

THE WEEK FASHION

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SUMMER 2019

Life-changing spas

'Transformative wellness travel' is one of the industry's hottest trends right now. *The Week / Travel* checks in to two health retreats that promise to help you live longer, be happier and look younger...



Espace Chenot Health Wellness Spa

L'Albereta, Franciacorta, Italy

Alexandra Zagalsky tests out biontology, a treatment method much loved by Premier League footballers

The goal

To feel more 'at one' with yourself: to sleep better, to eat well, and to get those healing juices flowing. Having said that, most people come to lose weight.

In brief

The buzzword here is biontology: a term coined by founder Henri Chenot in the early '90s to describe the perfect synergy between body, mind and soul, achieved by the expulsion of toxins. Considered to be a leading light in the world of

holistic therapies, Frenchman Chenot, now 76, was one of the first wellness practitioners to fuse western medical diagnostics with eastern treatments. As such, the famed Chenot Method combines the principles of Chinese medicine with state-of-the-art technology as a means of enhancing the body's natural healing powers.

The place

Chenot's other Italian retreat is located at the rather more regal Palace Merano hotel in South Tyrol, but L'Albereta flies the flag for old-school Italian glamour.

Located on a hilltop in the tiny village of Franciacorta, the ivy-clad 19th-century villa is surrounded by vineyards and offers sublime views of Lombardy's undulating landscape, with the main terrace looking out across the splendid Lake Iseo. There's plenty to keep the guests occupied between therapies: a large outdoor pool, tennis court,

indoor pool with steam room and sauna, mountain biking down the coastal road to crystal-clear shores, and even snooker in the lounge.

The majority of those booked into L'Albereta are diehard fans, and a large contingency are returning visitors. Guests speak in hushed tones and the prescribed dress code is luxe leisure wear (cashmere, of course), although many waft around in waffle robes, even at dinner time.

The lowdown

Lovers of Italian food (surely everyone?) will be happy to hear this isn't the kind of spa that serves up thimble-sized portions of soup; in contrast to many luxury med-spas, this rambling retreat offers a less hardcore approach to shedding pounds and feeling re-energised. Toxin-busting therapies - among them, high-pressure massages using suction cups and electro-stimulation rods (not as draconian



From left: rustic décor kept simple; follow the lights to find the hidden sculpture garden; calming views from the dining room. Below: 'suction' cups encourage natural healing

as they sound), mineral-heavy mud wraps and fat-freezing 'cryolipolysis' treatments - are paired with a carefully calibrated diet.

Main meals comprise three calorie-counted seasonal dishes; modest in size, but beautifully presented and big on flavour, as good food is integral to the centre's wellbeing ethos. Franciacorta is Italian wine country, which arguably makes the sobriety of a spa getaway somewhat ironic, but there's plenty to keep you busy - or, indeed, not - as your time is very much your own at L'Albereta; programmes tailored to weight loss and detoxification come without the drudgery of extreme fasting or forensic medical tests (unless requested, of course).

The most popular programme is the Fundamental Detox Henri Chenot seven-night stay, which begins with a full nutritional/lifestyle assessment to determine your metabolic age, as well as a bio-energetic test that flags up any energy 'blockages'. Your Chenot specialist then devises a bespoke therapy programme that aims to release these blockages from your meridian pathways.

Make no mistake, the Chenot Method isn't what you'd call pampering: treatments are geared towards invigorating the system and improving circulation, so expect a certain amount of pain for your gain. For example, being slathered in detoxifying green clay (rich in microalgae and essential oils) and wrapped up in thermal gauze like a human burrito is wonderfully relaxing. However, part two of the therapy, the cleansing hydro-jet, is significantly less soothing and involves being blasted with a high-pressure hose. It's uncomfortable

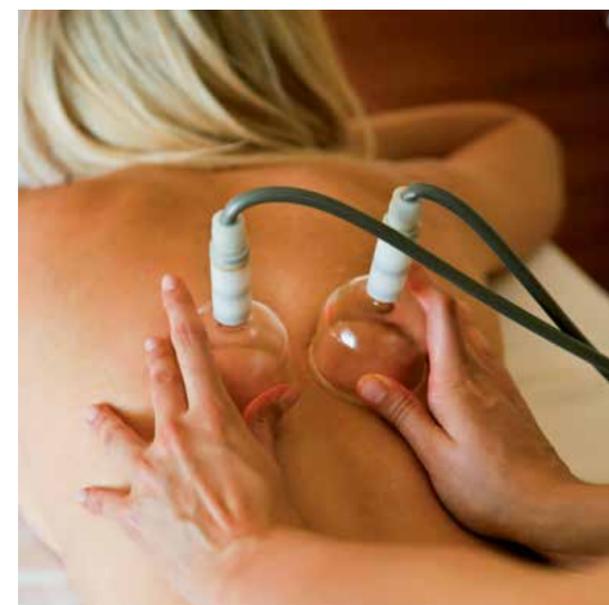
rather than painful, and it sure feels like it has shifted some cellulite.

For those who want a fully immersive experience, the spa offers many 'bolt-on' therapies and medical tests in addition to those set out in individual Chenot programmes. These range from respiratory and cardio assessments to acupuncture, hydro-colonics and 'immunity-enriching' ozone therapy. Not for the faint-hearted, the latter involves having your own reoxygenated blood injected back into your system. Anti-ageing face and body treatments are extensive, too, with innumerable drainage massages as well as Ultherapy, a non-invasive ultrasound treatment that promises to lift and tighten the skin. Also, the 'aesthetic medicine department' offers wrinkle-reducing hyaluronic acid fillers, glycolic acid peels and collagen-boosting micro-needling; cosmetic surgery is on the menu, too.

Does it work?

While the objective may be to boost a sluggish lymphatic system, the healing effects are, surprisingly, more psychological: by day two, I felt not only rested but much more alert and upbeat, as if my mind had suddenly sharpened and those feel-good chemical messengers floating around my body had been given a serious shake-up. What's more, my food cravings subsided and I soon forgot all about my fantasy Italian thin-crust with pepperoni.

The biggest lesson to be gleaned from the Chenot Method, therefore, is not what you should add to your own wellness regime but what you should try to 'unlearn'. And, believe it or not, those bad habits are surprisingly easy to correct. *Healing Holidays* offers a four-night *Dominique Chenot Spa Wellness programme at L'Albereta (albereta.it/en)* from £2,185 per person (sharing a double room) including flights, transfers and full-board accommodation (*healingholidays.com*). *British Airways fly to Milan Linate and Milan Bergamo (ba.com)*



Lanserhof Tegernsee

Marienstein, Germany

Felix Bischof fulfils a long-held ambition when he checks in for the most extreme of extreme detoxes

The goal

To 'reawaken' the body's self-healing powers – the Lanserhof *schlagworte* (buzzwords) are 'prevention' and 'regeneration' governed by a healthy gut.

In brief

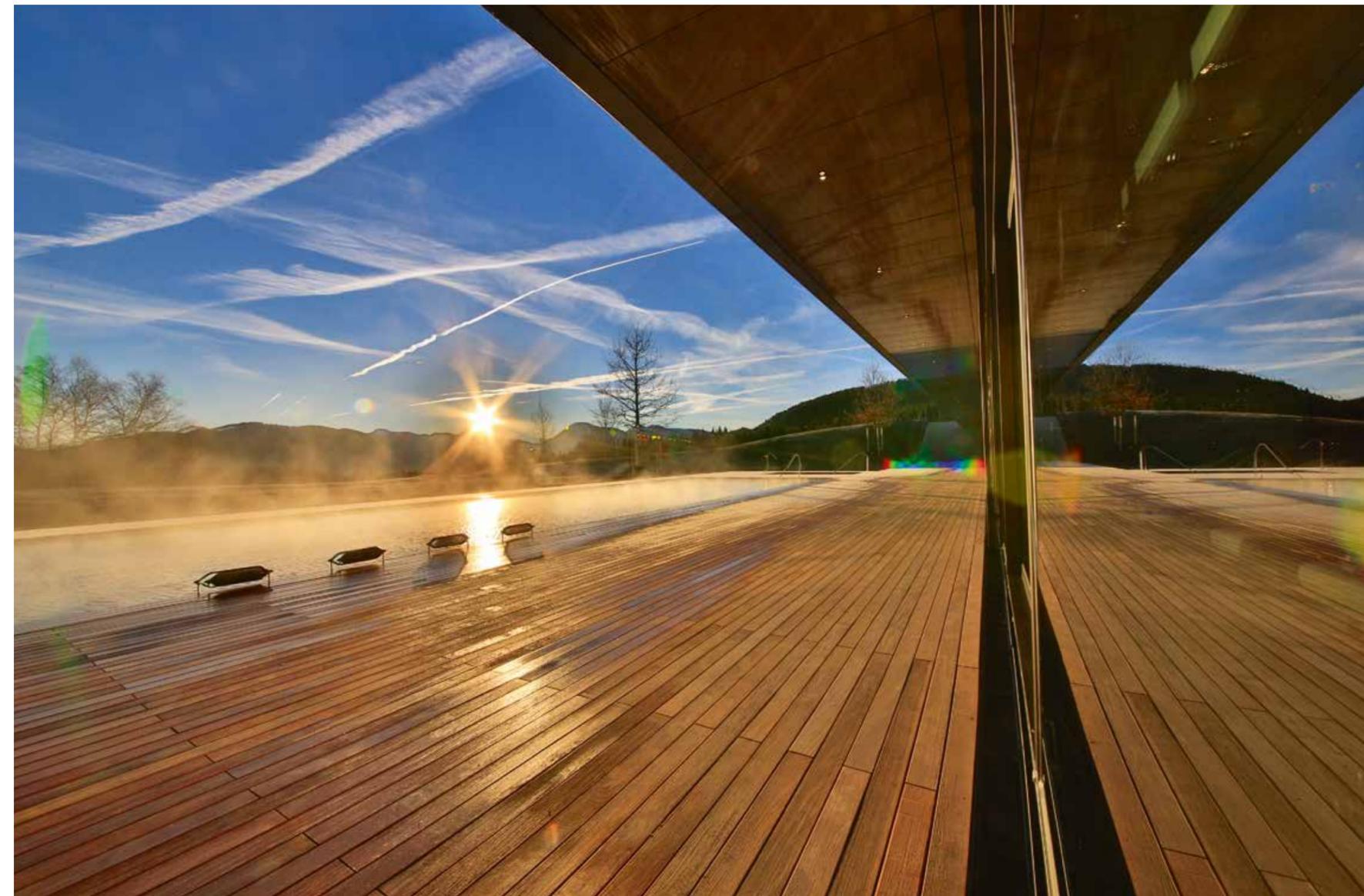
The king of results-driven retreats, Lanserhof was launched in Austria in 1984 when the small Lans Hotel set on the medieval Old Salt Road was refashioned as an innovative sanctuary. In 2012, a specialist day clinic opened in Hamburg, followed by this outpost in Tegernsee in 2014. Unifying them all is the award-winning Lans Med Concept.

Developed and researched for more than 30 years, Lanserhof's health plans combine the philosophy of 20th-century Austrian physician and scientist FX Mayr with modern medicine, naturopathy and

alternative treatments. Meticulously detailed bespoke treatment plans and a set-up that is famously discreet make it a favourite of business magnates, politicians and socialites. Earlier this year, Victoria Beckham was seen on a Lanserhof bike, taking in the bucolic views around the 9km² Lake Tegernsee.

The place

Not a hint of bleak sanatorium here. Instead, Lanserhof Tegernsee is a sprawling, luxurious sanctuary, set in a stunning location with elegantly sparse interiors and breathtaking architecture. When drafting Lanserhof's blueprint, Düsseldorf's Ingenhoven Architects envisioned the 21,000m² retreat to frame a central patio, inspired by monastery cloisters. All 70 rooms feature sizeable private balconies looking out onto rolling green hills,



At Lanserhof Tegernsee, results-driven treatments find their match in cutting-edge architecture set against the bucolic backdrop of rural Bavaria

and forests, and the site's dramatic heated outdoor pool – filled with water with the same saline content as the ocean – would not be out of place in a Helmut Newton photo.

The lowdown

I have long fantasised about staying at the dedicated health retreat of Lanserhof Tegernsee – a plan inspired by the prolonged cure holidays of the past, as described in books and films, and by my own German grandparents. The retreat is famously Germanic in its efficiency: in the lead-up to arrival, guests are sent weblinks to view their chosen treatment package and room details. I opted for the seven-night Lans Med Basic Package.

A fleet of private chauffeured cars wait outside Munich Airport to

accompanied by a measured portion of plain dietary bread, which serves as a training tool for considerate chewing. In accordance with the belief that digestion starts in the mouth, each mouthful of bread is to be chewed at least 30 times. Tea is quite literally on tap: herbal brews made from local ingredients such as birch leaves, silverweed and lavender are dispensed from metal spouts set into the wall.

In between meals, toxins – now freed from internal blockages – are removed from the body in saunas and steam rooms. Vigorous treatments include regular abdominal massages, electrolysis foot baths and a lymph detox pack, where skin is slathered in a potent algae concoction, which is then activated with micro-molecular steam blasted into a small tent-like construction that sits over the body. Then there's the daily changing programme of exercise classes – yoga, Zumba and Pilates included – and outdoor activities. I quickly fall into a daily routine beginning with morning group exercises *en plein air* – lunges and stretches to a soundtrack of birdsong and cowbells – followed by Nordic hikes past wild meadows, and herbal tea with fellow guests in the evening.

The philosophy here is simple, and appears easily translatable to my everyday life. First, 'no raw after four' – uncooked foods, including salads and crudités, are harder to digest; night-time is the right time for rest and the body's healing processes. Second, take your time and chew – patient chewing (30-40 times per mouthful) eases demands on the digestive system. Third, drink responsibly – plenty of water and herbal tea, but not during meals.

Does it work?

Days at Lanserhof Tegernsee start and end with views of forests, green hills and the Alps in the distance, and the cloistered set-up does make you hit pause and focus on your wellbeing. I acclimatise quickly to my new regime, which seems to work wonders. By day seven, I have lost weight, gained energy and feel thoroughly rested. I leave a devotee of FX Mayr's rules. Chew, chew, chew...

A seven-night stay at Lanserhof Tegernsee starts from €5,215, which includes the Lans Med Basic Package and single occupancy in a double bedroom (lanserhof.com/en). Or Healing Holidays can arrange a seven-night Lans Med Basic programme from £4,133 pp sharing, including flights, transfers and full-board (healingholidays.com; 020 8131 6868). A London Lanserhof pied-à-terre is set to open this year at Mayfair's The Arts Club