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Worldwise: Spa Designer Cary Collier's Favorite Things



Cary Collier co-founded Blu Spas in 1999. COURTESY CARY COLLIER

As a young child born and raised in west Texas, among cattle feed yards and ranching, Cary Collier always dreamed of becoming a cowboy. Instead, Collier, now 62 and living in Whitefish, Montana, took a decidedly different path: He has made a career in running and designing spas.

Since the 1980s, Collier and his wife, Kim, who he met at the Spa at the Crescent in Dallas, have worked on spa projects across Asia and America, ranging from tiny boutique hotels to giant conglomerates. "The idea of a 'spa' became my passion as I could just see that 'body, mind, and soul' had a future that would evolve," Collier says. "So, I started a consulting company to plan and design spas, plus sort out the operations."

Since founding Blu Spas in 1999, Collier and his co-founder, Doug Chambers, a business and real estate lawyer turned wellness expert, have worked on just shy of 400 spas in more than 40 countries, ranging from resorts to clubs and private houses. Recent projects include the Four Seasons Astir Palace Hotel Athens in Greece; Nobu Los Cabos in Mexico; and the Away Spa at the W Hotel in Philadelphia.

A signature offering of Blu Spas is the “event sauna,” inspired by the German sauna tradition *aufguss*, during which a sauna “master” helps to orchestrate the experience for users, including pouring water and essential oils over hot stones, and using towel rituals to diffuse vapors.

“The sauna *aufguss* or ‘event sauna’ definitely has a future in the U.S.,” says Collier. “It is not for every spa. But the concept, whether adhering to European traditions, or how we create our own interpretations of sauna bathing, will flourish as it offers entertainment and fun while taking in the benefits of bathing in a co-ed sauna. This is a contrast to dark and quiet saunas that also have their place.”

As the world gets closer to normal with the pandemic calming, most people are seeking to involve “nature, wherever and however,” Collier notes. “This includes a new frontier for crafting spa and soaking experiences in outdoor spaces: play porches, laugh loggias, sauna cabins and soaking pools, treehouses and jungle showers, elemental experiences with spa [or] bathing secret spots.” Indeed, he believes the most successful spas integrate “sustainable, sensory concepts and nature into adaptable indoor and outdoor spaces that all deliver a memorable and ‘feel good’ space... and give love to the ‘spaces between spaces.’”

Collier recently shared some of his favorite things with *Penta*.

I passed the time when I couldn’t work during the pandemic by... exploring more outdoor areas of Montana either with my wife, Kim, our daughters, Cierra and Asia, or solo—for pleasure, adventure, or workouts. Fly fishing in a river is sacred to me.

My favorite thing to drink right now is... Keto shakes such as vanilla, almond butter, and lion’s mane mushroom powder. They are a meal as part of my Keto regimen (delicious, energizing, and brain calming for me.)

The restaurant in my hometown that I love to take a visitor to is... Tupelo Grille in downtown Whitefish. It’s a great gathering place for food and the bar... we’re also grateful for the live music.

One of my favorite things about Montana is... the people. The friendly 'get it done' attitude reminds me of the people I grew up with in Texas. [They are] hard-working, have a sense of community, a dedication to truth, loyalty, honor, and a devotion to family.

If I were to buy a piece of art, it would be by... French nature artist Paul Cézanne. He strived and toiled to capture a moment in time, that if missed, was lost. It is just hard to turn away from his landscape art.

A spa treatment I can't stop doing is... a blend of Thai and Ashiatsu massage. Trust me on this.

A person who inspired me to do what I do is... the late Toni Beck, former director of The Greenhouse and The Spa at the Crescent in Hotel Crescent Court, Dallas. She was one of the most influential people in my life at the time and I still miss her.

My favourite hotel in the world is... Four Seasons Resort Bali at Jimbaran Bay. In 1997, we were part of the team that completed a new Balinese spa at the Four Seasons. The experience of crafting the details for a spa where everything was made in Bali changed my life and how I work. And it was one of the first spas in the world to shine on the importance and power of integrating outdoor spaces and experiences with indoor areas.

If I could have a meal with anybody, anywhere, it would be... Jay Shetty, author of *Think Like A Monk: Train Your Mind for Peace and Purpose Every Day*. A meal, walk in the park, or wherever Jay would like to meet... I'll be there.

What I love the most about the outdoors in Montana is... its position as a gateway to the Glacier National Park, the Whitefish Mountain Resort for winter skiing and summer hiking, and all the play choices at Whitefish Lake State Park. The perfect place to 'go out and play.'

A passion of mine that few people know about is... playing guitar. It is private for me because the sounds I once created were horrific! But I'm taking new lessons now with an exceptional musician and there is hope.

The thing that gets me up in the morning is... my purpose—duty and love. A happy spirit to make the day count.

This article has been edited for length and clarity.