



AND RELAX... WITH THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MASSAGE, SAYS EDWINA INGS-CHAMBERS



Embarassing confession time: it was only on holiday last month that I finally read Nancy Mitford's *Love in a Cold Climate*. Shocking, I know. Perhaps even more embarrassing is one of the more superficial things that struck me in the novel: how Lady Montdore relied on massage as one of the keys to her weight loss and transformation. How marvellous it would be, I thought, as I languished on a terrace in Patmos, if I could transform myself through steam baths and twice-weekly massages.

Then, as if by magic, on my return I find a wealth of massage news. For instance, in response to falling gym memberships, the Bali Health Lounge in Manchester is now offering monthly memberships that include affordable massages to help bust stress. Elemis has launched the Speed Spa, which offers 15-30 minute treatments, "designed to deliver maximum results in minimum time", says the brand's co-founder Noella Gabriel. "This 'me time' can have a huge effect on your stress levels, your sleep patterns and, of course, your skin." The personal trainer Claire Finlay tailors fitness packages for clients at her Transition Zone studio, in west London, which include massages after workouts, and Espa Life in the Corinthia hotel has introduced medical massages that use techniques from acupuncture and osteopathy.

I get on the blower to Susan Harmsworth, founder of Espa, who

is a fan of massage and who, immediately following our conversation, emails me a copy of an article from *The New York Times* from 2012 about a research project that showed how massage helps to reduce inflammation (well, when you're one of the world's leading spa experts, you have this sort of thing to hand). Harmsworth herself has a masseuse come to her home once a month, and she tries whenever possible to have a massage after a flight. She says that 50%-60% of treatments performed at spas worldwide are massages.

She does highlight a problem, though: "The difficulty we're struggling with is the level of expertise of the trainees who are coming out of the colleges. In the UK, they're covering face, hair removal, manis/pedis and massage in nine months or so, and to do a good massage you need to know anatomy and physiology. So at Espa, we're working with colleges to do a massage-specific course."

Personally, I pity any massage therapist who has to deal with my shoulders: the muscles are always so tight, I imagine their hands instantly bouncing off, rather like Chevy Chase on the hard Paris bed in *National Lampoon's European Vacation*. However, two therapists who truly stand out (both in London, I'm afraid) are Erinah Chadambura at Privet on Kensington Park Road, and Holly Gumble, who does an incredible Ila massage at the Gilly Green Boutique Salon in Marylebone. They make a huge difference to your tension levels and leave you feeling so relaxed, you look differently at the world — now that's properly transformational stuff.