

Client: Hamilton Bradshaw
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Pet Spa at Harrods: Cat and dog pet-icure

They're staring open-mouthed at the luxury spa on the other side of the glass where a smug, pampered client is wrapped in a fluffy white towel, enjoying a signature blueberry and vanilla facial and pedicure.

You see, this is not your normal spa-goer. It's Monty, a two-year-old British bulldog. On the next table, Silver the Persian cat is being treated to a blow dry, white fur flying everywhere, while a bearded shih-tzu called Gizmo looks rather surprised that he has been daubed in spa mud and wrapped in cling film.

Welcome to the Pet Spa at Harrods, Britain's first animal spa and the only place to be seen for pets of the rich and famous. Tamara Ecclestone is just one of the celebrities who has been spotted whisking her five dogs in for pedicures and a shimmer spray (yes, that's one of the 42 treatments on offer) since its opening in November 2010.

I'm here to spend a day behind the scenes at the spa, learning to paint doggy nails, shampoo cats and pamper the four-legged prima donnas to see if I've got what it takes to be a pet beauty therapist. It doesn't take long to realise the clientele - and their owners - inhabit an entirely different world to the rest of us.

Head of Pet Spa Stephanie Mehanna says it's not just bonkers billionaires who come through the spa doors, though she admits it does attract a particular kind of customer. 'They tend to be those with homes in London and the countryside who bring their big dogs in to be cleaned up after a muddy weekend,' she says.

'And then we have the locals who book their pets in every week - our prices aren't that high for the area and we do have the best pet stylists in London.'

Ah yes, the locals. This is Knightsbridge, a favourite second-home spot for oil tycoons and Middle Eastern royalty where the average asking price of a property is £3?million.

The Pet Spa looks like an exclusive salon with its large open room littered with treatment tables and static hairdryers. To the right is the 'fitness suite' complete with a Fit Fur Life doggy treadmill - where cocker spaniel Maisie is busy enjoying a workout, while a flat-screen television shows doggy films Beethoven, 101 Dalmatians and Hotel For Dogs on a loop.

On the left is the physiotherapy and massage area where candles line a shelf along the back wall. On Fridays, the spa hosts an Animal Communication and Reiki therapist who, for £175, will use the laying of hands to channel energy into your mutt. Yes, really.

On the therapy table at the moment is the first spa-goer of the day. It's not a dog or even a cat, but a four-year-old tortoise called Georgina who has popped in for a £29.95 Olive Oil Treatment and Pedicure. Preparing a tub of lukewarm water is qualified veterinary nurse Donna Wills, the spa's physiotherapist and masseuse, who charges £99-£155 per session.

Showing me how to scrub Georgina's shell with a brush while keeping her tiny head above water, Donna says: 'They usually like the feeling; they get vibrations through the shell.'

But instead of basking in the attention, Georgina seems slightly perturbed today, and tucks herself away as she's dried off and has olive oil applied to her feet. Perhaps luxury takes a bit of getting used to.



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One pet who clearly enjoys it is Donna's own border collie, Logan, who she has brought in today for a treat. He sprawls out on a big pink cushion before Donna begins to massage him using a soft, circular motion.

It certainly looks relaxing, but why on earth would a dog need a massage? Stressed after a hard day of walkies? 'It makes dogs feel better, just like it does for us,' she explains. 'Massage releases endorphins and encourages circulation which can cut down on injuries in the future.'

As I leave Logan to his massage, I head off to meet Silver, the first feline customer of the day. This floppy Persian cat has been coming regularly since he was a kitten for his weekly 11.45am wash and fluff dry. As I'm shown how to shampoo Silver using a foamy purple pouf, I'm reassured (sort of) that he has only given the occasional nip or scratch. He seems to be coping quite well until he tries to throw himself out of the tub, covering us in a spray of soapy water.

'We would never bathe an adult cat that wasn't used to it,' says Stephanie. 'It would be cruel.'

'We can use a waterless foam shampoo which is just brushed out as an alternative.' While Silver is set up under a blow dryer, it's time for the dogs to have their turn.

Monty and Coco, British and French bulldogs respectively, have come in for a full body groom which involves dead-hair removal, nail trim, ear cleanse, two shampoos, warm blow dry, custom coat styling and a spritz of Harrods pet perfume.

After Monty's wash, stylist Jessica attaches him to the frame above a table with a lead to stop him from falling off. She shows me how to clean right inside his ears using specialist pet eye and ear wipes and inside the folds in his wrinkly face.

Shih-tzu Gizmo, on another table, is getting ready for his mud bath. These specialist products mostly come from the U.S. and Japan, where people are potty about pet spas. I help stylist Dione rub gloopy mud all over Gizmo, before he is wrapped in clingfilm for five minutes to let it sink in. He's lined up for a blueberry facial next.

'It's not as frivolous as people think,' says Stephanie. 'The mud bath conditions the skin as well as the coat. Our blueberry facial helps remove tearstains, and the fresh breath treatment - where we brush the teeth with a dog toothbrush and toothpaste or spray in minty foam - speaks for itself.'

Something must be working as Stephanie says they get a lot of regulars, including Toffee, a crazy cocker spaniel who comes in twice a week - 'I think her owner would pay us anything just to take her off her hands for a few hours' - and a couple of German shepherd guard dogs belonging to a well-known Russian businessman (the spa is much too discreet to name names).

And then there are the chihuahuas and Pomeranians who come in often to have their nails painted. As none of them are booked in today, Monty is about to undertake the deluxe pedicure instead. For the uninitiated, painting a dog's nails (with £14.95 non-toxic Colour Paws varnish, in case they try to lick it off) is as hard as you would imagine.



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It requires one person to hold him still and the other to paint, carefully avoiding the fur. It doesn't help that French bulldog Mr Smith has just arrived for a fresh breath treatment, causing Monty to try to throw himself off the table to assess his rival.

Cool finish: Gizmo's makeover is complete with a final blow dry

As each dog is finished off throughout the afternoon and flounces off with a goody bag containing a Canine Cookie Company biscuit and a chewy bone, there's no denying they look adorable. Would they have had just as good a time rolling around in the mud instead of having it massaged in?

Probably. But, at least this way, they won't leave muddy paw marks all over the limo on the drive home.

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