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**TORONTO STAR – April 22, 2006**

Swept away by sweet sensations

PORT SEVERN, Ont.—"Chocolate is very good for cellulite," says Elizabeth Borrow, director of the Avalon Spa at the Inn at Christie's Mill.

Chocolate is good for you — words I've been waiting my entire life to hear.

Borrow says chocolate is an excellent exfoliator and can help to smooth contours and reduce the appearance of cellulite, the nasty orange-peel skin that's the bane of thighs and buttocks everywhere.

That's why this elegant spa, which offers everything from high-tech micro-dermabrasion to Vichy showers to hot-rocks massages, uses it as the basis for one of its most popular treatments, the Cocoa Body Wrap.

There's just one catch, I discovered after disrobing and hopping up on the massage table. The cellulite-busting chocolate is applied externally.

Using a scrub made from Epsom salts, cocoa and oils, therapist Sarah McLean gently but vigorously rubbed the skin on my arms, legs, feet, hands, back and décolletage to remove dead cells and reveal a new layer of fresh skin below.

The smell was incredible.

"I have the best job in the world," McLean enthused. "I get to work with this all day."

While the scrub itself is slightly rough, the sensation isn't unpleasant. In fact, my winter-dry skin enjoyed the feeling.

Besides, I'd heard rave reviews about the treatment and was already anticipating the final result.

"Many of our clients tell us," explained Borrow, "that their skin is so soft after the chocolate treatment they can't stop rubbing the backs of their hands. The skin is left feeling just like satin."

It isn't only the scrub that works the magic. There's a second exfoliating/moisturizing treatment, also made from chocolate, that continues the skin rejuvenation process.

Feeling slightly tingly after the scrub, I relaxed on the table as McLean slathered me thoroughly with a goopy brown lotion. Next, she swathed me in soft, warm cloths and then tucked a shiny, heat-reflective sheet on top.

I looked, appropriately enough, like a giant chocolate bar in a silver wrapper.

"Chocolate," said McLean as she draped blankets on top and lowered the lights, "is also good to inhale, because it encourages the release of endorphins in the brain."

More evidence that chocolate is good for me.

McLean then left me to bake for 25 fragrant, brain-boosting minutes.

My natural body heat, reflected and intensified by the shiny sheet and the blankets, soon caused the chocolate lotion to warm up — a lot — and that released the scent.

In minutes, I smelled like one huge pan of brownies.

During those cozy, chocolaty minutes, I dozed and simmered under my blankets, until McLean returned with an armload of fluffy towels and released me from the cocoa embrace.

"Hop into the shower and rinse off," she said.

Peeling off the bottom layer of cloths was a sticky little business, which left me still covered in a thick layer of gooey, brown glop. Definitely time to hit the showers.

The warm water released still more chocolate vapour. The aroma was killing me. Enough inhaling and absorbing, I was in desperate need of some chocolate I could put in my mouth.

Outside, McLean had a word of warning.

"Now don't even think about tasting that stuff on your skin," she said laughing. "It's not for eating."

Getting the chocolate scrub and lotion off my skin took time and a fair bit of rubbing with a terry cloth — the stuff sticks like glue.

But as it slowly rinsed away, I could feel a distinct improvement in the texture of my skin. Soft and smooth, no winter flakiness left at all. And the moisturizer had yet to be applied.

The moment I stepped out of the shower, I realized I'd misjudged Sarah McLean — she did have a heart after all. There, waiting on the crisp white sheeting of the massage table was a chocolate, one perfect chocolate in a shimmering silver wrapper.

It survived less than a nanosecond, but it was exquisite.

"I see you found your treat," McLean said when she returned, "and you've already eaten it."

Instant guilt. Was I supposed to save it for later?

"No, no, that's good. Chocolate is an important means of increasing serotonin levels in the brain."

Even eating chocolate is healthy. Could life get any better than this?

The last stage of the treatment was a delicious application of a hydrating seawater mist that sealed in moisture and left my skin soft and sweetly scented.

Like the others who'd gone before me, I left that Avalon treatment room gently stroking the back of my hand, appreciating its satiny texture.

Who knew chocolate could work such wonders?

The Avalon Spa and the Inn at Christie's Mill offers couple's weekend getaway packages that include simultaneous Cocoa Body Wrap treatments, followed by chocolate-dipped strawberries, champagne and even a dip in the Avalon's salt-water mineral pool. For more information, visit <http://www.avalonspa.ca>

**TORONTO STAR, September 28, 2005**

PORT SEVERN -From across the water, the Inn at Christie's Mill looks like a mirage, a rambling castle guarding the last lock on the Trent-Severn system that's a portal to Georgian Bay.

'Dock and Dine,' beckons the sign, promising good food, luxury and romance among the rocky contours of Muskoka's western edge.

At night, Christie's Mill sparkles and glows like a lighthouse strung along the shore. The Inn's enviable position provides the restaurant, curved inside a grand bay window, with an unparalleled view that changes with the weather, the hour and the season – watercraft, trees, sunsets, low-flying flocks of Canada geese and, only too soon, snow-banks and the early darkness of winter's night.

Wisely, while other areas of the Inn have been renovated, upscaled and expanded-luxury spa, Avalon, opened last year-the Twigs dining room, with its pine ceiling and beams, has been allowed to stay true to its rustic roots-literally.

It's the site of the first sawmill on the Severn River, built in 1830 and owned for a time by a man named Alexander Christie.

For almost a century, it has been an inn.

First, as Arrowood Lodge, it attracted fishermen from all over the continent who came for bass and perch.

More recently, it has been changing hands among German owners, including, since 2002, Count Rudiger Graf von Goertz, whose real castle is in Schilitz in Deutschland. Because of the Count's influence, there seemed to be the potential for a hearty Germanic meal as autumn overtakes summer-vention, perhaps, and maybe even morels or at least schnitzel.

But 30-year-old chef David Scoffield, who worked in the kitchen at the Schoolhouse Country Inn in Belwood and apprenticed with a former White House chef de cuisine, reserves the most adventurous dishes for his occasional multi-course Chef's Tables tasting menus.

A recent example: Roast Loin of Elk with honey-glazed carrots and chocolate Aztec sauce.

On the regular menu, the chef limits his homage to the Inns current owner to a pork tenderloin (\$26) ever so slightly sweetened with honey and cider jus, and a pasta (\$18) that adds thick slices of sausage, albeit sweet Italian sausage, fanned along the fettuccine that mixes pesto with sun-dried tomatoes.

Scoffield sends out consistently attractive and appealing plates. A colourful composition of perfectly prepared seasonal vegetables includes peppers and squashes, and occasionally, a flourish of ornamental cabbage.

Scoffield's strengths are meat melting off the bone – rack of lamb (\$34) and baby back ribs (\$23) – and, appropriately, gently cooked fish, whether halibut paired with a voluptuous lobster tail (\$30) or arctic char in a pink peppercorn and champagne butter sauce with dill.

The ribs (\$23) at Christie's Mill seem to be a favourite with the people who summer in the area. However, instead of a tangy barbecue sauce, they're glazed with hoisin sauce, garlic, lime and just a little barbecue sauce.

A recent addition to the menu brought a half Muscovy duck (\$27), its skin crackly and its flesh tender with just enough fat, surrounded by butternut squash puree and dates in a red wine sauce.

Scofield and his serving staff are nothing if not accommodating. When I asked for a side dish of a mushroom gratin that was meant as an accompaniment to another meal, the server agreed to check with the chef and the chef said yes.

This turned out to be a scrumptious mélange of mushrooms sautéed with shallots and garlic, treated to whipped cream and truffle oil, and finished with parmesan, sizzled under the broiler.

Scofield is good with mushrooms - a soup one night tasted like the surrounding forest. He also likes his truffle oil and, one night, sent out a seriously opulent sip of onion velouté as an amuse-gueule, thick as clotted cream, rich as butter and teased with truffle.

One night, our server was Meghan, incredibly attentive and thoughtful - really, one of the best experiences with service I've enjoyed.

### **HOMEFRONT, Summer 2005**

Muskoka bound – for fresh air, green forests and a memorable spa!

*On a recent road trip, Homefront publisher Helmut Dostal put the 'pedal to the metal' in a 2006 7-Series BMW, as we headed to the tiny hamlet of Port Severn. Invited for a mid-week 'head start on Summer' at Avalon, The Spa at Christie's Mill, we were promised a healthy dose of Muskoka charm.*

Open for just over a year, Avalon, The Spa at Christie's Mill, has become frequented predominantly by passing boaters and wellness-savvy locals. Now, if the Spa Manager has her way, there'll be more of us heading up Highway 400 for spa get-aways. It's here in Muskoka that the peaceful waters, clean air and green forests work in harmony with the spa's wellness practitioners.

#### **In the mood**

Our pampering begins with an invitation to nap in the elegant lounge, a tranquil space reminiscent of the Victoria era. Think down-pillow top chairs, antique lace, a doll's pram, china teacups, ladies' magazines, and a sweet scent that calms. A lovely touch here that's a design find. Now, we're too laid back to swim in the warm salt-water pool. Instead, we just relax.

#### **Time for two**

In one of the loveliest couples' suites we've experienced in a while, we sink into a magical hydrotherapy tub with chromographic coloured lights. A 20 minute soak in heavenly waters filled with Dead Sea salt, aqua detox powders and lavender crystals limber us up and put our minds on pause.

#### **Healing hands**

It's our lucky day. Signature wellness massages and facials are up next. Still in the privacy of our couples suite. We're treated to the granddaddy of massages: a head to toe blend of Swedish massage and other innovative techniques. Mind clearing, muscle soothing and stress relieving! Our facials are equally soothing with plenty of 'wise advice' for home maintenance programs that keep us looking sleek.

### **Waterfront charm**

The inn itself is modern with a European flair. Large and tastefully decorated rooms, plenty of antiques, and a casual, fine dining restaurant over-looking the water add to the charm. Local staff are well trained, friendly and eager to please. Whether you're retreating for a weekend or escaping for a few days like us, The Inn at Christie's Mill is proof that you don't always need a family cottage to enjoy an all-Canadian summer in Muskoka.

**THE GLOBE AND MAIL, Saturday, October 16, 2004**

*The Avalon spa's antique-filled waiting room assures visitors that they've left the city far behind.*

### **WORLD OF WELLBEING**

**AVALON: THE SPA AT CHRISTIE'S MILL, PORT SEVERN, Ont.**

There are dozens of relaxing ways to savour Ontario's fiery fall foliage: a country drive, a lake cruise, a hike or bike ride through the woods-the list goes on. But by combining one of these options with a trip to the new Avalon spa at the Inn at Christie's Mill, the season can be milked for all it's worth.

### **Location**

The 44-room inn is set on a peninsula that juts into the Trent-Severn Waterway, which connects Georgian Bay with the lakes of Muskoka. It's about two hours north of Toronto by car, and is just minutes from Highway 400.

Boaters can dock at the inn and head for the spa, something management says is popular in the busy months of summer and early fall.

The resort is surrounded by forest, and the sight of scarlet leaves and blue skies reflected in the water is a fine primer for the spa session that awaits.

### **Design**

In June, the 56-year-old property unveiled an \$8-million addition comprising the 7,000 square-foot spa, an indoor pool and hot tub, 15 guest suites, a new reception area and two conference rooms.

The décor of the renovated and expanded inn would be best described as regal rustic: Marble accents, wrought-iron furniture and crown moulding blends nicely with stone fireplaces, expansive balconies and Group of Seven reproductions.

This decorative theme continues into the spa, where an antique filled waiting room assures visitors that they've left the city far behind.

### **Clientele**

The new facilities draw more than casual weekenders - weddings and business conferences are now de rigueur. This is reflected at the spa, where bridal and stress-release day packages are available.

### **Treatments**

A blend of therapies combine traditional North American offerings - manicures, facials and the like - with wellness techniques from around the world, including Hopi Indian and Swedish massage, and Jin Shin acupuncture. Alternative therapies such as reflexology and reiki are also offered. One relaxing way to begin a visit is with a soak in the mineralized hydrotherapy tub, which is infused with a variety of healthful salts, crystals and powders.

Many treatments start with a short 'healing touch' session, which aims to relax and clear energy fields by lightly touching the body, working downward from head to toe. Among the spa standards on offer, the hour-long Avalon Tranquility Facial combines a gentle cleansing of the skin with nourishing moisturizers to balance and revitalize. A mind-clearing technique—a light touching of acupressure points on the head and neck—is also incorporated. All facials include a face, scalp, and foot massage.

The full-body experiences, meanwhile, show off all Avalon's bells and whistles. The 'Mystical Water Ride' lives up to its name, as a pair of therapists massage, exfoliate (using a Dead Sea salt scrub) and douse the front and back of blissed-out clients with a five-jet Vichy shower.

While the falling water stimulates the physical senses, the duo delivers a synchronized full-body massage using a modified Hopi Indian technique. This gradually evolves into a light touching of the head and feet. And a final envelopment in soft towels.

### **Food and drink**

Avalon's spa menu includes eclectic items such as Mediterranean chicken salad and pecan-crusted fillet of sole, as well as herbal teas and juices.

The inn's full-service Twigs restaurant, meanwhile, combines a surprisingly urbane menu - pistachio-crusted quail and Canard Bigarade, for example - with sublime lake and forest views.

### **Service**

Resort staff are pleasant and accommodating, while spa therapists are both skilled at their craft, and at dispelling any awkwardness that might arise from an intimate treatment like the Mystical Water Ride. (For spa newcomers, the latter treatment's near nakedness and the attention of two female masseuses could be intimidating.)

### **Bottom Line**

The Avalon spa and adjoining inn offer a retreat for stressed-out city dwellers at any time of year, but right now at the height of the fall colours in Muskoka, they provide a balm for all the senses.

### **Information**

Avalon: The Spa at Christie's Mill: 263 Port Severn Rd. N., Port Severn, Ont, 1-800-465-9966 or (705)538-2354: [www.christiesmill.com](http://www.christiesmill.com). The Avalon Tranquillity Facial costs \$60, and the Mystical Water Ride costs \$125 for an hour and \$185 for 90 minutes.

## **THE GLOBE AND MAIL, Tuesday, September 14, 2004**

The Inn at Christie's Mill, a 45 room resort near Port Severn in Ontario's Muskoka region, is another long-established hostelry with a recently constructed spa. The 7,000 square-foot facility, which houses seven treatment rooms and four beauty stations, opened in June and is just the latest project in along line of transformations at the resort. Back in the 1920's, it was a rustic fishing lodge. In the 50s and 60s, it became a family destination. With a new spa and additional and upgraded hotel rooms constructed at a cost of \$9-million, inn manager Bill Sullivan is hoping to attract well-heeled couples who enjoy pampering themselves. He also hopes to encourage his current clientele to stay longer now that there is more for them to do.

### **ECHO GERMANICA, July, 2004**

In the best of European tradition the Inn at Christie's Mill in Port Severn also expanded their popular venue. A brand new wing with 12 new European décor suites, all decorated differently, the amazing Avalon Spa with up to the minute technology and aestheticians, a new lakeside restaurant called Twigs, as well as convention facilities for corporate affairs of an intimate nature, all add to the charming setting of this inn, run by Bill Sullivan, General Manager. Heinz Brast was the soul and spirit of this extensive million-dollar expansion and Count von Goertz, an inventor by trade, became the investor in this venture. About 150 guests enjoyed an extraordinary reception with classical entertainment in the lobby, exquisite food and other entertainment like a walking stone man, a living fountain and a moving grapevine, referred to as living garden performers, an absolutely charming idea. There is no doubt that this facility is going to be a smash hit! What one would not give to be a pampered guest there!

### **LEISUREWAYS (CAA Publication), June-July 2004**

Another sign of the times is the proliferation of spas. Where tourists and cottagers once came to Muskoka to breathe the clean air and gaze from gazebos at the setting sun, now they come to relax with hot stone massages in high-tech treatment rooms. One of the newest and glitziest is Avalon Spa at the completely renovated and expanded Inn at Christie's Mill in Port Severn.

### **MUSKOKA TODAY, July 1 - July 15, 2004**

Resort destination spa puts Port Severn on the map

West Muskoka's Georgian Bay shoreline sprouted its newest and finest spa and resort destination last week with the reopening and expansion of Inn at Christie's Mill. The \$8-million spa and deluxe get-away room transformation was feted with a champagne reception for 200 invited guests highlighted by Garden Reception that came to 'life.' Christie's Mill is now Central Ontario's premier accommodations center for weddings and honeymoons. It features an exquisite and exclusively pampered retreat and spa for executives and or haggard souls fleeing the city in search of freedom and tranquility on a crimson sunset waterfront.

With the finest dining room and menu in the area Christie's Mill has scaled the ramparts to heights unforeseen in Muskoka. It is next to the world-famous Port Severn Locks just a few kms west of Orillia at Georgian Bay.

### **SMART LIVING – Toronto Edition – Summer 2004**

The Inn at Christie's Mill, one of Muskoka's most charming resorts, has more than doubled its size after completing extensive renovations.

The crown jewel is Avalon, a 7,000 square foot holistic health and wellness spa. Features include indoor pool, ten treatment rooms, including one for couples, a Roman bath, mineral and hydrotherapy pools for therapeutic relaxation and stress relief.

Styled in a European Country décor, the new wing has 15 elegant and spacious suites, each with a floor to ceiling fireplace, whirlpool tub, lavish furnishings and wrought-iron balconies or patios overlooking the lake and gardens.

Each spa guest will receive a private wellness assessment upon arrival. Only natural treatment products are selected and personalized to suit each client's needs. One of the signature spa experiences is the Mystical Water Ride, where two professional therapists provide a relaxing massage and mineral salt scrub followed by a Vichy Shower and then further massage using a special "Hopi Indian" technique to release tension and blocked energy. There are also treatments and packages that cater to couples, sports enthusiasts and bridal parties.

The Inn at Christie's Mill is located in Port Severn, just 90 minutes north of Toronto and is open year round. On-site facilities include tennis courts, whirlpool hot tub, saunas, small watercrafts and a private beach. Two dining rooms boast spectacular views of the Trent Severn Waterway and culinary creations reflect regional cuisine. The nearby Georgian Bay area offers guests championship golf courses, theatres, museums, boating and cruising the 30,000 Islands, hiking and biking trails, cross country and downhill skiing and snowmobile trails. You can also enjoy the scenic skies in a float plane, or just sit back in a comfortable Muskoka chair and take in the view: there are endless activities to rejuvenate your soul.

A German Count owns the Inn and guests will have a regal experience booking his private suite from \$555 per couple per night. Please call 1-800-465-966 or visit [www.christiesmill.com](http://www.christiesmill.com)