

WARNING: Hiring a local architect or contractor with no spa or wellness experience can be hazardous to the health & success of your practice.



Corridor with gracious 'flow'

# Transforming Wellness

From a Renovation  
Nightmare to  
A Center for  
Transformation & Training

By Christine Castigliano

As an expert in your specialty, you've spent years studying and refining your medical practice. Now you're ready to take the next step and expand into a medspa or wellness facility. You're a very busy professional with a vision and a mission, and you want to execute it quickly.

However, making decisions based solely on speed is not always wise - or profitable. When choosing design and development professionals to execute your vision, be aware of some very common and dangerous pitfalls that can mean the difference between success and a less optimal outcome.

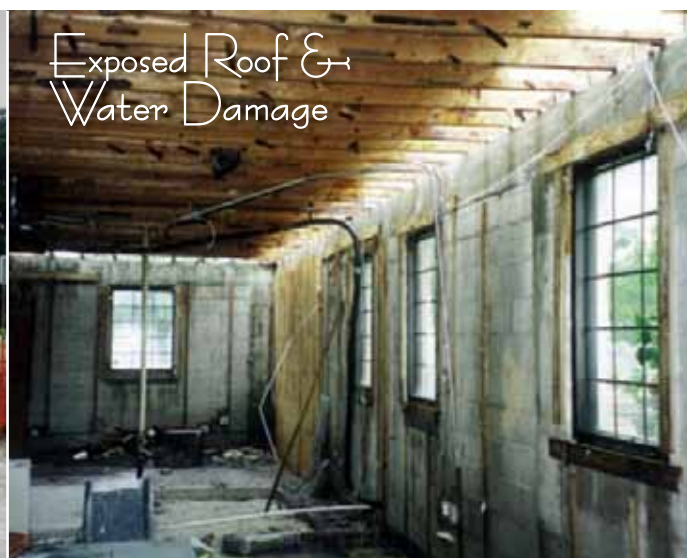
This is the lesson that Sasha Parker, President and Founder of Esthetic Skin Institute Inc. in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, (<http://www.esiw.com>) learned the hard way.

For 14 years, Sasha trained medical professionals in esthetic treatment procedures, including BOTOX, Platelet Rich Plasma Treatment, and Carboxyl Therapy. A registered Facial Specialist, Licensed Massage Therapist and Certified Electrologist, Parker worked internationally with renowned plastic surgeons and dermatologists. She trained thousands of clinicians in her workshops, seminars, and courses.

Perpetually on the road, giving seminars and trainings in rented facilities, Parker needed a space of her own. She wanted to create a facility where clinicians could receive the very best hands-on training in the latest technologies, while adding a second dimension to her business by providing Medical Spa services to the public.



Before Renovation



Exposed Roof & Water Damage



Completed  
Exterior



Elegant Reception Area



Treatment Room

**Like many entrepreneurs developing a new facility, she hired a local architect and contractor** to redevelop an existing free-standing 3,000 sq. ft. building. Typically more experienced with spec homes and offices, most local design professionals lack experience with the unique, specific requirements of medspa and wellness practices.

As soon as the building purchase was complete her contractor applied for a demolition permit, to speed up the process. Unfortunately the demo crew went too far and took down the roof. Exposed to the weather, and with construction permits still in the bureaucratic pipeline, seasonal rains poured in with torrential hurricane force.

**Months behind schedule, and with her facility under water,** Sasha sought help at a conference presentation given by Michael Effler, head of industry-leading spa design firm International Design Concepts (IDC). Impressed with IDC's portfolio and design philosophy of creating an effective and sculptural flow, she approached Michael after class, fraught with concern about her project and the architect's plans.

Michael was able to visit the site with Sasha the very next day. It was still raining. "She stood in tears as water poured down through the open ceiling, down the walls and pooled at her feet," Effler said.

Not only was the building project a disaster, the local architect's plans revealed a series of bland, boxy rooms lit by fluorescent lighting. "The old-style medical reception area was defined by a wall of privacy glass, with sliding receptionists' windows opening onto a typical stack of tabbed files in storage. Not the most appealing first experience for a new patient or professional student of medical esthetics," he added.

The only silver lining was that IDC could revise the existing plans before construction began.

To begin, Michael attended some of Parker's classes to factor in her exact needs for the teaching space. Then, he and Sasha explored the services she planned to offer and exactly how she wanted the facility to feel. Finally, combining his intimate understanding of her goals with decades of experience in spa design, Michael sat down with the IDC creative team and re-visioned the local architect's original floor plan and interior design. They created an entirely new flow for the space, incorporating graceful, efficient lighting technology, and a luxurious interior surface palette.

**Thanks to the IDC team's understanding of medical spas,** and the design elements that function as a working sculpture, the renovation was a success. The facility includes service-specific infrastructure as well as ergonomic designs that provide a smooth, efficient service flow, as well as a seamlessly unique customer experience.

The IDC philosophy includes the wisdom that every facility should have a unique signature service. Sasha chose her personal favorite, traditional Asian back walking massage. IDC designed special treatment rooms with high bars that enable the practitioner to hold on to better control the pressure on her client's back.

IDC plans for the facility include expansion for the future. Treatment rooms can open to a garden, allowing the warm Florida sunshine and fresh air to infuse the indoor spaces.

Today Parker's facility stands out as an educational center for esthetic professionals while greeting medical spa guests with a warm, rich presence and a full range of medical and traditional spa services.

## Why hire a Design Professional with Medspa and Wellness Experience?

As designers and developers of spas, medspas and wellness facilities for over 25 years, we've seen many horror stories of projects gone wrong. We'd like to spare you some of that pain. We'd like you to understand that a design professional who understands value engineering can optimize a design for your unique practice. Someone who can "watch your back" in the wild and woolly world of development and construction can save you thousands of dollars and countless hours of stress.

**Beware of these two common early-stage design scenarios that can hurt your bottom line.** Both seem attractive, because they appear to get the project going fast.

**One common pitfall: so-called 'free' design services offered by equipment vendors.** First of all, the design is not free, but is buried in the high cost of equipment. The end result of this hidden agenda is a very basic design oriented around the cabinets and equipment they want to sell you. In this kind of "doc in a box" environment, with cheap materials and poor lighting, your patient's experience is less than ideal.

**Another common pitfall is to hire a local architect,** perhaps through a friend or business contact. While many architects design outstanding homes, office or retail spaces, very few have experience with the unique, specific design requirements of a spa and wellness facility: plumbing, sound abatement and how

to optimize space for each service. We've seen too many service stations placed in a room, so they won't function properly. We've also seen missed opportunities to add another station, for an additional revenue source.

**Design errors are easy to correct in the planning phase,** but are very expensive in the construction phase, or even worse – after you open your doors. These costly mistakes equal months of setbacks.

**Your true goal should not be 'free' or 'fast' – but to achieve return on investment, or ROI.** Your clients and patients come to you for your expert care, professionalism, and sense of well-being. But a facility that feels cold and clinical, like the hospitals and medical facilities of the past, does not reflect the modern values of wellness and nurturing. Without a welcoming sense of flow and "wow" – that unique one-of-a-kind experience that connects deeply with your clientele, and inspires them to recommend you to friends – you can lose repeat visits and the vital word-of-mouth marketing that will grow your practice.

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Design & Development Services:  
[www.idc-design.com](http://www.idc-design.com)  
800-IDC-1034

