



Walter Smalling

**SomaFit**  
Washington, D.C.

**Adamstein & Demetriou Architects**

**Contractor: Artwork & Building Resources**  
**2004 Award of Merit in Interior Architecture**

# Buff Design: Gorgeous New Spas

The U. S. spa industry is booming. A recent study for the International Spa Association reports there are an estimated 12,000 spas throughout the country, double the number of only four years ago. Last year 45 million people visited American spas, and in 2003 the industry achieved \$11.2 billion in revenue. By any measure, this is a growth market for spa owners and their architects.

Two of this year's AIA/DC award winners demonstrate that these urban sanctuaries of wellness and relaxation are the ideal showcase for high style and eco-friendly design. The architects for two new Washington facilities, **SomaFit** and **Nusta Spa**, confronted different challenges but both arrived at solutions that celebrate healthy bodies and outstanding design.

Theodore Adamstein and Olivia Demetriou, principals in their own firm, were the design team and clients for SomaFit, a combined fitness and spa facility in Georgetown. "The business grew out of our own experiences," says Adamstein. "For years we had been running all over town for massages, personal trainers, yoga classes, and everything else. I had an idea that I couldn't let go of: a non-membership club that offered all the services but where you pay only for what you want." Adamstein is the managing partner of

the SomaFit venture that he and Demetriou started with a small group of business investors.

Their 8,500-square-foot facility houses a personal training gym; two studios for Pilates, yoga, and other conditioning classes; nine spa treatment rooms; quiet lounges; and showers, saunas, and steam rooms. SomaFit's "work/reward" approach to fitness became the cornerstone for the design concept. "The design challenge was to create separate identities for the fitness side and the spa side of the club," explained Adamstein. "The fitness areas had to be high-energy and dramatic; the spa needed to be a quiet, more private, 'de-stressing' environment."

The space unfolds as a series of zones: the reception area is flanked by the gym and exercise studios. A progression of frosted acrylic panels on pivots and louvered screens give rhythm and definition to the cardio areas. The entrance to the spa, inspired by ancient bathhouses, is a rotunda where deep blue mosaic tiles contrast with porcelain-white tiled walls. The project employs a reduced architectural language free of excess ornament and distinguished by natural wood, translucent surfaces, and a neutral palette. "The design had to work equally well for men and women—

we didn't want it to feel like a salon," says Adamstein. "Great syncopation!" said the jury in describing the interior. Jurors agreed that the design's zoning was "compact and clever," and they particularly liked the "whimsical quality of the vibrantly colored furnishings."

Bold design elements, customized lighting, and sensual materials come together to create SomaFit's distinctive interior.

In this burgeoning market, first-time spa owner Elizabeth Snowdon and her architect, Kendall Wilson, founder of Envision Design, have made their project distinctive through a strong commitment to environmental responsibility. Nusta Spa, is the first spa in the United States to be accepted into the LEED for Commercial Interiors Pilot Program. LEED (Leadership in Environmental and Energy Design), created by the U.S. Green Building Council, measures the standard of eco-friendly buildings. "The green component of this facility and its healthier low-impact environment was a feature of the project from the start," says Wilson. His firm has established its leadership in sustainable design with projects for such eco-friendly clients as Environmental Defense, the National Audubon Society, the World Wildlife Fund, and Greenpeace USA. "We like to demonstrate that being green doesn't mean doing without."

The 5,000-square-foot spa includes a reception space, consultation room, relaxation area, seven treatment rooms, locker rooms, and support spaces in an atmosphere completely removed from the bustle of city life. An eleven-foot wall of reclaimed oak boards separates the public and private spaces; an indoor waterfall provides soothing sounds in the relaxation area; and wall, floor, and

finish materials meet the highest standards of sustainability. The content of the locally produced carpet is more than 50 percent recycled, and the architect-designed print materials including business cards, letterhead, and promotional materials use vegetable-based inks and recycled paper.

Wilson credits his client and her insistence on customer service and quality for much of the impetus for the project's sustainable focus. "Elizabeth wanted her spa to cater to individual client needs, and she wanted the architecture to be as flexible as the spa treatments. The project's green features added quality more than they added cost." For example, individual thermostats in each treatment room that allow clients to control the temperature are both luxurious as well as energy efficient.

Owner Snowdon agrees. "Before opening my own business, I was an avid spa consumer and my ideas about highly individualized service come for my own experiences as a spa customer. In the beginning, I knew at some level I wanted to create a healthy, environmentally responsible space, and Envision's expertise in sustainable design was a huge selling point. Working with Envision was really an education for me. They brought such a depth of knowledge to the project and built my level of commitment to green design."

"The connection between a health and wellness facility and environmentally sound design is obvious," says Snowdon. "Increasingly in the spa industry eco-friendly environments are a prominent selling feature." Nusta Spa's green components "really differentiate it in the market and have received a very positive reception among customers." 🌱

**Nusta Spa**  
Washington, D.C.  
**Envision Design PLLC**

**Contractor: James G. Davis Construction**  
**Presidential Citation for Sustainable Design**

## What's Sustainable Design?

The Presidential Citation for Sustainable Design is given to a project that is designed to be energy efficient and environmentally responsible.



Eric Laignel