

The joy of the first massage after lockdown

Alice B-B relishes being touched in her first post-lockdown treatment

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Chenot's energetic massage

ALEX TEUSCHER

Oooh, isn't a post-lockdown knees-up in Ibiza tempting? But annoyingly, the smartest holiday choice has to be a medical spa in Switzerland.

Which is why, on Boris Johnson's much-lauded Super Saturday, I find myself sipping broth not beer. Heeding the government's messaging about taking responsibility for our health rather than relying on a unicorn vaccine, I'm the first British journalist to trial Chenot Palace for an immune system-boosting week at its medical spa in Weggis, Switzerland.

I'm anxious about whether this will work, having spent three months in the relatively Covid-free Cotswolds. The very nature of a spa is to be fingered and thumbed by up to ten therapists a day. However, the Chenot Palace management team are confident that their new protocols are safe. Staff members were tested for coronavirus before the spa opened in July and have their temperatures checked every morning. There are mask and sanitiser stations, and treatment rooms and equipment are deep-cleaned after every use, and it's one at a time in the sauna.



The exterior of Chenot Palace Weggis, ALEX TEUSCHER

To date, Switzerland has come off fairly lightly, with 36,514 cases and 1,711 deaths at time of writing. But the threat of contagion still hangs heavy in the air. So off I went, the wellness equivalent of Christiane Amanpour, to the spa front line.

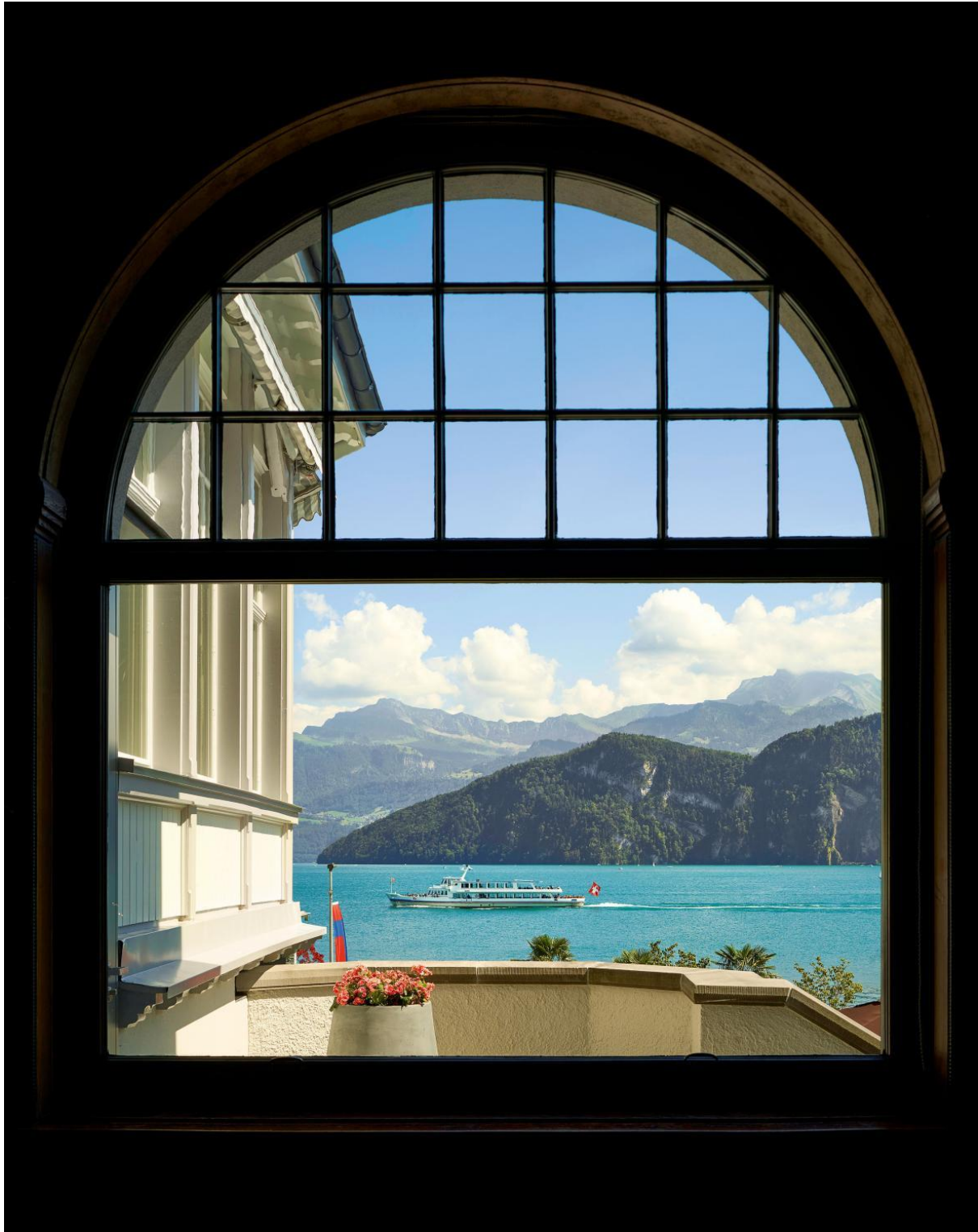
In the 1970s, long before it was fashionable, Henri Chenot began looking at how poor lifestyle choices can result in a build-up of toxins, potentially leading to degenerative diseases. Over the past 50 years his method has been developed to prevent disease, rebalancing the body's physiology using a combination of Chinese and Western medicine.

The new Chenot mothership is on the banks of Lake Lucerne, so the best bedrooms overlook the crystal-clear water. Next to the hotel, with its fairytale turrets, is a modern extension by the architect Davide Macullo, with acoustically engineered sleep suites, cryotherapy rooms and Nasa-designed anti-gravity treadmills.

With the virus on my mind, treatments that boost immunity and reduce inflammation are high on my list. I see a doctor, nutritionist and Chinese medicine practitioner, and have lifestyle biomarker diagnostic tests, where I learn that despite my penchant for butter and my age of 45, my arterial age is a thrilling 34. Tests show my spleen to be stressed, so I am prescribed a meridian massage followed by laser acupuncture (less ouch than needles). Another issue is the weakening of the collagen in my skin, so I have a course of photo-biomodulation: a full-body, low-level laser therapy that gives cellular metabolism, blood flow and wound healing a kick up the bum, shunting collagen-production and inflammation-reduction into action.

There's also the daily rhythm (the body likes routine, I learn) of an aromatherapy bath, a mud wrap on a warm water bed, and a hot and cold hose-down with power jets, all of which helps to sweat out toxins, soften the

capillaries and get the lymphatic fluid moving. There is also a daily massage. I nearly burst into Madonna’s *Like a Virgin* after my first post-lockdown massage: “Touched for the very first time.”



A view of Lake Lucerne

FABRICE FOUILLET

But what I really love about Chenot is that it's not about diets or weight loss (although there can be a welcome side-effect; I leave minus my lockdown arse). Instead, the reduced-calorie Mediterranean menu – which topped a Harvard analysis of 39 diets for reducing heart disease, metabolic syndrome, diabetes and certain cancers – helps the body to expel toxins as well as recalibrating poor lifestyle choices that may well have started in childhood. Unlike the culinary misery of Mayr-based establishments, in which the staple buckwheat toast and sheep yoghurt makes you hangry and is unsustainable in real life, one of the joys of Chenot is the Michelin-star type fireworks that emerge from the kitchen, created without salt, sugar, butter, white flour, alcohol and the rest. “Food and lifestyle is medicine,” Dr George Gaitanos, Chenot's chief operating officer and scientific director, says. “You can reset the body here, and then maintain it with lifestyle choices. The doctor is you. For me, health is about performance. And Chenot is about attaining the best performance for each individual.”

Right now, that performance includes self-protection and prevention. Ibiza can wait.