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magazine

# wellness

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Products

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Step into Nature with

## Tai Chi

## Sleep On It

Get a Good Night Sleep  
No more nightmares

# Beautiful Forever

- How to stop the clock
- Organic spa
- Skin giving you problems?

## How meditation affects your brain

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Strong As Nails:

# Priti Organic Spa

Comes Out  
Smelling  
Like a Rose

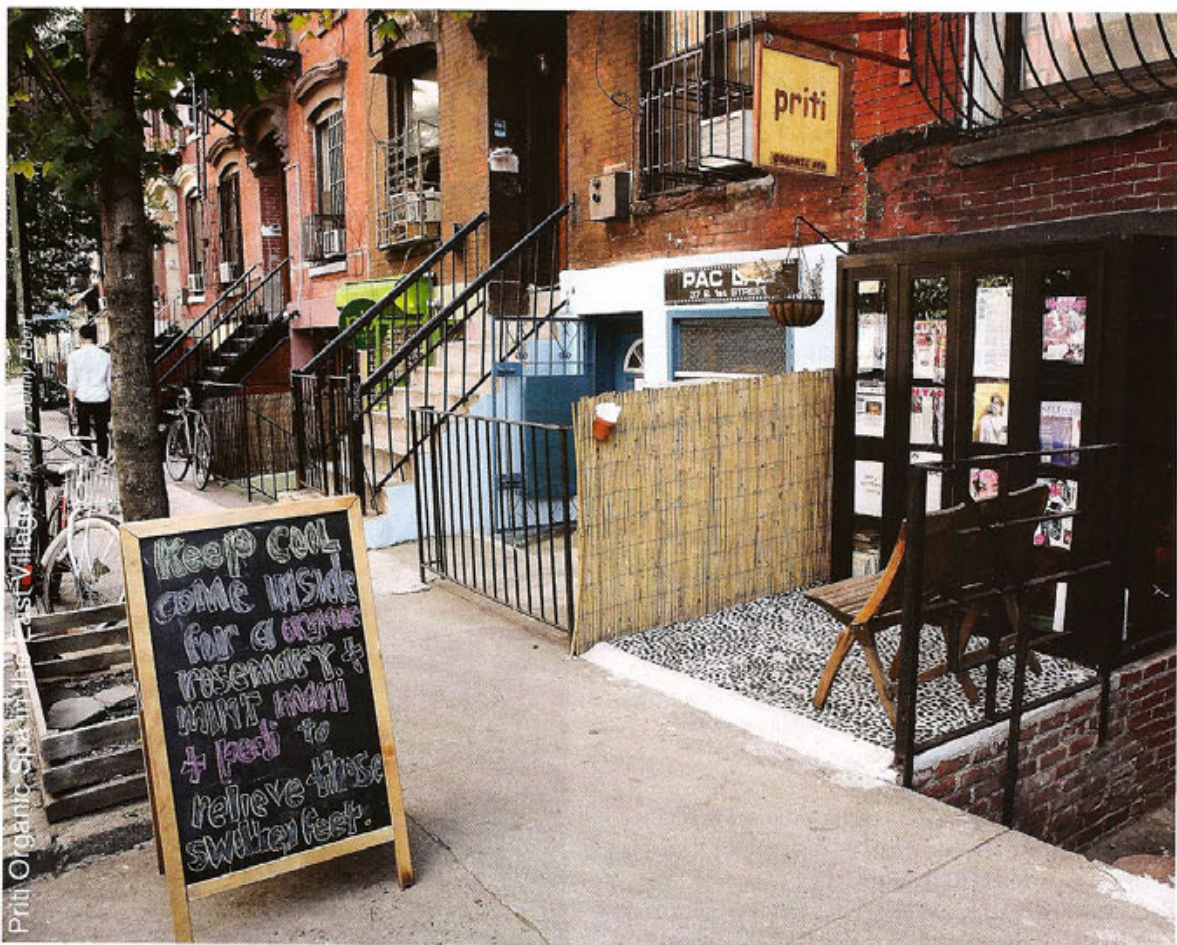
*By Annette Racond*

A tall blonde greeted me at the front door and offered me a cup of organic tea. Hints of lavender, rose, and tea-tree oil scents provided a soothing reprieve from the congested streets of the East Village. A handful of people chatted about the salad bar at nearby Whole Foods. Sage-colored walls subtly offset the Eastern-inspired artwork and hand-carved furniture. This ultra-pampering nail spa seemed to offer it all. Yet, something was missing. There wasn't the faintest whiff of the overpowering odor of acetone and other harsh chemicals that are typically the norm in such a setting. But Priti Organic Spa isn't your typical nail salon.

"The idea hit me while sitting in a conventional nail salon during my pregnancy," says Kim D'Amato, owner of Priti Organic Spa. Priti means satisfaction in Sanskrit. "I thought if I can buy almost any type of organic food, then why can't I find a nail salon that uses organic products?" Several years later, D'Amato put herself through nail

school at Manhattan's Lia Schorr Institute while researching nail-polish products free of toxic chemicals such as formaldehyde, toluene, and dibutyl phthalate (DBP). She came across health-oriented cosmetic companies such as Uhma Nagri, Live-Live, and No-Miss, but ultimately decided to launch her own line of nail-polish products. Her Priti line now includes about 90 colors, base and top coats, and a nail-polish remover derived from soy. She also features a Princess line of nail polish for the younger set with colors chosen by her seven-year-old daughter, Siena. Due to popular demand, Priti Organic Spa now also serves up massages and organic facials using products from the Dr. Alkatis Holistic Organic Skin Food.

Fortunately, D'Amato had already started buying organic foods and products during her pregnancy, several years prior to learning she had skin cancer. "I'm Australian, which means I spent my entire life out there in the sun. Growing up, nobody thought anything of it. We'd pour



olive oil all over our bodies. I used countless products. Quite frankly, I'm surprised we survived this long, but leading a toxic lifestyle is not an option for me anymore," says D'Amato.

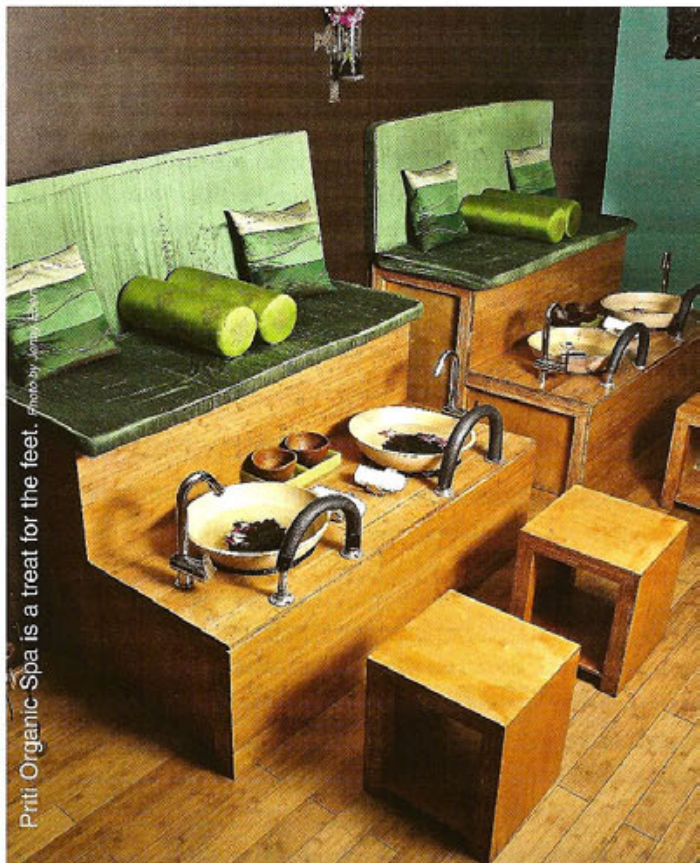
D'Amato's skin-cancer diagnosis reinforced her decision to use organic products. Now she is more careful than ever about what she applies to her skin and is happy to report she is cancer free. "Using toxic products does not make for happy endings," emphasizes D'Amato, who was discovered by a modeling agency in Australia and whisked away to Paris where she spent ten years in the business. "There's no reason for anyone to throw all types of toxic chemicals into and onto her body. Why do we need products full of parabens, especially when they've been linked to breast cancer and other forms of cancer?"

D'Amato is a big supporter of Teens for Safe Cosmetics ([www.teensforsafecosmetics.org](http://www.teensforsafecosmetics.org)), an organization that helps young adults educate their peers about toxic cosmetic ingredients. She is surprised more organic nail salons haven't arrived on the scene and attributes this, at least in part, to higher operating costs. "I can't possibly be the only person who can do this. Once the organic lifestyle becomes more mainstream, we'll see prices come down. It's only a matter of time before it catches on."

Zoe Picayo, Priti Organic Spa's aesthetician, agrees with D'Amato about the cost of operating organic spas. "Running an organic spa," she says, "requires a great deal of dedication. You have to consider everything from the paint you put on your walls to how your organic cotton sheets are laundered. You really have to believe in what you're doing. This isn't just some kind of gimmick. It's a big commitment."

Experimentation is a great way to familiarize yourself with the organic way of life, according to Picayo. Instead of using cleansers containing 20 unfamiliar ingredients, Picayo encourages spa buffs to opt for a mixture of organic goat's milk and honey (equal amounts of each) to deep cleanse the skin. Then rinse off with water, adds Picayo. "Avocado, bananas, and strawberries are also great for the skin," she continues. "These are the beauty regimens we've been reading about for years in *Seventeen magazine*."

Concern over the potency of organic products is another reason why some spa-goers may be reluctant to abandon chemicals, according to D'Amato. "A lot of people," she says, "feel like organic products can't fight the aging process, but is there anything that really fights aging? I



Priti Organic Spa is a treat for the feet. Photo by Jenny Ebart



Manicures at Priti Organic Spa get the thumbs up. Photo by Jenny Ebart



have a lot of friends who have gone the chemical route. Peeling off layers of skin with acid can't be all that good for you. I'm sure there are some great treatments out there, but they're just not for me."

Picayo sees aging as a natural part of life. "We don't have to re-create how we looked when we were twenty with all kinds of needles and injections. Why erase your personality and the signs that you've lived life? We shouldn't feel compelled to get rid of this fact."

Pre-natal women appear to be leading the way in the demand for organic treatments. Many moms-to-be learned about Priti in their gynecologist's waiting room. Having pretty toes during childbirth appears to be on the wish list of many moms-to-be. "A lot of pregnant women," says D'Amato, "come in for pedicures right before their due date. So much so that four women started going into labor right here in the shop. They lay on their sides while we rubbed them with massage oil and raced to call husbands, doctors, and ambulances. We had one nail technician who was a midwife also, but we've yet to have an actual birth on the premises."

D'Amato wanted to provide an outlet for women to exchange ideas and network. Some of her clients, she says, come equipped with a bottle of wine and talk business while getting manicures and pedicures. D'Amato plans to introduce an organic wine night to expand on this concept. "A lot of what I know about organic products is through my clients. I learn something from almost every person who walks through my door. It's very inspiring and it definitely keeps me going," she adds. When asked if she finds it ironic that many organic restaurants, as well as her own spa, are situated in the East Village, an area formerly riddled with crack houses and drug dens, D'Amato remarks, "Maybe it was the only way for this crowd to clean themselves up after decades of partying." But, she feels the organic way of life is here to stay. Says D'Amato, "Don't mess with green women – especially green moms – because we're leading the pack!"

#### Recommended Resources

Here is a handful of companies dishing out healthy products for head to toe.

**Dr. Alkaitis Holistic Organic Skin Food**  
Website: [www.alkaitis.com](http://www.alkaitis.com)

**Live Live & Organic**  
**Bee Yummy Skin Food**  
Website: [www.live-live.com](http://www.live-live.com)  
Phone: 212.505.5504

**No-Miss Healthy Alternative Cosmetics**

Website: [www.nomiss.com](http://www.nomiss.com)  
Phone: 800.283.1963

**Opi Nail Care**  
Website: [www.opi.com](http://www.opi.com)  
Phone: 800.341.9999

**Priti Organic Spa**  
Website: [www.pritiorganicspa.com](http://www.pritiorganicspa.com)  
Phone: 212.254.3628

**Uhma Nagri 100% Pure**  
Website: [www.ahmanagri.com](http://www.ahmanagri.com)  
Phone: 305.866.0956