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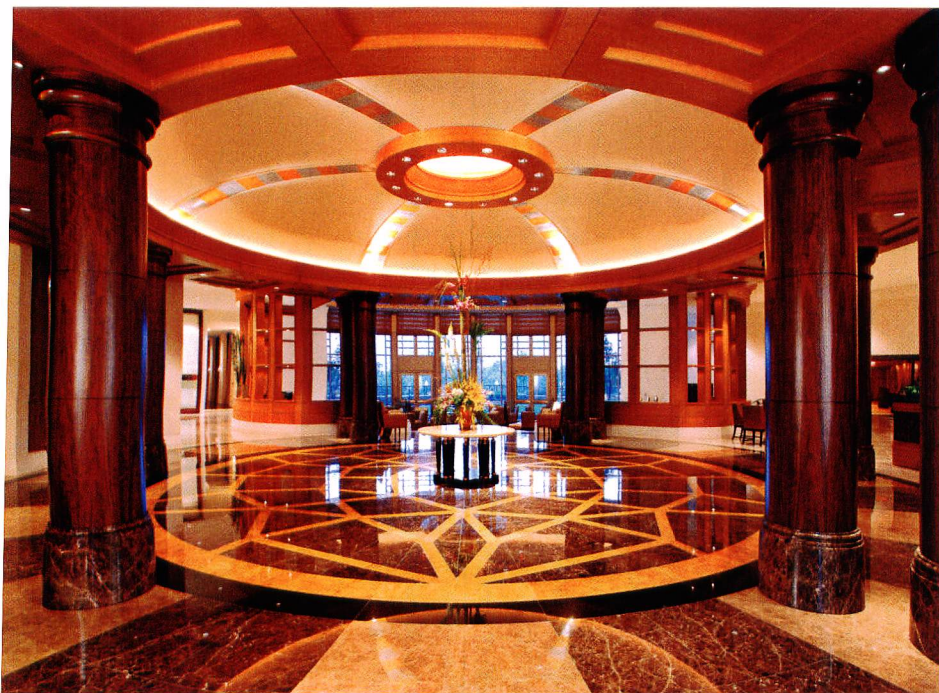


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PULSE POINTS



Our take on...

MANDARIN ORIENTAL, WASHINGTON, DC

THE SPA HERE HAS ALL THE MANDARIN ORIENTAL LEITMOTIFS: THE LUXURY OF space (eight treatment rooms in 10,500 square feet), a pan-Asian treatment menu, and an emphasis on ceremony that's perhaps too much of a good thing. Treatments begin with a hand as well as a foot washing, both of which involve much choreographed towel folding and wrapping, along with tea pouring and cymbal ringing. The spa is partly below ground, but the decor makes it feel like a sanctum. My only quibble is that the spa reception area is also the hotel pool entrance and is therefore heavily trafficked. I tried the Traditional Thai Ritual, in which my 30-minute welcome ceremony was followed by more than two hours of remarkably effective Thai massage. (Ask for therapist Sioux Barry, who studied Thai massage in Thailand and yoga in India.) The hotel location, near the Mall and overlooking the Potomac Tidal Basin, is great. Rooms are MO plush, and some, such as Premier Water View rooms, have views of the basin and monuments, plus huge bathrooms with tubs for two and showers for four (but only one sink). Service is generally strong, with the only missteps an AWOL doorman and valet parker when I arrived and poky waiters in Café MoZU, the casual restaurant. (Valet parking, incidentally, is very expensive—US\$40 a day.) But lunch in the lobby lounge came quickly, room-service breakfast was prompt, and my wake-up call was exactly on time and included the weather forecast—a step-further detail that's another Mandarin Oriental hallmark.

US\$495–\$8,000. 888-888-1778, www.mandarinoriental.com

Limelight

JON RASMUSSEN, SHAMAN,
POST RANCH INN,
BIG SUR, CALIFORNIA

IN THE MID-1990S, DISILLUSIONED WITH HIS work as an applications engineer, Rasmussen consulted a spiritual adviser, who said he'd enjoy working as a "mediator of souls between the worlds." That sounded out-there to him, but he continued to explore energetic healing. A few years later, another shaman described his own work using that same phrase. That whoa moment set him on his path, studying with the Q'ero Inca of Peru and practicing almost ten years, more than four at Post Ranch Inn. He describes his work as addressing problems on the mythic and energetic levels and helping people come into their own freedom and power. He uses feathers, rattles, herbs, and stones to cleanse the aura, then calls on the guest's "essential nature to come in and fill him with light." He says, "It's hard to explain scientifically how this works, but I just show up and do it, and people write two weeks later and say, 'My life completely changed.'" He's even worked with psychologists, whose patients had breakthroughs after sessions. "I had to have results," he says. "Otherwise, it wouldn't feel right."

From US\$200 for 90 minutes.

800-527-2200, www.postranchinn.com

