



# Hole-istic approaches

*Where's an Ontario golfer to go to cleanse body and mind? It's Elemental, my dear* **TED McINTYRE**

**T**he pictures looked enticing enough: the hint of a country resort, an attractive yoga instructor, oil drizzling down somebody's head. The fact that one of my favourite golf courses, Timber Ridge, is packaged with many stays didn't hurt either.

But Elemental Embrace, I discovered, is not your typical luxury getaway. The rooms are simple, spartan and clean, with no TV and no alcohol on the menu. The mantra is "Clean your mind, cleanse your body and soothe your soul." Consider it a body scrub—from the inside out. And there's arguably no better place to do it in the province than this unique wellness retreat, situated a 90-minute drive east of Toronto in the sleepy town of Brighton.

I dropped in on a dreary, misty October morning. The greeting at the front desk and by the resort's visionary and owner Begumpara Teja was the sort typically reserved for returning friends. People come here not to indulge, but to restore,

and there's a like-minded embracing of this commitment by staff and visitors alike.

Entering its fourth year, Elemental Embrace was founded on the East Indian principles of Ayurveda. More than a holistic system of healing, Ayurveda is a lifestyle. It states that the rhythm of a human life is intimately connected with the rhythm of nature. When you are perfectly in tune with your natural state of being, a flow of vital energy is established, unifying body, mind and spirit. The idea is that the foundation of life can be identified in terms of the five elements: earth, space, fire, water and wind—each corresponding to a different facet of the body. Balancing these is the key to overall health.

If this all sounds a little hokey to we Westerners, keep in mind that this life science has been practised for more than 5,000 years. Teja takes it seriously enough to have hired a trio of Ayurvedic doctors (Vaidyas) from India to customize herbally medicated treatments and provide consultations in overseeing individual wellness programs. Further, these experts have been registered and accredited in

Natural Medicine with the Examining Board of Natural Medicine Practitioners of Canada, which allows all treatments to be claimed under Naturopathic Medicine in many benefit plans.

The retreat's focus is very much on the individual. Despite a capacity of up to 20 guests, there's an average of between eight and 14 at any one time, most feeling comfortable enough to lose the vanity case and remain in their robes for most of the day. A range of programs varies from a single relaxation massage or colonic hydrotherapy right up to a 21-day weight loss, detoxification or rejuvenation package.

Ayurvedic massages are regarded as more luxurious than Western versions since most have two people working on you in sync. They also employ precious oils and herbal extracts created in labs in India by respected Vaidyas, then modified to fit your personal needs. I opted for the Ojas, EE's signature treatment. While lying naked (or nearly so if you're a tad modest) on a teak plank bolstered with rolled towels, the lights dimmed, hypnotic Indian music in the background,



Left to right: Yoga expert Lisa meditates on the resort grounds, an aerial view of Elemental Embrace, two hands are better than one—a distinguishing feature of Ayurvedic massages—and the flowing topography of nearby Timber Ridge Golf Club.



the procedure begins with a synchronized Abhyanga massage; four hands producing long, sweeping strokes in perfect rhythm. The therapeutic qualities of the herbs and oils, I'm told, help increase circulation, tone muscles, calm nerves, lubricate joints, increase alertness, eliminate impurities from the body, soften skin and promote better sleep. The latter came easily as I was oiled head to toe, and even between the toes. I was then asked to roll over. Attendant Cathy stayed close, presumably to make sure I didn't slide off the table. From neck to toe I was oiled again.

The Shirodhara technique takes over for the second half of this treatment, which bestows a mental calmness and clarity. A steady stream of medicated oil, heated to 55C, continuously poured onto my forehead and down my scalp. This is a massage of the third eye, as they say. I lost all track of time during the hypnotic treatment, waking dreams and a myriad of thoughts cascading upon one another. As I began to emerge from my transcendental state, I realized both attendants were waiting there to escort me into a steam box for 15 minutes. With just my head protruding, a bead of sweat transformed into a steady stream down my back, chest and arms. I was then guided out. I nearly lost my footing, oily feet and all, but Cathy assured, "We've never lost one yet." I was led to the shower, but didn't want to wash the oil out of my feet and hair, so luxuriant was the feeling.

Such treatments promise to improve stamina and focus in the long run. In the

short term, I just wanted to slide into bed and sleep for a week, but lunch beckoned.

The food here, as you might expect, is wholesome—a slight Western infusion of Indian cuisine. They can be very strict on what gets put in front of you if you so choose, but you'd be missing out. Lunch commenced with chopped ginger with lime and salt to aid in digestion. Next was dessert, since sugar is hardest to digest. Small disks of curry and lentils then combined with cabbage, curried chicken and sweet jambas—which is sort of like a timbit drenched in syrup. There was also white rice, black bean curry, a tortilla shell and a hot sauce that could have ignited concrete. (A baked apple garnished with mango sauce, sour cream, raisins and cinnamon began the dinner affair, the main course consisting of rainbow trout.)

My table guests included Michelle, a fund-raiser, and May, a writer whose business card said, succinctly, "writer." My favourite, though, was colonic-loving Michael, a lovable but politically incorrect American who bore a striking resemblance to *Lord of the Rings* director Peter Jackson.

I tried my hand at yoga early the next morning. The resident instructor, Lisa, is a pro, and is more flexible than Gumby. Nursing a baseball injury, I had all the elasticity of a matchstick.

I wrapped up my visit with a one-hour consultation with one of the Vaidyas, in which I was encouraged to share intimate details of my bodily issues, from sleeping patterns to bowel movements. The diagnosis noted that my vatta (air), was too high, explaining my dry skin—which also

explained why most patients require 100 to 200 ml of oil during their Ojas, but they went through almost 400 ml on me.

It's a wonder I could hold on to the club later that morning at Timber Ridge GC, located a scant five-minute drive from the resort. Many come to Elemental Embrace on a two-day or four-day golf package in association with this course. But the much lauded design must be respected despite its misleading 6,600 yards from the tips. Consistently ranked among the best golf values in the province, the well-manicured 200-acre property can be punishing, with thigh-high fescue and a slope rating of 146 from the gold tees as it meanders up and down varying terrain that meshes demanding parkland holes with wide-open links-like looks. But in a manner of speaking, you're never really out of the woods. Even No. 18, measuring a mere 370 yards, features a pair of bunkers ideally situated to swallow up tee shots, leaving an uphill approach to a tricky green.

Fortunately the service here is unexceeded for a \$50 weekday green fee. So if your mind and body feel battered after a round, you can always hoist a spirit in the cozy clubhouse afterward—or better yet, revitalize your spirit just down the road.

#### CONTACTS

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