

spa business

LAURENT HOUEL

On brand leveraging with
evian's new spa concept

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LAURENT HOUEL

Water brand evian® has created a new licenced spa concept that's set for a strategic rollout around the world. We talk the global brand development director to reveal more about this exciting venture

KATIE BARNES » MANAGING EDITOR » SPA BUSINESS

Evian®. A global brand based on pure spring mineral water, health and vitality which promises to help people 'live young'. What better fit for a branded spa concept that's been developed for a global rollout? The first facility has just debuted at the Palace Hotel Tokyo as part of a US\$1.2bn (€923m, £745m) redevelopment and there are already more in the pipeline.

It's an ideal match, says evian's global brand development director, Laurent Houel: "Evian is a water brand so there's an obvious link with spas, but it's more than that. If you delve into our history, evian water has always been closely associated with health and wellbeing. It was discovered in 1789 by a French aristocrat, count de Laizer, who's kidney pains dissipated after drinking it. This



Evian will target five-star hotels, such as the Palace Hotel Tokyo in Japan, in the rollout of its licenced spa concept

The move into spas was spurred by evian's successful Roller Babies campaign which gave the brand a real global platform



spurred on thermal spa experiences in the French Alpine town of Évian-les-Bain, with the first facility opening in 1824 and in 1878 the health benefits of the water were recognised by the French Academy of Medicine.

"Firstly, we think this move makes sense as a relevant proposal in the spa industry. But secondly, it's an interesting business opportunity to develop our brand. It leverages our DNA and reinforces our image as a premium brand and our wellbeing anchor."

NEW CATEGORIES

Spas aren't entirely new to evian, as Danone, its parent company, already owns two hotels with spas (Hôtel Royal and Hôtel Ermitage) located in its exclusive Evian Resort – previously known as Royal Parc Evian (see SBO4/q1 p45) – in Évian-les-Bains. In addition,



the group owns the town's original thermal baths, Les Thermes Evian. In a one-off venture in 2004, the group also opened its first day spa in Shanghai's leisure development Three on the Bund (see SB04/q1 p52).

It wasn't until a few years ago, however, that the decision was made to create an evianSpa concept suitable for global rollout. Houel explains: "In 2009, the evian brand was relaunched with Roller Babies, a new worldwide campaign which became a massive success – it's one of the most viewed web advertisement ever with more than 200 million views on YouTube. For the first time, evian had a real global platform and now we've reignited excitement towards the evian brand, it's the time to deploy it further."

Houel started at evian at the same time as the Roller Babies launch. Having spent his

career working in marketing and business development for FMCG and luxury companies such as Procter & Gamble, Coty and LVMH he was ready for a new challenge. "Evian has a fantastic history and when you come from the luxury business, as in my case, heritage and roots are key. I was very impressed with the brand's richness, which gives a strong foundation to build on."

His role is to develop evian in "new categories and services" with a recent project including the MyEvian.com website which enables customers to personalise evian water bottles for special occasions from weddings to business conventions. He's reluctant to give away details of other confidential areas of expansion – "they're all very diverse projects and involve other aspects of the brand". But spa, of course, is another avenue.

TELLING A STORY

Testing the waters, so to speak, the first evianSpa opened in Japan this May at the luxury Palace Hotel (see Info Panel). Houel says: "We found a great hotel partner, or rather they found us via Yoriko Soma, a Japanese spa consultant [from Conceptasia Management & Consultants] acting on their behalf. It offers the utmost in Japanese hospitality and like evian has a long history [originally opening in 1961]. This is the second time it's been completely rebuilt. Also, Japan is one of the most demanding countries in terms of consistency and quality in overall consumer experience. If you get it right there, you can get it right anywhere."

Houel is pleased that they've created a robust spa offering. "I think our concept is a compelling one because it tells a story and it ▶

INTERVIEW: LAURENT HOUEL

Evian water may be used in some treatments but not in baths and pools as it's too extravagant



► has something to attract consumers beyond a great facility,” he explains. “We would not have just put an evian logo on a spa and say ‘this is great’. We had to tell an evian story.”

The story takes its inspiration from the 15-year journey that the spring water makes before emerging at the source in the heart of the Alps. The evianSpa menu has 16 signature therapies themed around the water journey – four for each of the stages. First is celestial, the start of the water cycle in the sky, which, says Houel, is represented by ‘let go moment’ treatments; second is mineral, the journey the water takes through the rocks, that lends itself to detox treatments; third is precious, where the water gathers in a reserve, which is linked to anti-ageing; and fourth is vital, the flow at the source of the water, which includes rejuvenating treatments.

These core signature treatments will be offered at all evianSpas, but there will be the possibility of adapting or adding more therapies according to local cultures. Equally there won't be a set agreement with product houses,

► Evian water has always been closely associated with health and wellbeing



“It’s an interesting business opportunity to develop our brand. It leverages our DNA and reinforces our image as a premium brand and our wellbeing anchor”

although skincare companies will need to work with the set treatment protocols.

Water is obviously a USP, but while some services actually incorporate evian water, you won't find an evian-filled pool or bath. Houel reasons: “The minute you put water in a pool you have to treat it, so it won't be evian anymore. We're not planning evian baths because we don't want to get into extravagant luxuries. Evian is close to the people and nature and an expensive treatment is not in keeping with the brand philosophy.”

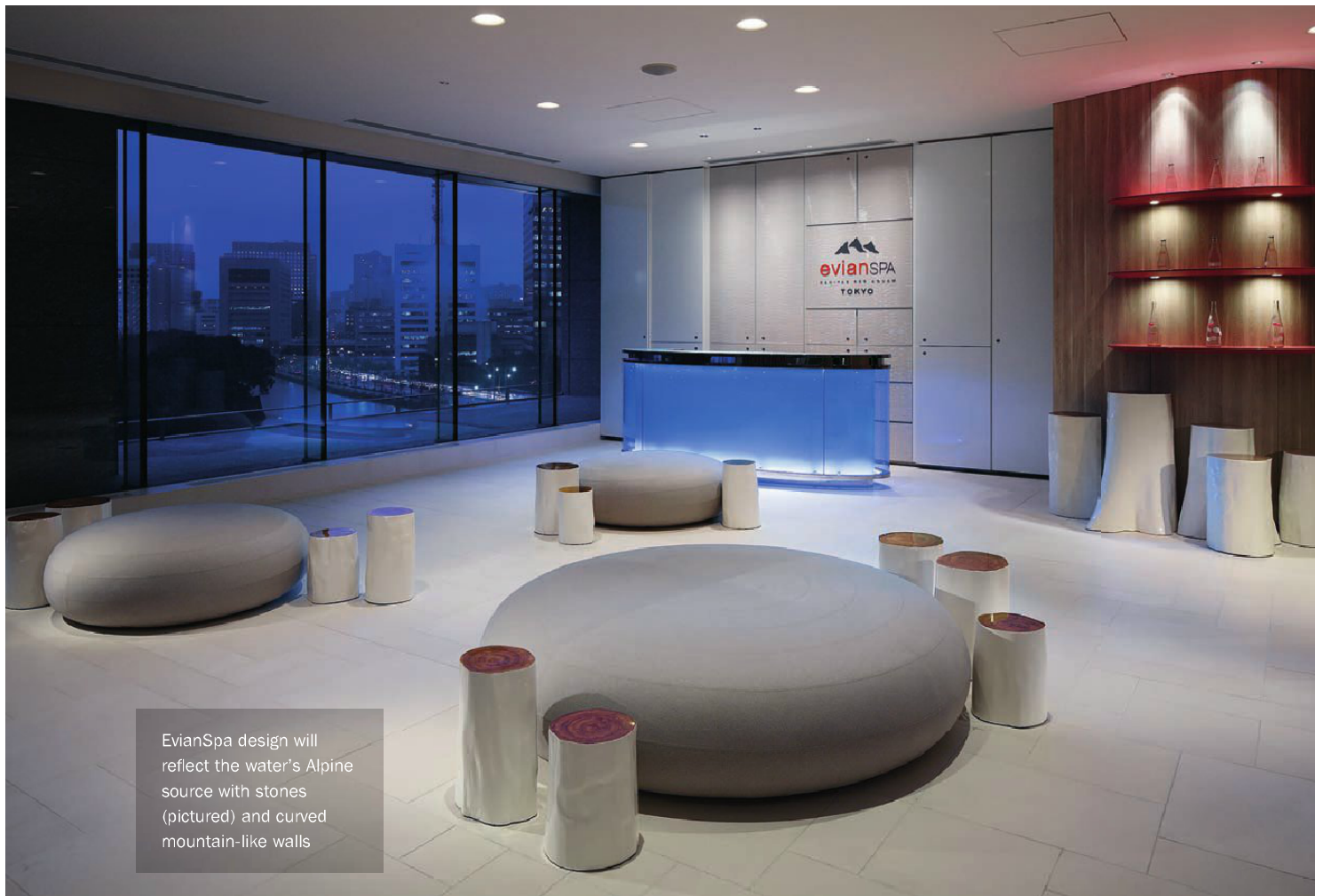
The idea is that evianSpa architecture will also take its cue from the Alpine environment – walls will look like the curves in mountains that have been shaped by water, while Houel also talks about sensory stimuli that will “really immerse the guest in the evian universe”. For example, natural sounds – not music – like flowing water and wind rustling through the trees will be triggered when

customers get to certain points and there will be a signature Alpine scent.

COMMERCIAL MODEL

The majority of the evianSpa concept was developed by Houel and outside designers. But by his own admission, he isn't a spa specialist: “I'd been exposed to the spa business indirectly in the past at companies like LVMH, so I had a certain knowledge, but I'm not an expert.” So, he started to look for an industry person to team up with. Two months before the Tokyo launch he found Patrick Saussay (see p36) who was previously the managing director and in charge of international growth for the Swiss spa skincare company After the Rain.

With a 15-year career in business consulting for global companies such as BearingPoint, combined with the spa focus, Saussay was the right fit says Houel: “I have the brand and marketing knowledge, but Patrick has the real passion and expertise when it comes to spas, the spa sector and the spa business.” Saussay helped put the finishing touches to the evianSpa concept ►



EvianSpa design will reflect the water's Alpine source with stones (pictured) and curved mountain-like walls



▲ The first spa is located on the fifth floor of the new US\$1.2bn Palace Tokyo Hotel that reopened in May



▲ Lighting in evian spas will vary in brightness according to the natural cycle of the sun and time of day



▲ The treatment room ceilings at evianSpa Tokyo feature water ripple effects

Info Panel: EvianSpa Tokyo

The first evian-branded spa in Japan opened at the newly redeveloped 290-bedroom Palace Hotel Tokyo, across from the famous Imperial Palace, in late May 2012.

Occupying 1,200sq m (12,917sq ft) on the fifth floor, it comprises five treatment rooms with Earthlite massage tables; a double suite;

male and female relaxation lounges with a sauna, heated soaking tub, soaking pool with jets and plunge pool for men and a marble sauna and heated soaking tub for women; a Technogym fitness facility; and a 20m pool offering views of the palace. The product houses are Anne Semonin and Omnisens.

The design by MEC Design International Corporation – part of Japan's Mitsubishi Estate Group – has been inspired by the Alpine origin. Features include a loose stone garden in the reception that signifies the water's mountain top source, while treatment room ceilings have a water ripple effect.

INTERVIEW: LAURENT HOUEL



The priority will be to launch Spas in countries where evian has a super premium image

► as well as working on the finer points of its licensing agreement and the overall business plan. His role moving forward will be to focus on the commercial model and development of evianSpa via hotel partners. In order to do this, Saussay set up a consulting and management company in March called Global Project and Spa Advisory, with evian as its first client.

So, why hotel spas and not standalone day spas? “Licences are easier to set up with hotels and there’s the potential for more success from a business and revenue standpoint,” says Houel. “We don’t want to be alone and we’re happy to partner with a hotel and to benefit from its history, location and marketing – as long as it’s the right fit – just as the hotel will benefit from having an evianSpa as an extra revenue stream and a boost for occupancy and, potentially, room rates.”

Evian is also ruling out the idea of running spas too. “The overall mission at Danone is ‘health through nutrition for all’ – evian belongs there clearly, but spas are not part of our core business,” he says. “We’ll provide a complete concept and full logistical support for implementing the license, but we’re happy to join our forces with experts in the field [in operational terms].”

RELEVANT ROLLOUT

As the location for the launch of the concept, evianSpa Tokyo has been a success that Houel says he and the hotel partners are “very happy with”. But now the idea is to grow the concept in the right markets and

Favourites

Book: Tom Sharpe’s *Will series* is absurd and hilarious

Film: *The Party* (Peter Sellers) and *Dr Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick)

Food: A Saint-Honoré cake from Patisserie des Rêves in Paris is a real treat

What do you do in your free time? I cook, I travel, I discover. With my family and friends

Time of year: Each season

is special and I need this change of time
Best non-evian spa: Les Fermes de Marie (see SB05/1 p62) in Megève, France. It offers a great consumer experience – service is friendly and excellent
Spa treatment: a full relaxing treatment combining deep tissue massage that really acts on stress points, and a scalp massage
Best advice: “It ain’t

over til it’s over”, not really personal advice but a Lenny Kravitz song. It’s another way to say keep pushing if you believe in what you do
Who do you admire most? All entrepreneurs who build a successful business from scratch. And my wife for her impressive multitasking and wit, combined with this mysterious feminine gift of being able to walk in 12cm heels

countries with the right hotel partner. “It’s not a question of going massive for us,” says Houel. “It’s a question of being relevant.”

With evian distributing to over 150 countries, Houel says the priority will be on those where the brand has a “super premium image”. Typically these are countries in Asia, such as Japan, Korea, China and Singapore where distribution is focused on hotels, restaurants and other high-end businesses. The UAE and Russia also show promise. In comparison, the distribution in markets such as France and the UK is larger and more ubiquitous. “In Asia the brand is more linked to luxury which makes it a better fit for spas,” says Houel. “But we’ll obviously look at potential projects in other countries where we have a strong image and awareness though.”

The goal will be to target five-star, urban hotels which have enough space – at least 800sq m (8,611 sq ft) – to do the concept justice. In France, the priority will be to create a flagship evianSpa with the imminent renovation of the Hôtel Royal. But it’s too early to disclose details of other possible developments: “We’re still in the process of meeting various operators,” Houel says. “We’ll be very happy to identify a handful of projects by the end of the year and then go from there.”

“It’s really exciting to deploy a brand in a new category. We think the spa concept we’ve developed is a distinctive one. But at the same time we’re humble. We know we’re not the first ones in the market and we know we have to learn. But the initial reaction we’ve had from potential partners has been positive so far.” ●



PATRICK

SAUSSAY

We talk to the spa consultant charged with international development for the new evianSpa brand

KATIE BARNES » MANAGING EDITOR » SPA BUSINESS

What's your background?

I've been in consulting for 16 years including senior manager roles at global business consultancy firms Andersen and BearingPoint. I've been involved with the modernisation of major multinational companies in varying sectors – from aeronautics to consumer goods. For three years, I focused on healthcare organisations, including the healthcare ministry in France and several French hospitals.

My work and travels eventually led me to the wellness industry, where I thought my experiences of project management in complex environments would help. I spent three years as managing director of the Swiss spa and skincare brand After the Rain with a view to developing it internationally.

How did you hear about evianSpa?

I crossed paths with Laurent Houel in early 2012 when he was finalising the first evianSpa concept in Tokyo (see p30). I was immediately taken by the concept and intrigued by his ambitions to roll it out worldwide. He had the marketing and business development expertise in the luxury sector and a deep knowledge of evian's core values; while I had the spa experience and business development/project management expertise.

I set up the Global Project & Spa Advisory consultancy and evian is my first client.

I helped to put the finishing touches to the concept and business plan and to set up the development strategy. I'm now setting up meetings with hotel partners that will hopefully lead to projects

What will your work involve?

I'll be focusing on the international development of evianSpa. Initially, I helped to put the finishing touches to the concept and business plan and to set up the development strategy. As part of the development process, I'm now setting up prospective meetings with hotel partners that will hopefully lead to projects and implementing the evianSpa brand. As part of the licence we'll provide all the necessary support from understanding the concept to treatment menu and therapist training and operating protocols. Management support is also available via my consultancy if it's required.

It all depends on the hotel's needs. Our common goal is to secure consistency and quality of the evianSpa brand. We can work with a hotel to implement an evianSpa that fits with its specific positioning – whether its introducing more locally-inspired treatments, therapies for couples or children, or working on something that can increase a guest's length of stay.

Will evianSpa be your sole client?

Not exactly. Launching a worldwide spa concept is a huge project, which requires deep involvement and working in lots of different areas. So, evian is the main focus for Global Project & Spa Advisory, but there are some other possibilities in the pipeline.

Wellness is a young and exciting industry. There are lots of challenges, especially the growing need for delivering high-quality experiences consistently and developing financially sustainable businesses. But there are also lots of opportunities.

What's exciting about evianSpa?

The arrival of evian in the wellness industry, with a new and fresh approach is clearly exciting and it generates a real business opportunity. The idea of making the concept relevant to different markets and cultures is what really inspires me. ●