

Wondertime

November 2008

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inspiring parents.

move over turkey

5 unbeatable
side dishes
including pie!

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brett paesel:
the wives of bath

For the first six years of motherhood I treasured my “happy hours.” Every Friday from 4 to 6, I would meet a few friends to raise a glass and talk about everything from politics to shoes to sex.

I felt young and single again, planting my foot on the rail of the bar, rocking out to the tunes, gabbing as if I didn't bear the responsibility of raising two helpless human beings into functioning adults who know diplomacy is better than biting and that a store credit card is never a good idea.

These days Friday happy hours have dwindled to a rarity. Now that our kids are older, my mom friends and I find ourselves locked into after-school schedules—soccer games, pizza nights, sleepovers. But I've missed the female bonding, especially with Dee, Melanie, and Paula, whom I've known since I was single and had a slew of store credit cards. It occurred to me that a midday gathering, while our seven children were safely ensconced in academia, might be easier to arrange than a cocktail hour. Since two of us are at-home moms and two work freelance, it could actually be doable—and sneaking away would fulfill our urge to tap into our younger, naughtier pasts.

I thought about the nearby Korean spa, which is only 15 bucks—for an extra \$30 we could book Akasuri scrubs. I imagined all of us bonding, exfoliating, and hopping into our cars after lunch, glowing like Cameron Diaz. This is pretty much what happened, though I looked less like Cameron and more like Nick Nolte in that drunken mug shot.

Some might consider the word “spa” an overstatement, given the missing ceiling tiles and the bold signs that disclaim responsibility for personal property.

I've tried to prepare my friends for the all-nude experience. But as we undress, Dee glances at the naked bodies walking by and giggles, “Maybe I'm too immature for this.” She slips on a robe and pulls it tight. I love seeing women of all ages and body types, walking around with no self-consciousness. It lets me embrace my imperfections. Then again, I grew up in Europe, where the entire continent is clothing-optional. I suspect Dee's blip of reluctance will disappear once we get into it, and she does seem more relaxed by the time we hit the baths.

There's a warm mineral whirlpool, a cool pool, and a tub full of what looks like black tea, called “mugwort.” The name makes me think of fire-breathing, people-eating eel ▶

Amy MacLin
Beauty Floozy

she tries it all...

tubside
spa:
himalayan
sea salt



The *Star Trek*-esque pinkish crystals of Himalayan sea salt have spent 250 million years languishing in ancient deposits, where they've sucked up 84 minerals for your eating (and soaking) pleasure (\$30, himalayanseasalt.com).

To create your own hydrating primal ocean,

add ½ cup to the bath with a few drops of essential oil. I am fond of **Aura Cacta Essential Solutions** blends in **Mellow Mix** (lavender and chamomile, for decompression) or **Cool Hottie** (geranium and clary sage, for hippie clarity), \$10 each, auracacta.com. Any stray salt nuggets can be nestled into the chocolate bar you brought into the bathtub. (Green & Black's Organic has grooves that would be ideal for this kind of thing; \$5, chocosphere.com.)



Sea salt photograph (top) provided by Masterfile; Amy MacLin photograph by Brett Hale; product photograph provided by himalayanseasalt.com

—| facetime

Amy MacLin
Beauty Floozy

the wives of bath continued

creatures, but the women soaking in the glassy brew seem to be surviving nicely, and a sign says it's good for "your cycle." I try to keep my cycle on my side, so we dip our toes in.

Melanie yelps as we all immediately jump back. It's scalding hot, as if we've stepped into a soothing nuclear reactor. Maybe the toxins are simply being burned out of our systems, and our cycles are terrified into cooperating. I glance around to see if anyone is noticing how guttlessly we're behaving in a spa, for God's sake.

"Let's work our way into this," Paula suggests, and we pad after her nakedly. We slip into the bubbling whirlpool, and after a group sigh, we notice that Paula's holding a razor. "A razor?" asks Dee. "Look around," says Paula.

We turn our heads to take in women freely scrubbing each other, shaving, and applying oils and moisturizers. Frankly, the razor is a bit "when in Rome" for me, but I've always admired Paula's lack of self-consciousness.

We fall into conversation that bounces from PTA politics to the impossibility of spraying on a realistic tan. After we get too hot for the whirlpool, we venture over to the cool pool, which is not so much "cool" as "glacial." I can feel my pores closing. By now the glow must be so bright I could guide ships to shore.

Alternating between hot and cold pools supposedly regulates one's temperature, so next we attempt the scalding mugwort again, and indeed it is considerably easier this time. We lol in the tea like sodden crullers until a Korean woman in a black bra and underwear announces, "Number 70." Time for my scrub. ▶

Yes, it's lip gloss in lotion paper. No, you don't need it. But aren't you glad it exists?

Dianne Brill Lip Lingerie gloss, \$27, beautyhabit.com



Keep an eye on this or Barbie will steal it for her hatbox.

Yves Rocher Touche de Blush in Sweet Pêche, \$10, yvesrocherusa.com



Come with me to the casbah!

L'annine Jasmine Hand and Body Cream, \$16, beautyhabit.com



The little goat is SO ADORABLE. He's like the Gerber goat.

Canus Goat's Milk Soap, \$3, drugstore.com

Deep-moisture products sometimes feel like punishment, but this one smells like OATMEAL COOKIES.

Aveeno Creamy Moisturizing Oil, \$8, drugstore.com



Some products make us wonder whether they represent the advance of civilization or its decline. For instance: Poo-Pourri, a potion that promises to make the business of being an organic life-form less embarrassing. The blend of essential oils is misted on the waters of the toilet bowl before—how to put this delicately?—

solid elimination, thus forming a shield that vanquishes bathroom odors. Amid much hilarity and scorn, we put it in our windowless ladies' room, which then began to smell ever so delicately of lemon-grass and bergamot. Of course, everyone disavowed all knowledge. (\$15 for a 4-ounce bottle, poo-pourri.net)



Product photographs by Tara Gorman

1/3V LHP

| facetime

the wives of bath *continued*

Korean body scrubs are not for wimps. My scrubber pats the wet vinyl pad, making the universal sign for "On your stomach." Once I've assumed the position, she sets to work with her exfoliating mitts. It's not painful. It's unbearable, like being under an industrial-grade sander. She must be removing more than dead skin. Surely she's taking off some stuff I might need later to cover muscle and bone.

But like the scalding bath, it slowly becomes endurable. Then—*splash*—she slops me with a bucket of warm water. "Turn over," she commands, and I awkwardly squish into a face-up position. Being scrubbed prone is harder because I'm clutching my breasts lest my harsh mistress scrub them raw. But she avoids any areas that might be especially tender, flipping me right and left before she asks me to swivel around so she can wash my hair. Now, having my hair washed is on my list of top 10 best sensations, behind the obvious and eating cheese. Sadly, this part is all too fleeting. She nudges me to sit and squirts something minty into my hands. "For your face," she says.

The last treatment is the heated jade floor, which I will have to add to my list of best sensations. We lie on blankets, feeling the warmth of the smooth tile. I close my eyes. And I give thanks for my old friends. This entirely bearable lightness of being has every bit as much to do with their company as it does with soaks and scrubs. It feels like happy hour. ●

Soaking Locally

We're guessing you don't have a Korean bathhouse, or *jimjilbang*, down the street. Steve Chon, owner of SpaCastle, a five-story megaplex in New York City, hopes to remedy that sad situation: He plans to open 19 more Korean-style spas in cities around the country, starting in Atlanta. At SpaCastle, \$35 (\$45 on weekends) gets you access to rooftop jet pools, a sauna lined with gold, and an "Iceland" room with frosted pipes. Alcohol is forbidden, nudity encouraged (in sex-segregated areas, that is), and families welcome. (nyspacastle.com)

Other on-the-cheap spa options:

Massage-therapy schools
Naturalhealers.com offers a nationwide listing.

Local gyms
Get a day pass and stick to the steam room and sauna.

Nail salons
Many offer seated massages, no appointment required.

Brett Paesel calls this her mugwort look.



Photograph by Julia Toy