



east meets west

Ken Rosen, Chiva Som's resident expert in traditional Chinese medicine, explains why this ancient therapy has winning spa potential. Interview by Julie Vuong

The rising profile of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is one for spa operators to watch.

According to Ken Rosen, TCM has a global appeal that should cement its growing popularity from Australia to the UK – with spa take-up well to the fore.

As resident expert in TCM at Thailand's award-winning 5-star health resort Chiva Som, a high-end favourite with jetsetters looking for seclusion and tranquility, Rosen is well placed to spot emerging trends. "From being in the spa industry for the last two years I've noticed a real move away from treatments that are designed merely for pampering purposes, towards more concrete therapies that go beyond the surface," he says.

Rosen is emphatic that traditional Chinese medicine's potential in the spa environment has not yet been fully realised. Turning advocator, he lectured at last year's International Spa Association (ISPA) conference and at the Spa Asia Wellness Summit to raise the therapy's profile. "Hospitals aren't ready to accept us, so spas are good settings for therapies that are not strictly medical but health and fitness driven," he emphasises.

Rosen is also aware of large untapped

numbers of experienced therapists looking for suitable working practices. "There are many trained TCM practitioners in Europe," he states, "and I'm guessing the numbers are pretty comparable to the US, which is plentiful."

These practitioners find spas attractive on a number of levels, Rosen explains. "Those who don't find the idea of operating their own practices desirable may find spas a secure and profitable base. Furthermore, Chiva Som allows me the flexibility to develop new therapies along with training therapists, teachers and

"Spas can benefit by renting vacant rooms or spaces to practitioners"

doctors in all of TCM's five branches. In turn, spas can reap the benefits by renting vacant rooms or unused spaces to practitioners looking for either full- or part-time posts."

Therapy explained

The five core elements of TCM are: exercise; nutrition; herbal medicine; structural medicine; and, probably its most popular and familiar ingredient, acupuncture.

"With acupuncture, essentially what you are doing is resetting the nervous system," Rosen explains. "That's why it treats everything from the common cold to eczema and arthritis."

As many in the West know, this ancient therapy places small needles on specific points along the body's energy meridians to induce a deep state of ease. "When the treatment is over the body then resets itself. A good treatment of any nature should help you return to a 'still' point," Rosen adds.

But over and above a reactive therapy, TCM is also recognised for its strong preventative powers. "Good TCM doctors are interested in maintaining consistent levels of health," Rosen asserts. "The first branch of TCM is exercise, which involves physical activities including kickboxing and yoga. The bottom line is that it's important to be proactive with your body."

According to Rosen there are three groups of clients that are attracted to TCM. "The first category is probably the most popular," begins Rosen. "These are people that are stressed out – which admittedly is the majority of the population, but the difference is they're willing to admit that it has become problematic and are seeking to rebalance and maintain wellness in their lives." He continues, "TCM is also



Left to right: Ken Rosen believes TCM has global appeal; Thai resort Chiva Som; practising TCM; acupuncture is TCM's best known treatment

incredibly effective at helping addicts or those that need to lose weight. And finally, the third camp is the one that interests me most and is occupied by people who have reached the end of the line with Western medicine – people like me.”

Personal drive

Rosen himself falls into the last group having turned to TCM after his childhood was ravaged by cancer. “I was diagnosed with Hodgkins disease when I was 12,” he reveals, “and following a series of radiation therapy I subsequently developed thyroid cancer. My belief was that Western medicine had reached its limits and this thought eventually led me to find traditional Chinese medicine.”

Experiencing personal success with the system provided Rosen with the impetus to help others to discover TCM. He studied under a handful of experts across North America including Paul Pitchford, author of *Healing With Whole Foods*, and Doctor Andrew Weil, a commentator on self-healing.

Rosen confesses his New York drawl and Western look is atypical for an Eastern practice such as TCM, but believes that his background endows him with a unique

advantage which will help appeal to a broader market. “It’s weird,” he says. “I’m a New Yorker and here I am practising Chinese medicine in the East. But the reason I’m on this planet, other than to live my life, is to make TCM make sense in the modern world – so it’s not considered so alien and ‘out there’ by people.”

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TCM trends to watch

New spa frontiers “TCM fits well in the growing medispa sector and acupuncture facials, in particular, are good offerings because they’re great for anti-ageing. On a regular basis these reset and rebalance the system.”

Ones to watch “Auricular acupuncture will be the next big trend. Each part of the body is reflected in the ear so from here I can relieve back tension or help people quit smoking. It works miracles.”

New strongholds “Germany, France and England are particularly proactive, with good schools and associations related to TCM. When you look at TCM on a global scale you’ll notice that each country practises it differently, yet it produces the same results. It’s a testament to the therapy and just how powerful it is.”

Essential reads “Between Heaven And Earth by Harriet Beinfield and Efreim Korn; and *Healing With Whole Foods* by Paul Pitchford.”