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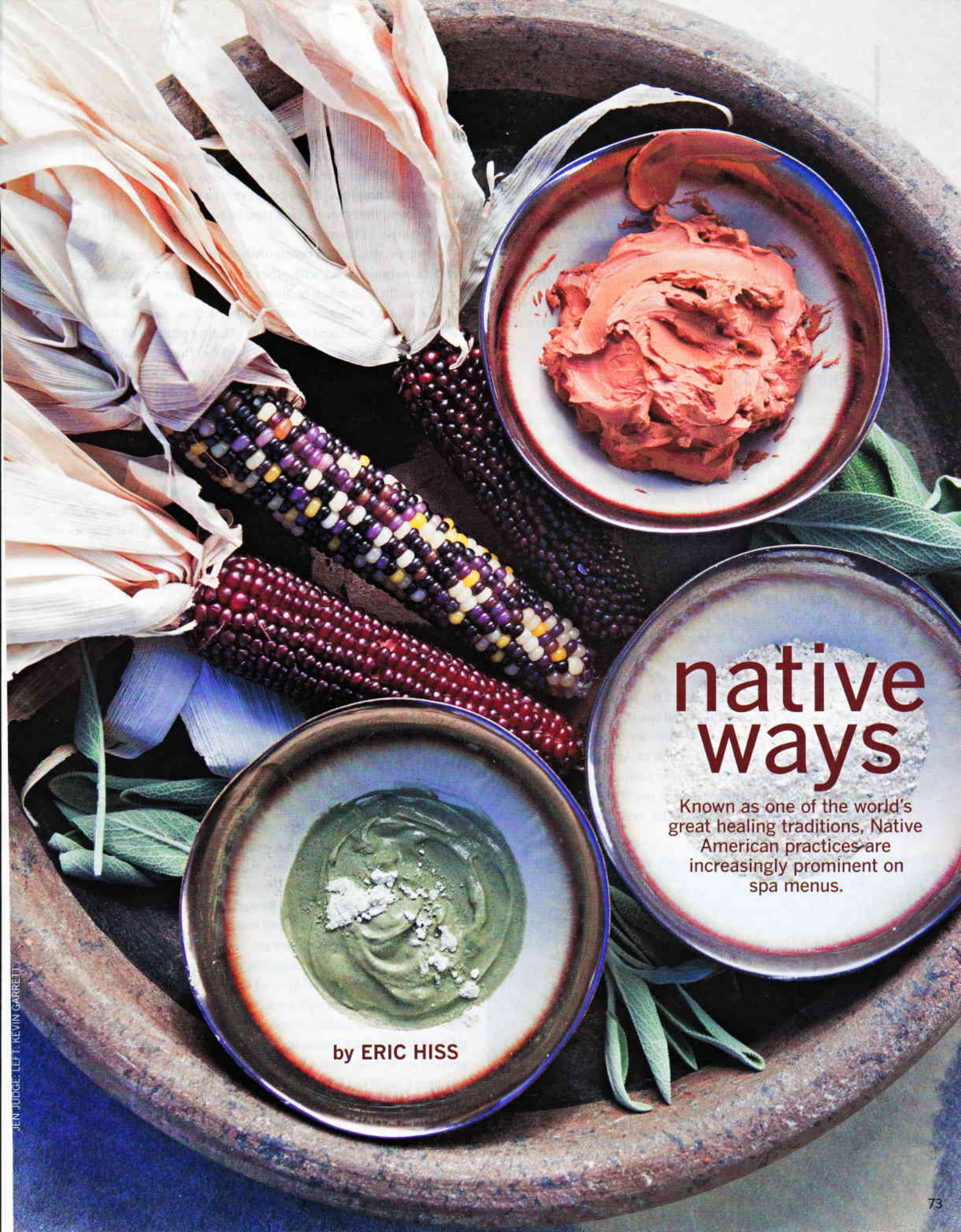
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native ways

Known as one of the world's great healing traditions, Native American practices are increasingly prominent on spa menus.

by ERIC HISS

JEN JUDGE; LEFT: KEVIN GARRETT

History is poignantly clear that since the arrival of the first European explorers on the North American continent more than five centuries ago, relations between the newcomers and indigenous Native Americans have been complicated. Thankfully, those dark days are mostly behind us, allowing for a rebirth of tribal traditions that includes a renewed focus and respect for native language, culture, ancient wisdom and wellness practices. As a result, Native American traditions are finding their way onto spa menus across the country, allowing practitioners to tap into a wealth of knowledge stretching back thousands of years.

➤ The Essentials

It goes without saying that “Native American” is an incredibly broad term, covering hundreds of tribes from all parts of the country. But there are some commonalities in their spiritual and wellness traditions. The foundation of the Native American belief system holds that everything in nature moves in a continuous cycle, reflected by powerful symbols such as the medicine wheel — used by many tribes since before recorded time. Made of rocks placed in a circle, this symbol serves as a sacred compass of life, marked by “spokes” of stones representing the Four Directions of north, south, east and west. Depending on the culture, each direction is assigned various colors, attributes and one of the four primal elements: earth, air, fire and water. As an example, for the Hopi, considered one of the most traditional tribes, north represents earth, the color white and the body; east denotes air, the color yellow and the mind; south relates to fire, red and the heart; while west is connected to water, the color blue and spirit.

Stones such as basalt are considered important healing tools and used by many tribes such as Arizona’s Pima people. Placed on the body to access trigger points and direct energies, stones are used to soothe, remove negative energy and bring about a sense of balance. One of the most prized stones of all,

however, is the gemstone turquoise. Holding a revered place with the tribes of the Southwest, where it’s usually encountered, turquoise is regarded as sacred and energetically related to creativity and expression. It’s a mainstay of healing practices when placed on areas of the body such as the throat and wrist, and it’s commonly worn as a sign of prestige and protection from negative influences.

Not surprising with a community so tied to the land, Native practitioners also work with other allies from the natural world. Traditionally, Cherokee healers recognized over 600 medicinal plants, and like members of other tribes, only harvested herbs when needed and only after offering prayers of thanks. Although specific ingredients vary by tribe, the most important Native botanicals generally include sweetgrass, sage and tobacco. Sweetgrass, plaited like a braid, is dried and then ceremoniously smudged for gentle healing and renewed connection to earth. Sage, found in multiple forms, is used for clarity, strength and removal of unwanted energies. Tobacco, considered by many tribes as a sacred gift from the Creator, is communally smoked in ritual ceremonies. Other botanicals are applied directly to the body, such as blue corn, which nurtures skin and acts as a natural exfoliant. But it’s not all about nature: Other elements intrinsic to Native American practice are sacred songs, rhythmic drumming, dream interpretation and energy work.

Today, across the country, treatments utilizing these practices run the gamut from skin-deep to spirit cleansing. Just as spa menus differ, the focus of these tradition-based treatments also vary, ranging from multi-step therapies that may incorporate a touch of native culture, such as smudging, to deeply rooted experiences at spas built on native homelands as a direct homage to ancestral traditions. Here are six acclaimed spas that interpret the substance and spirit of Native American healing practices.

➤ Elements of the Ancestors

Treatments using traditional Native American ingredients are becoming increasingly common, especially in areas that have Native history and ready access to locally sourced botanicals like juniper and sage. A prime example can be found in Santa Fe at the foot of New Mexico’s Sangre de Cristo Mountains, where the SháNah Spa & Wellness Center, located at the historic **Bishop’s Lodge Ranch Resort & Spa**, was named after the Navajo word for “vitality and energy.”

“Since the spa’s opening, we set out to echo the elements of the native Pueblo people,” says spa director Antonietta Matter. “This area was sacred and special to them, and we do our best to maintain that energy throughout our treatments and native ingredients.” The menu includes treatments such as the Purification Polish (50 minutes, \$135), which uses the cleansing properties of blue corn to exfoliate and nourish skin; and the Tesuque Clay Wrap (50 minutes, \$135), a treatment incorporating a local clay known for its healing properties. (Like people of many cultures, Native Americans hold that some clays and mud nourish skin and remove toxins).



Farther north near Park City, Utah, **Sundance Resort** is best known for its celebrity owner Robert Redford. But due in no small part to Redford's own personal interest in the West, the spa also boasts a wealth of Native-influenced treatments reflecting a commitment to sustainable practices and respect for the area's original inhabitants.

The Spa at Sundance cultivates the Sioux concept of *hocoka*, which means creating a sacred space for healing and restoration. Through mindfulness, use of indigenous ingredients and respect for native traditions, this spirit is felt in therapies like the Sage & Sweet Grass Ritual (90 minutes, \$170), a multi-step journey that begins with a sacred sage smudging to cleanse, followed by the burning of sweetgrass to seal in healing energy. Then, after a dry exfoliation, mud from the Great Salt Lake is applied to remove toxins and revitalize skin, echoing the way the substance was used by the ancients. The Sundance Stone Massage (90 minutes, \$170) brings a Native influence to a popular spa staple. First, guests choose one of the Four Directions in order to connect with the characteristic and scent most sought during their treatment (for example, the renewal and rebirth of the east). Stones are then placed in the palms and along the spine to evoke the medicine wheel, and a massage is applied to bring the body in harmony with the greater powers represented by this mystic symbol.

➤ A Sense of Place

Taking the traditions to even deeper levels are spas that follow the blueprint of Native design practices by creating spaces honoring ancient customs. One such venue is the year-old spa at the **Primland** resort, located in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia. This area was the homeland of Cherokee, Monacan and five other tribes, and the spa was designed to stay true to nature and Native ways in the context of a modern spa environment. Primland's European owners and designers were so inspired by local Native American culture and history that the spa was purpose-built from the ground up as a homage to traditional beliefs. Aided by cultural consultant Little Wolf Griffith, a Monacan elder, the spa design features elements such as fealty to the Four Directions, which involved decisions like keeping the water element — the swimming pool — located in the south, per Monacan belief, and incorporating color schemes of turquoise and beige to honor earth and sky. In order for guests to have contact with elements of Native American life during their stay, they decorated the space with authentic artifacts, such as a traditional deerskin wedding vase and dream catchers donated from Griffith's personal collection. Aspects of the treatment menu are culturally influenced too; the Magic Lake Wrap & Float (60 minutes, \$130) was inspired by a Native American legend about a mythical body of water protected by the animal kingdom.

A casino resort might be an unexpected place to find a wellness sanctuary, but that's the proposition of the Skaná Spa at **Turning Stone Resort and Casino**, located on Oneida Indian Nation land outside Syracuse, New York. Meaning "peace"



in the Oneida language, Skaná was opened as a place of refuge, designed to allow the outside in. The structure is inspired by a traditional Oneida longhouse, with broad timbers arching over an open reception area, and a glass-enclosed passageway that allows visitors to witness the change and cycles of the seasons as they enter.

The spa menu spills over with an abundance of ingredients used historically by the Oneida, including sage, lavender, maple and white pine. The latter is held in particularly high esteem by the tribe as a powerful symbol of peace; its fragrant oil is valued for its use in treating fatigue and exhaustion.

But the most uniquely indigenous experience one can participate in is the sweat lodge, arranged through the resort. Set apart from the spa's main building in a wooded area, up to 10 people at a time are invited to disconnect from the outside world in a three-hour inner journey called the Sweat Lodge Experience (\$300). Overseen by an American Indian treatment specialist, the experience is composed of traditional storytelling, drumming and chants, and culminates as participants are enveloped in darkness and heat, created inside a red willow and buffalo-hide structure by fire-heated stones splashed with water. Tradition believes that physical and spiritual maladies are left behind through the deep sweat and darkness, and participants emerge reborn with new vitality from the womb-like environment.

➤ Spirit Guides and Shamans

For spa-goers who want to encounter this knowledge base in an even deeper way, there are more esoteric opportunities to experience Native American healing. Whether one refers to them as medicine men, shamans or energy workers, some guardians of this ancient canon lead experiences that go deep into our essence to clear issues, blockages and past hurts — both physical and psychological. This work is very specialized, and those practicing at the highest level are either natives from a healing lineage or gifted non-natives who have been accepted by native teachers and instructed in this subtle science. (Continued on page 86)

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KATHY BERNSTEIN
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She has just come back from down under, where she previewed the new Beach Suites on Hayman Island, communed with nature at Longitude 131 at Ayers Rock and sampled the spa offerings at Qualia on Hamilton Island — truly combining nature and nurture.



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thorough written questionnaire and a one-on-one interview, a highly skilled therapist designs an ideal program to address one's individual needs. Incredible!

(Continued from page 77)

Belen Stoneman, a member of the Gila River Indian Community and a healer at Aji Spa at the Gila-owned **Sheraton Wild Horse Pass Resort & Spa** near Phoenix, Arizona, is one such gifted individual. Her *Thoachta*, or "Healing," by Belen Stoneman treatment (110 minutes, from \$270) — part of the spa's special Indigenous menu, created and managed by cultural caretakers — is a sought-after experience that combines traditional Indian healing doctrines, massage and polarity techniques, as well as deep energy work, to relieve physical and emotional issues. Trained in the healing arts by elders, Stoneman is the only person allowed to do this work, and reservations made well in advance are highly recommended.

Trained by both Native American healers and elders of the ancient Q'ero people of Peru, modern-day shaman Jon Rasmussen — a California native whose wild youth earned him multiple near-death experiences and a breakthrough spiritual experience — plies these ancient techniques along the redwood-studded

Central California coastline of Big Sur. During his Shaman Sessions (from 90 minutes, from \$250), offered upon request at the luxe **Post Ranch Inn**, the sun-kissed and serene practitioner (who could easily be mistaken for a Big Sur art dealer) uses a toolkit that includes rattles, hawk feathers and energized stones to help clients clear energetic baggage. Heady stuff, yes, so sessions usually begin with a discussion to explain the process and uncover issues and ailments before Rasmussen sets to work. He starts by asking the individual to select a healing stone (known as a *cuya*), then attends to his prone client with ancient chants, passing sacred objects over the body, and calling in unseen energies. The work is deeply personal, but Rasmussen says it's not unusual to have clients end a session by sobbing tears of joy.

Suffice it to say that whether the effects are life-changing or merely pleasantly pampering, it's clear the increasing influence of Native American healing on our modern bodies and spirits is alive and well. *

OTHER GREAT NATIVE AMERICAN TREATMENTS

CURRENT SPA & SALON AT NORTHERN QUEST RESORT & CASINO Airway Heights, WA

Suggested treatment: Purification Ritual

This multi-step treatment honors Earth's restorative powers by utilizing a body masque of mineral-rich red mud to remove toxins, followed by a massage with juniper sage oil to relax and restore skin's luster. **90 minutes, \$185**

MII AMO

Sedona, AZ

Suggested treatment: Inner Quest

This meditative journey honors a traditional Native American ceremony. The treatment includes sweetgrass smudging, a gentle massage on power points using cedar and sage oils, and a papoose-

like wrap in a Pendleton blanket to create warmth similar to a sweat lodge's. **60 minutes, \$220**

OJO CALIENTE MINERAL SPRINGS RESORT & SPA

Ojo Caliente, NM

Suggested treatment: Native American Blue Corn & Prickly Pear Salt Scrub

This purifying exfoliation uses indigenous blue corn, prickly pear and ancient sea salt to remove dry skin and impurities. Try solo as a 25-minute scrub, or longer with a complementing herbal-oil scalp massage. **50 minutes, \$85**

SAGESTONE SPA & SALON AT RED MOUNTAIN RESORT & SPA

St. George, UT

Suggested treatment: Four Directions

Created with respect to

the cardinal directions of the medicine wheel, this uplifting full-body treatment uses sacred herbs and plants in different ways, including a cornmeal/tobacco exfoliation, cedarwood oil massage and sweetgrass wrap. **75 minutes, \$160**

TAMAYA MIST SPA & SALON AT HYATT REGENCY TAMAYA RESORT & SPA

Santa Ana Pueblo, NM

Suggested treatment: Spirit Path

Designed for the ultimate in relaxation, this experience includes a massage incorporating aromatic oils, a blue corn exfoliation, and Native herbal wrap followed by an aromatherapy scalp massage. **90 minutes, \$190**



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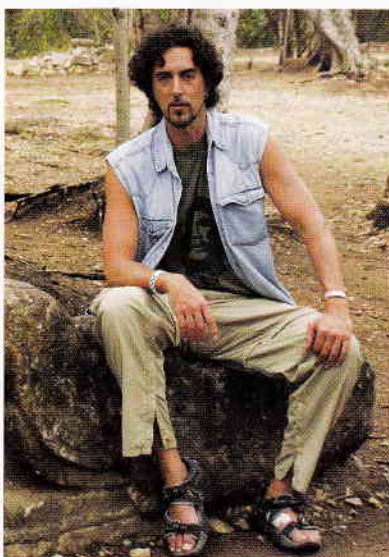
contributors



► Manhattan-based beauty writer **Rona Berg** gives insight into spring's most popular botanicals and reports on other beauty news in our SpaBeauty section (page 27). A contributor to *O, Real Simple* and *The New York Times*, she has also authored two beauty guides, including *Fast Beauty: 1,000 Quick Fixes* (Workman, 2005). "It's what I like to call glamour on the

fly," says Rona. In addition to writing, Rona travels nationwide speaking about organic and natural beauty. "Beauty is a very complicated and rich subject that sometimes gets treated in a superficial manner," says Rona. "I really like to explore the depth of it, and talk to women about what they can do to maximize their beauty from the inside out."

► While interviewing skincare experts for "Face Value," (page 51) Columbia, South Carolina-based writer **Katie McElveen** was nervous she'd be given conflicting advice, but that wasn't the case. "Every person I spoke with reaffirmed the need for sun protection, exfoliation and antioxidants," she says. After her research was finished, McElveen experienced an awakening of her own. "I thought I was doing all the right things for my skin, but it turns out I needed to get a lot more aggressive." Now she's doling out advice of her own: "Apply sunscreen to the backs of your hands when you're driving – the windshield doesn't offer protection from the sun."



► Writing about Native American healing practices for "Native Ways" (page 72) wasn't **Eric Hiss'** first foray into the subject matter. "My extensive travels throughout the Southwest when I was younger sparked an interest in native cultures that continues today." From a ceremonial sage smudging to an hours-long sweat lodge experience, Hiss was impressed by the effectiveness

of these therapies, and by the deep respect the therapists show toward tribal traditions. "It was so revealing to speak with dedicated healers practicing traditions that go back more than a millennium." The Los Angeles-based travel writer contributes to *Condé Nast Traveler* and *Men's Journal*, and is the author of a walking guidebook to Los Angeles.