



SCRATCHPADS

Oasis of calm

Scratch visits Durban House in Nottingham to discover more about the site; a former museum that now features a charming beauty lounge steeped in history

HELEN STONE REPORTS

Durban House, a beautiful 18th century building, has been used for many purposes throughout its time, but most notably and recently, as the D.H. Lawrence Heritage Centre. Following its closure last year, the building was left vacant, but it wasn't long before local salon owner, Michelle Davis, took on the house and began breathing new life into it, while respectfully upholding the charm of its former use.

Set within its own beautifully maintained grounds, Michelle saw the potential in this historic building as soon as she set eyes on it. "Prior to opening The Beauty Lounge at Durban House earlier this year, I'd owned my own salon for 10 years and would drive past Durban House on my way to work every day," Michelle recalls. "It's such a beautiful house and I would always think to myself how well it would lend itself to holding a salon inside."

"With so much rich history to its name and located in such a peaceful setting, while only a short drive from town, it was – in my mind – the perfect place in which to create an elegant and serene spa." So when the premises became vacant, Michelle

wasted no time in seizing the opportunity that she'd dreamt of and took on the building, transforming it into The Beauty Lounge.

First impressions

Walking into this striking double fronted country house, there's an instant feeling of calm; a peaceful aura and an expectation that a very special experience lays ahead. The impressive reception area with its high ceilings, large doorways and beautifully crafted wooden reception desk sets the scene for a stunning spa experience.

A large selection of luxury retail products lines the walls of the entrance space, with elegant display stands boasting lotions, creams and nail polishes. Blending both vintage pieces of furniture with bold contemporary items gives this area a real 'wow' factor and the synergy between old and new feels very natural in this building, which has reinvented itself many times before, while always maintaining its period charm.

Akin to the vast array of beauty treats on offer to purchase, a selection of D.H. Lawrence books are also for sale, and a massive plaque above the double doors leading into the spa area dedicates a special memory to the former novelist and poet.

Fresh flowers and a large salt lamp further adorn the impressive entrance area, giving a soft and homely feel, while just across from the main reception, the ring of teaspoons against china cups leads the way to a delightful tearoom, in which day guests can be found relaxing in their gowns to the lounge's soft music, and indulging in the range of delicious homemade treats on offer.

...and relax

As guests walk through the reception space and into the main lobby, they're greeted by a grand sweeping staircase, which extends a natural invitation to ascend into the peaceful day spa above. Warm shades and natural hues are used for the décor here, while twinkling lamps and inspirational quotes scribed on the walls lead the way to the first floor of this blissful sanctuary.

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Relaxation and a feeling of calm are parts of the mantra at The Beauty Lounge, and this dreamy setting is the perfect place to find both. While the age of the building largely dictates the spa's layout, it also offers up many natural nooks and spaces for relaxation zones, and there's no shortage of these comforting rooms to choose from. Almost an entire floor is given over to quiet zones and chill-out areas, enticing guests to really take time to unwind. Gentle music plays throughout the rooms and soft lighting giving a peaceful aura to the entire floor, which clients can't help but be enveloped into.

"As they come to the top of the staircase, guests can wander round the top floor in a full circle to explore the chill out zones and find a space that suits them," Michelle explains. "There are day beds and loungers in the first two rooms with soft fabrics and plump cushions. A further two rooms house our deluxe heated water beds, each draped with Indian gold leaf bedding," she continues. "Our guests love to lay and chat on these, snuggling in the warmth of the beds and letting themselves drift off."

"We also have another lovely relaxation zone with cocoon chairs and hanging basket seats which gently sway," she reveals. "It's the perfect space in which to lose yourself in a good book."

Perhaps the most intriguing relaxation space though is a quirky former schoolroom which has been respectfully left with its original markings and décor, including a beautifully painted hopscotch on the floor. A vintage school desk gives a fun nod to the room's historic use and houses a selection of 'colour to calm' adult colouring books. Guests are encouraged to take a book, snuggle on one of the oversized beanbags that are scattered throughout the room and colour themselves into a state of calm.

Treatment zones

Aside from the many dedicated chill out spaces at Durban House, there is a host of impressive treatment spaces, too. An infrared sauna, steam cabinet and outdoor hot tub all prove popular with day guests looking to indulge in the full spa experience, and many also opt to visit the picturesque nail bar as part of their day. "Our nail bar is created in the former 'wedding room'," Michelle beams. "It's a room in which many local people have got married over the years so it's a very special place for some of our guests. The three big sash windows in this room give loads of beautiful natural light, so it was an obvious choice for the location of our natural nail and >>>





brow bar," she continues. "Our clients love to sit and look out over the gardens while they are pampered and this bright and airy space works really well for our therapists, too."

"We also have a luxury pedicure room with super comfortable arm chairs for clients to laze in while we indulge them in a spa pedicure," Michelle enthuses. "Plus, we offer both single and double treatment rooms for guests to choose from. These are the special spaces where all our facial, massage and body magic happens."

Furthermore, the basement in this grand old house has been converted into male and female changing rooms, a spray tan room, shower facilities and a stylish hair studio, which, with the clever use of white and silver tones, is bright, light and modern.

Creating an experience

"At The Beauty Lounge, we have a huge range of clients, from regulars who pop in for a weekly manicure, to day spa guests who love to come and enjoy full use of the facilities and really escape here," Michelle explains. "Our ethos is to make every single guest feel special, and we achieve this by working together as a team to treat each customer with kindness and respect, while offering a very nurturing experience with luxury products and expert treatments."

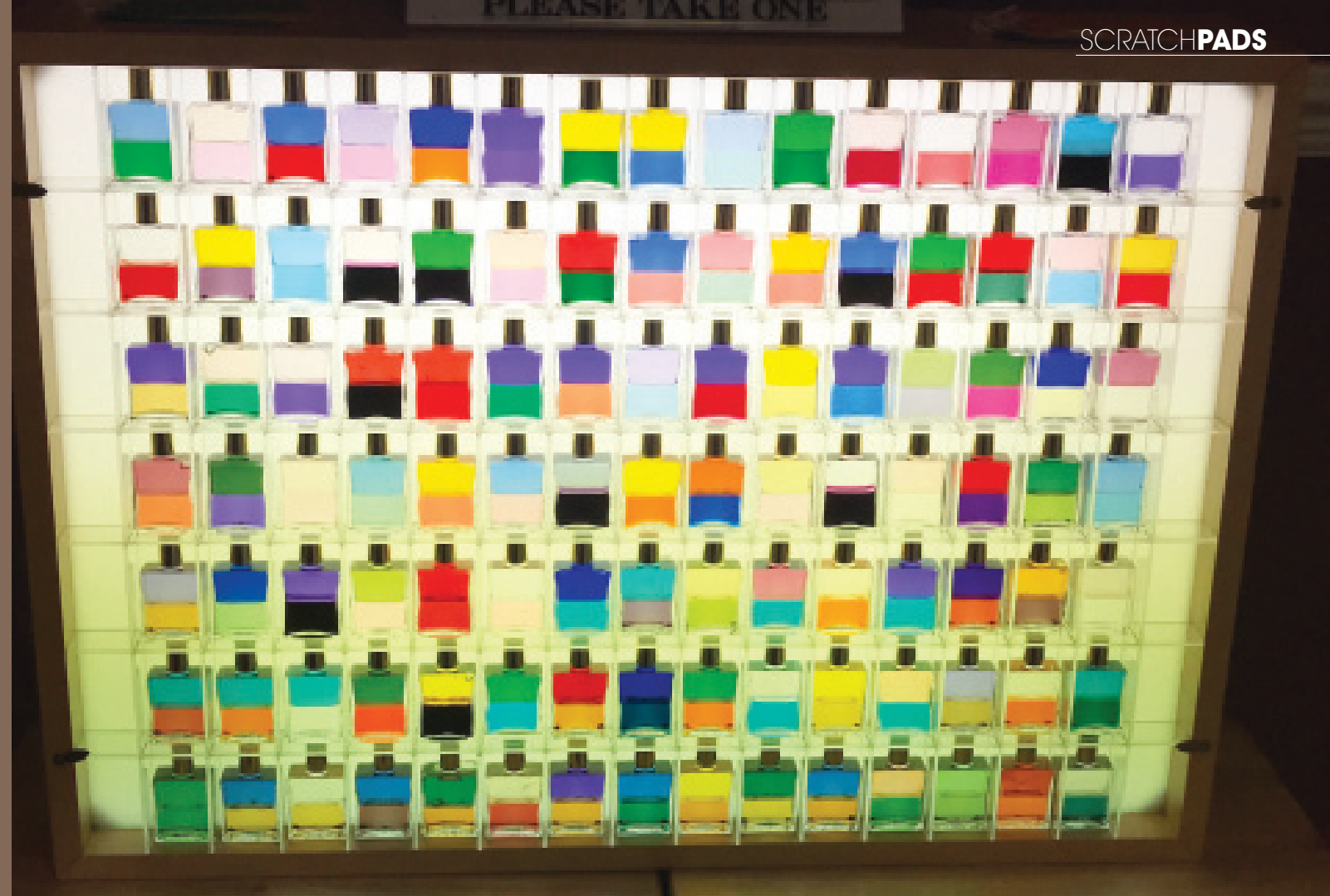
"In total, we have six therapists and three hairdressers so we're able to offer a lovely range of treatments and services," she cites. Popular choices on the spas repertoire include CND™ manicures and pedicures, brow and lash services, body scrubs, wraps and massages, and facial treatments.

"I only use the best products," Michelle states. "We've chosen CND™ for all our nail needs, Dermalogica for skincare, plus The Natural Spa Factory, High Definition and Moroccan Tan for our other beauty services. For me, choosing these brands is not only about the fantastic products but also about the support from the companies behind them," she reveals. "Without people like Samuel and Samantha Sweet of CND™, and the Dermalogica training programme, I simply wouldn't be where I am today."

"For me, the real key to running a successful spa is a combination of hard work and offering the best products at affordable prices," Michelle concludes. And of course, having the vision and conviction to take on a building like Durban House and transform it from a museum to a spa, has also played a massive part in the success of Michelle's journey. Her drive and dedication have seen her go from owning a very safe business setup in town, to a magnificent spa in the countryside, which is going from strength to strength with each month that passes.

"My experience so far has been simply delightful," she fondly explains. "There have been times that the journey has knocked us, and we've encountered unexpected problems along the way, but what's important is that we've learnt from these things and now we're heading towards our second year of business here, we aim to be the very best at what we do, with future hopes to growing and building on the spa and the experience that we offer." 5

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