

salons of the year grand-prize winner

Peter Conte Salon & Spa

There are plenty of captivating elements in Peter Conte Salon & Spa, a nature-inspired oasis in Matawan, New Jersey. From several water features created from local, hand-placed river rocks to elegant “trees” that cleverly cover support columns to rainforest showers in the treatment rooms, the space is a work of wonder. But lest you think Planet Earth was the driving inspiration for design, think again.

“Clients were always on our mind,” says co-owner Roger A. Peter. “Their comfort and relaxation is a priority to us. We wanted them to know however much they spend, they’re receiving high value for their money.” Based on their successful grand opening last fall, clients evidently agree they’re getting a big return on their investment.

EVERY LITTLE DETAIL

A client first entering the salon area will hear a funny thing: peace and quiet. Large sliding glass doors separate the cutting area from the hustle and bustle of the front desk, allowing stylists to focus on their clients without distraction.

“At other places anyone can walk up to a stylist and take time away from the person in the chair,” says co-owner Jennifer Conte. The doors discourage anyone without an appointment from wandering in. The doors also contain the noise from ringing phones and clients checking in or making purchases. “Everybody appreciates it,” says Conte.

The salon and spa are laid out in a circular design that allows areas to flow into one another and creates a seamless line for the eye. It also forms a path for clients to follow, so they are slowly immersed into the atmosphere of the salon as they move from



1. The water wall encourages clients to relax in the waiting area. 2. The circular design promotes a continuous flow in the layout.

each phase of their services. The layout makes the client the main attraction in every area—for example, the color area is positioned close to the styling stations so technicians can mix their chemicals near the client and discuss the process together. There is no “abandoning” a client to disappear into a backroom.

For the spa, Peter and Conte wanted to do something completely different that would go beyond a standard whirlpool tub or luxury shower, which many of their clients already have in their bathrooms at home. Instead, they implemented a grotto tub room that would allow couples to relax side-by-side



during water treatments, and installed rainforest showers that feel worlds away from small-town New Jersey. Says Peter, “While statistics indicate hydrotherapy services are difficult to make a profit on, ours are successful because they are unique and clients will gladly book them.”

FROM VISION TO REALITY

Because both Peter and Conte have spent decades in the industry and are still doing hair, they had a good grasp of the concept they wanted to create when they decided last year to relocate their nine-year-old salon into a larger, 3,800-square-foot space just down the street. Their goal: a warm and friendly place that wouldn’t intimidate their existing clients. To bring the vision to life, they teamed up with Cahill Studio, which has created a wide variety of spaces including restaurants, retail and nightclubs. The owners were very specific about what they didn’t want, including right angles and standard doors (the ones they ultimately installed on the curved walls use sliders instead of standard hinges, and eliminate fussy framework and slamming).

After some tweaking, Peter and Conte took their design to Sal Chieffo, their consultant at Belvedere, to check functionality. They also polled their clients for input: What would they like to see? Their answers led to the creation of the couples’ exotic treatment room and plenty of satisfied

clients. “They were so pleased we wanted their feedback,” says Peter. “It was one of the most important steps we took.”

As first-time designers, the duo admit their top-to-bottom buildout has been a learning experience. “I was unaware of how many individuals were needed for every phase of this project,” says Peter. “A better understanding of some of the complexities of starting from scratch would have allowed me to better manage my expectations in terms of costs and completion dates.”

After 15 months, the salon was finally finished—behind schedule and over budget. Still, says Peter, the reaction of his clients has made all of the hard work worthwhile. “Though we had posted a drawing of the new salon in our old space, that was just lines. They had no idea it would be this unbelievable—and neither did we.”



3. Curved lines in the ceiling and floor promote a clean, open feeling in the hair styling area. 4. The nature theme echoes throughout the salon, with tumbled stones and tables cut from tree stumps. 5. The retail area brings the outside in with a tree-like structure that radiates light and acts as a focal point. 6. The color area, adjacent to the styling area, allows for open communication and provides television entertainment during processing.

Peter Conte Salon & Spa

Location: Matawan, New Jersey
Opened: September 28, 2005
Owners: Roger A. Peter, Jennifer Conte
Website: www.peterconte.com
Salon style: Immersive, calming, contemporary
Square footage: 3,800
Styling stations: 16
Treatment rooms: 6
Equipment: Belvedere
Furniture: R. Petrane Construction

Top retail lines: Framesi, J Beverly Hills, L’Oréal Serie Expert
Design: Cahill Studio

Judges’ comments:
 “Almost *Alice in Wonderland* in the modern world.”—Raab
 “A harmonic convergence of contemporary simplicity and zen naturalism.”—Van Zeyl

WEB WATCH!
 Want to see more photos of our winning salons?
 Visit www.salontoday.com