

# The Evolution of Ajune

By J. Elaine Spear

Leaving behind the restless energy of Third Avenue and entering into the world of Ajune can be disorienting. One moment you're fighting to keep your place in line at the neighboring Starbucks, and the next moment you're enveloped in a Zen-like atmosphere where everything from the outside—even a skinny, double mocha latte—ceases to exist.

Wrapped in warm, wooden accents, gentle splashes of cossetting colors and gleaming slate floors, Ajune is about as far as you can get from the grit of the Big Apple without actually leaving town.

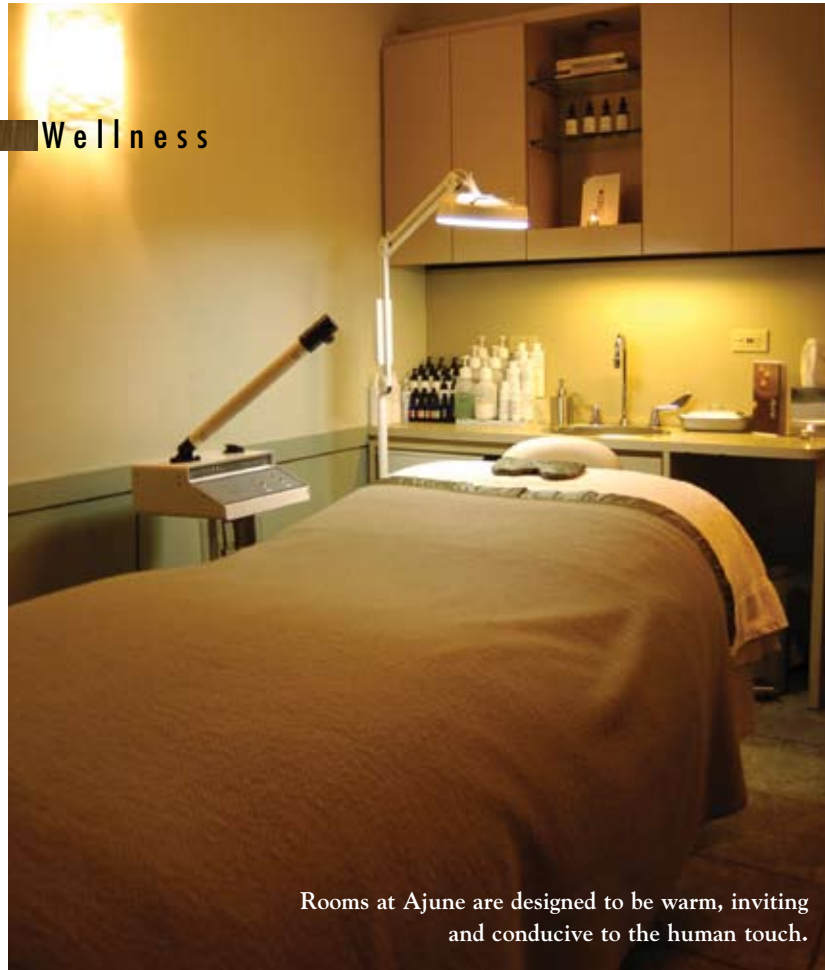
Make no mistake about it, though: Despite its tender trappings of warmth, softness and spiritual nourishment, Ajune's focus is always on beautiful skin.

Ajune epitomizes the coming of age of the medical spa movement that has been struggling with its authenticity in much the same way the spa industry did back when many salons with one treatment room claimed to be day spas. "Ajune is a true medical spa that is directed by a physician, rather than a facility where a physician rents space and does medical procedures but doesn't have con-

trol over the entire operation," says Mauro Romita, M.D., board-certified plastic and general surgeon, member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, assistant professor of surgery at New York Medical College, and founder and medical director of Ajune. "Everything in our spa is measured against our research and medical integrity. We don't claim that our esthetic treatments do things they aren't supposed to do, for instance, because it wouldn't be responsible for a physician to make medical claims about nonmedical products."



Dan Bibb Photography



Rooms at Ajune are designed to be warm, inviting and conducive to the human touch.

Dana Romita-Cox, vice president and second-in-command at Ajune, is young, energetic and completely committed to both the business and spirit of the spa world. “I didn’t fully understand what I was getting into when I joined my father’s fledgling business while it was still being built in 1999,” says Romita-Cox. “I soon discovered, though, that when you own a spa, you do whatever is needed to ensure that guests always have a seamless experience. In that spirit, we’re constantly trying to improve our customer service while introducing valid new treatments to our menu. To protect our clients and our reputation, we never jump on the bandwagon when a new product or device hits the market. We wait several months until the dust settles to ensure that it truly delivers as promised, and does so without complications.”

Embracing many elements of “spa,” Ajune’s focus is on creating personalized clinical experiences with plenty of relaxation and nurturing along the way. Designed by renowned spa architect Robert Henry ([www.rdh-architects.com](http://www.rdh-architects.com)), based in New York City, Ajune exudes sensual modernism. The walls of the treatment rooms are made from hand-polished plaster and recycled glass mosaic tiles that have been hand-laid in beautiful, reflective patterns. “We included these elements because Ajune’s treatment rooms focus on human touch,” explains Henry. “We also installed a floor-to-ceiling, 50-foot glass front that serves as a giant light box for the interior during daylight hours. It gives spa guests a peek at the speed-of-light lifestyle right outside the door and creates a delicious pedestrian experience.”

As Ajune’s corridors lead to the spa area, the glass becomes opaque, and finally takes spa guests to the ethereal “Hall of Whispers” that’s swathed in white, floor-to-ceiling drapes. The most popular room

Dan Bibb Photography



Ajune’s goal is to offer cutting-edge treatments in a lush, tranquil setting.

at Ajune, though, is the Zen Relaxation Room, where guests can unwind prior to services and after treatments before re-entering the real world.

### Scientific Wellness

Ajune’s medical offerings include Botox injections, Restylane (dermal filler), Gentlewaves LED, laser hair removal, Profect Laser Therapy (builds collagen and kills *P. acnes* bacteria), microdermabrasion, medical-grade peels and Endermologie. A variety of nonablative lasers are also used for age-management services and programs. Ajune’s newest service is noninjection mesotherapy, a cellulite treatment that uses the new DermaWave machine.

Romita is available two evenings per week for complimentary client consultations, as well as for Botox injections and other physician-based services. “We definitely concentrate on lunchtime services at Ajune, saving the more invasive cosmetic procedures for my medical office,” he says. “Having patients visit Ajune

bandaged and bruised from rejuvenation procedures like a face-lift would be unsettling to other spa clients and isn’t in tune with what we stand for at our medical spa.”

Ajune used to offer yoga, but the demand for treatment space soon took precedence. “We constructed two more treatment rooms in our former yoga space,” says Margaret Lora, spa director. “We still offer stress-relieving therapies such as reflexology and aromatherapy, but our specialty is definitely clinical antiaging services. We do deeper peels, antiaging and hydrating clinical facials using different kinds of equipment—thermal and nonthermal lasers, for instance—and use prescription skincare products, but nothing that requires downtime. Our goal is to offer proven cutting-edge therapies all wrapped up in a nice, tranquil package.”

What’s most intriguing about Ajune’s menu, though, is the blend of age-old wellness techniques and state-of-the-art medical procedures to create a complete,

## Spa Facts

**Location:** 1294 Third Avenue (at 74th Street), New York, NY 10021

**Established:** 1999

**Size:** 4,300 square feet

**Rooms:** 13 treatment rooms, including four wet rooms (one Vichy shower, one handheld Vichy shower and two steam/shower-equipped rooms)

**Employees:** 40 and rising to serve a 16,000 client base, 5,000 of whom are seen on a regular basis

**Primary Retail Products:** Alyria, Astara, Comfort Zone, Skin Medica, Naturopathica, SkinCeuticals, Sonya Dakar and Sundari

**Signature Service:** Ajune Total Bioenergizer Facial, 90 minutes, \$200



Ajune owner Romita believes that fostering a stress-free environment can help promote well-being and health.

“Ajune represents a safe haven where people can completely let go.”

## Changing Roles

*“Prevent when possible; restore when necessary”*

“More and more, aesthetic plastic surgeons are branching out into nonsurgical beauty enhancement procedures,” says Mauro Romita, M.D., founder and medical director of Ajune. Romita speaks with authority, having been a board-certified plastic surgeon for 24 years, and founder of one of the earliest and most successful medical spas on the East Coast. “We’re assuming a role that helps manage the aging process, as well as surgically correcting signs of aging.”

results-oriented spa experience. The Ajune Cellulite Program (8 to 10 weeks) includes Endermologie, Thermofreeze (hot and cold therapies with a special massage), pressotherapy and detoxifying mud therapy. The State of Mind Program (10 to 20 treatments) focuses on imparting a sense of well-being by including an Organic Nutritional Body Wrap, Hot Stone Therapy Massage, Hot Stone Foot Reflexology and Ajune’s Classic Ginger Massage. Lymphatic drainage is also used to enhance vitality by stimulating the lymphatic system.

“Relieving stress and promoting well-being are essential to having good health,” says Romita. “Stress slows down the healing process and makes the body more vulnerable to disease, including skin and breast cancer. This is why

Ajune is more than an oasis in the midst of Manhattan—it represents a safe haven where people can completely let go and allow practitioners with whom they have developed a trusting relationship to take care of their needs.”

Lora, who is the former spa and salon director of the Avon Salon & Spa in Manhattan, comments how different it is to manage a medical spa, as opposed to a high-end day spa. “Besides the much higher treatment standards and training, one of the biggest differences is the type of clients who are attracted to our spa,” says Lora. “They’re more experienced than your typical gift certificate crowd. They’ve been to many spas and are seeking more definitive results from their treatments. They want to know what is and isn’t possible with their skin,

Romita describes this new role as “Sequential Intervention,” where physicians treat areas that need attention, and leave areas that are still in good shape alone. According to Romita, “We now help to prevent skin damage and premature aging in younger patients, do mildly corrective procedures in slightly older patients and perform surgery on older patients who have more severe signs of aging. This naturally leads to aesthetic skincare services, and for some physicians, owning a medical spa.”

and what the best choices are to make them look and feel better about their appearance. This makes it easy to create a strong client/technician relationship. It also naturally leads to higher retail sales. Any time one of our estheticians isn’t producing high retail sales, I immediately become concerned because I know that our clients aren’t receiving the caliber of education they should be receiving at our facility.”

Ajune only hires practitioners who hold themselves and the company to the highest standards. “I’m not necessarily looking to hire estheticians with 20 years’ experience,” says Lora. “Instead, I look for qualified people who are interested in what tomorrow will bring, who do their homework and who are constantly bringing new things to the table. This is essential because I sit behind a desk much of the time and don’t have a lot of direct interaction with clients. My technicians, on the other hand, are constantly in contact. They’re the ones who get the most feedback. I manage and support our team, but our staff drives the business.”

Estheticians in particular have the opportunity to grow their skills far beyond what they might in a traditional day spa setting. Those interested in performing clinical esthetic services visit Romita’s medical facility to see firsthand what he and his staff do. When they join the team, they receive plenty of hands-on training and are certified in different noninvasive medical therapies. “Once our clinical estheticians are properly trained and certified, they can do things like apply medical-grade products, use our acne laser and perform Endermologie treatments,” says Romita. “I’m quite meticulous about this because my reputation as a physician is on the line. Also, I’m legally responsible for any problems that happen during medical-based procedures.”

## Showing Growth

While the past five years have shown phenomenal growth for Ajune, the future holds a different opportunity for this vibrant company. “Our spa is operating at over 80% capacity and we’re out of available space,” explains Romita-Cox. “After several months of debating on how to expand our business, we decided to do so on the Internet at [www.skinmdny.com](http://www.skinmdny.com). SkinMD New York is an informational site where people can learn about specific treatments and products that we’ve tested and approved at our spa and medical facility. It’s purely a resource center, with several doctors contributing information. If users decide they want to purchase a particular product, there’s a link connected to our Ajune e-commerce site.”

For the real deal, though, celebrities, chic young mothers and anyone who wants to treat their body, skin and psyche in one fell swoop are flocking to Ajune. Once there, it’s hard to choose between a Sundari Gotu Kola and Walnut Body Scrub, a Godiva Chocolate Body Wrap, or a facial rejuvenation service with results that are guaranteed to last days instead of hours. “We don’t believe there are any quick fixes out there, nor is there one magic bullet that will make you look and feel better about yourself,” says Romita-Cox. “Our job at Ajune is to provide a relaxing oasis where real results happen. So far, we’ve exceeded even our own expectations in terms of client support and success.” ♦

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The ethereal Hall of Whispers leads Ajune clients to the spa’s peaceful treatment rooms.



Owner Dr. Mauro Romita and vice president Dana Romita-Cox

