not to mention the world’s largest Swarovski crystal ceiling). The renowned Gold Radiance facial at its Talise spa utilises golden peptides to revitalise lacklustre complexions.

Meanwhile, the Sense spa at London’s Rosewood hotel features a gold leaf relaxation chamber that casts a glow on its clientele’s skin. Gold remains popular as a design material, says David Knowles, founder and creative director at Artelier, which commissions artists to decorate spas and other recreational spaces (including on luxury yachts), because “it exhibits durability and resistance to the humidity, vapours and heat that comes with spa environments... and has become synonymous with luxury”. It seems our precious me-time is becoming just that. **T**



Clockwise from top left: Onyx treatment room, Dior Spa Eden-Roc; a cabin there; crystal steam room at The Peninsula hotel, Hong Kong; infinity pool, Burj Al Arab Jumeirah; Dior’s Escale à Eden-Roc massage



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