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**Pampering Pleasure - My Cup Overfloweth**

Anna Selby

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The spa at L'Albereta, a five-star Relais et Chateau hotel near Verona, avoids the usual toenail painting and eyebrow shaping. This could be because it is presided over by Henri Chenot, founder of "biontology"- "the study of essence of life and its evolution".

According to biontology, the body mirrors the mind. "Tension in the muscular layers, both superficially and deep down in the organism are deemed to be the result of repressed emotions," says Chenot, who has devised various relaxation and detoxification techniques.

My treatment began in the traditional Italian way with hot mud. Pasted all over, I was wrapped in plastic and blankets, until it was time for a hydrotherapy bath that bubbled deliciously but became hotter and hotter. I soon resembled an overcooked lobster, so, when I was approached by a large, muscular masseur, I went for what I expect to be the gentlest - and coolest - of the massages he offers: cupping.

Cupping came to notice recently when Gwyneth Paltrow was photographed with strange circular marks on her back, though poor Nigel Hawthorne was forced to endure it as one of his torments in The Madness of King George. At l'Albereta, the cups are attached to a suction machine in a process said to detoxify the body and to relax and energise the pressure points. Different cup sizes are used for the parts of the body - smaller ones for the less fleshy areas. Most people prefer not to look but I steeled myself and glanced down to see my skin being sucked halfway down a tube. I lay back weakly. Afterwards, though, I felt great.

Treatments are complemented with spa cuisine for a complete "cure", though you can punctuate this with a glass or two of Franciacorta, the hotel's own prosecco produced from the surrounding vineyards.

L'Albereta, Via Vittorio Emanuele, 11, 25030 Erbusco, Italy (www.alberta.it; 00 39 030 776 0550).