



Palace Merano

# The five-star luxury detox



There can't be many 5-star, grand luxe hotels in Europe that do not serve a drop of alcohol, nor allow their guests any edible indulgences, yet which still have 90 per cent repeat business. Palace Merano represents the world of 'luxury austerity': a hotel designed to leave you feeling incredibly healthy and proud of your ability to resist temptation whilst relieving you of at least €4,500 a week. Just as the line between cosmetics and pharmaceuticals is becoming increasingly blurred, so is the crossover between clinics and hotels.

Palace Merano, however, has set out to make austerity – and self deprivation, even – feel extremely comfortable. Tucked away in the pretty historical town of Merano in the Italian Dolomites, Palace Merano attracts many nationalities (Italians, French, Russians) to its Espace Henri Chenot: at its simplest a very expensive and effective weight loss clinic, but also a spa for those who want to feel really well again. The key to this place is that every single guest must participate in the health programme. So, unlike other hotels with spas, there are no temptations to detract from the goals of wellbeing, weight loss and fitness. Most of us find it hard to rebalance ourselves without some professional help: how much more motivated are we likely to be if surrounded by tens of others undergoing a similar programme?

There are other well-known clinics with a loyal following, such as the Mayr clinic in Austria, but these traditionally have tough regimes and fewer luxuries, so that staying there can be a challenge in itself. A casual summer visitor might mistake Palace Merano for a large, luxurious European resort hotel, with guests lounging by impressive pools and enjoying drinks on the terrace. Closer inspection reveals that the bar area is

only stocked with strange sounding juices and teas, and that there's a hint of consomme on the air on the day when everyone is officially fasting. Behind the scenes, doctors and therapists in white coats wait to get to work on their patients.

Espace Henri Chenot is the creation of Henri Chenot, 67, who combines western scientific training, including a master's degree and doctorate in psychology, with expertise in Chinese medicine and 40 years' experience. He created the first laboratory of Phytocosmetics in 1970 and, as president and founder of the International Phytocosmetics Association, began to travel Europe to illustrate his own idea of preventive health care. Chenot opened the first Espace Henri Chenot at the Cannes Polyclinic in 1974 and in the early 1980s he transferred to Italy, where he inaugurated the Merano Espace Henri Chenot. In 1999 he created Biontology, a new concept for studying the evolution of psycho-physical ageing, founding the Academy of Biontology in 2004 and the Biontology Laboratory in 2008.

"Health," he says, "is the balance of our genetic code, lifestyle, age and surrounding environment, which influences our physical appearance and psychological state. You need to live in harmony with yourself to be in good health. Illness occurs when this balance is broken and is manifested both physically and mentally. When the body detects such an imbalance, it tries to cure it 'naturally' if it has the time and means to do so. Detox treatment allows it to recover."

Every guest is under constant medical supervision (delivered in different languages) and has regular massage and hydrotherapy sessions. The standard programme features drainage and energy treatments which aim to eliminate toxins

whilst promoting harmony of body and mind. Diet, however, is everything. Under Dominique Chenot, the hotel serves delicious food – in minute helpings, naturally – and the charming Italian waiters manage to make a decorative display of salad leaves feel like a course from a Michelin-starred chef.

Most guests stay for a minimum of a week and soon start to enjoy the routine of medical appointments, bio-energetic check-ups, mud wraps, jet washes, massages, cookery lessons, fitness lessons and other treatments. White dressing gowns are the only day dress and everyone carries his or her own well-organised personal file reminding them of appointments and containing the exciting weight loss chart that gives a sense of purpose for the week. Not every guest has to do the full detox diet (there is an alternative 'healthy' option), but most do, and it definitely leaves you hungry. Detoxing can affect people in different ways, and occasionally leave you feeling very unwell. But at least the 5-star environment helps to counteract this: it's considerably more comfortable than some establishments in France and Austria where it really is a case of "Tights out!"

As more and more stressed out people need their annual detox, so the hotel has been adding more rooms. Thirty-three of the 98 are suites. The more contemporary top floor suites have balconies with inspirational views of the mountains, and are luxurious, with marble bathrooms, LCD TVs, wifi and comfortable sofas. More traditional, elegant, high-ceilinged rooms below are a little more austere but no less comfortable. The mini bar contains only water. In effect, apart from the treatments, what's special about Espace Henri Chenot is the Tyrolean setting – it has a micro-climate which allows palm trees to grow next to snow-capped peaks. Alpine walks are very much part of the Henri Chenot wellbeing experience (they don't say whether retail therapy amongst the town's lovely boutiques is as beneficial).

The Palace Merano/Espace Henri Chenot recipe has been described by one critic as "disarmingly perfect". At its heart, though, are practitioners with experience who are really passionate about improving the health and wellbeing of others – and it may be that, with this place, they have got it just right. [www.palace.it](http://www.palace.it); [www.henrichenot.com](http://www.henrichenot.com)

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