

Conversion by Design

These breathtaking spas have been uniquely built into historic spaces across the globe. *By Rachel Kossman*

In the summer of 1988, Peter Chittick and Carolyn Fairbairn stumbled upon a large country house in the tiny village of Crillon le Brave, France. Within a year, they had renovated the property and opened it as *Hostellerie de Crillon le Brave*, an 11-room hotel. In the 26 years since, various nearby buildings have been acquired and renovated. The latest, in 2014, was a 17th-century stable, which was recently transformed into the **Spa des Ecuries** (crillonlebrave.com). The spa's two treatment rooms were once feeding areas for horses and the storage cellar now serves as a couples' suite, complete with a private dressing room and shower. Warm stone walls from the stable's original structure invite guests into this modest yet exquisitely decorated space, which displays photographs of the original village. The staff chose UK-based Bamford skin care because it epitomizes the spa's locale, says spa manager Pauline Ballot. "Bamford is all-natural and organic," she explains. "The fresh scents of lavender, chamomile, rosemary and geranium marry perfectly with the scents of Provence and our stable's history."



A 180-year-old Canadian gristmill doesn't typically summon dreams of a tranquil spa escape, but the husband-and-wife team behind the conversion of Wakefield Mill were able to successfully envision what others could not. The La Pêche, Quebec, site launched as a hotel in 2001 and **Spa Eau Vive** (wakefieldmill.com) opened four years later. The renovation was accomplished thanks to a combination of preservation and imagination. The mill's original stone walls still grace nearly half of the facility's interior, spa treatment rooms stand where the mill's turbines once churned and several all-glass walls were installed to overlook La Pêche River's MacLaren Falls—the mill's original power source. Another notable but subtler use of the 1830s structure: all of the property's posted room numbers were cut from leather found on the mill's original machinery. Do guests enjoy being pampered at such an extraordinary site? "The history of our property definitely adds an element of escapism," explains spa manager Dale Monroe. "There's no doubt that relaxing in a space that has existed for nearly two centuries is a unique experience!"

On a plot of land in the lively city of Chengdu, China, where mulberry gardens of the ancient Daci Temple once welcomed spirituality seekers, stands **MI XUN** (thetemplehousehotel.com). The new 9,600-square-foot spa within The Temple House hotel opened in September 2015. The spa occupies a heritage building constructed nearly 1,000 years ago and sits adjacent to an active Buddhist temple and monastery. In honor of its setting, MI XUN has wrapped the site's history around its spa experiences. Before treatments, guests are asked to clear their minds over a traditional Chinese wishing well, and are then led through the property's Bitieshi courtyard, constructed during the Qing dynasty. In contrast to its historical roots, MI XUN itself is sleek and ultra-modern, as architects from U.K.-based MAKE studio redesigned the interior to be a contemporary interpretation of traditional Chinese design. "By restoring much of the building's original Western-Sichuan architecture, the site has been revived as a peacefully secluded space," says spa operations director Kelly Coates Xu. "It's truly an oasis within Chengdu's bustling metropolis."