

Joanna Rogers escapes to the countryside for some pampering . . .

What could be better this month than getting out into the countryside to enjoy the sunshine, fresh air and spring

flowers. Combine it with a relaxing beauty treatment in a dream location, and you have the perfect day out!

In the depths of the beautiful West Oxfordshire countryside in the hamlet of Bruern, near Burford, are a group of five-star holiday cottages owned by Lady Judy Astor, and designed and furnished by her and her sister, top interiors specialist Jocasta Innes.

The 11 cottages, sleeping from two to eight people, and Weir House, sleeping ten, are undoubtedly the *creme de la creme* when it comes to self-catering, having won a batch of top awards.

The cottages have been created from the stables of Bruern Abbey, the imposing Cotswold manor house, just across the road. On offer at Bruern is inimitable home-from-home perfection — when guests arrive, tired after a long journey, they find their cottage lights on, fire lit, tea tray and home-made cake on the table, Champagne in the fridge and candles just waiting for a match.

Three years ago, Lady Astor enhanced the Bruern experience with the addition of a small-but-perfect spa. Called Spa@the Stables, there is a lovely light and airy conservatory-style swimming pool surrounded by beautiful gardens — especially gorgeous at this time of year with all the spring flowers — plus a gym, and two chic beauty treatment rooms.

Sadly, the pool and gym are only open to resident guests, but recently planning permission was obtained to open the treatment rooms to the public, and the manager Laura Harris is excited and keen to spread the word about this hitherto 'secret' location.

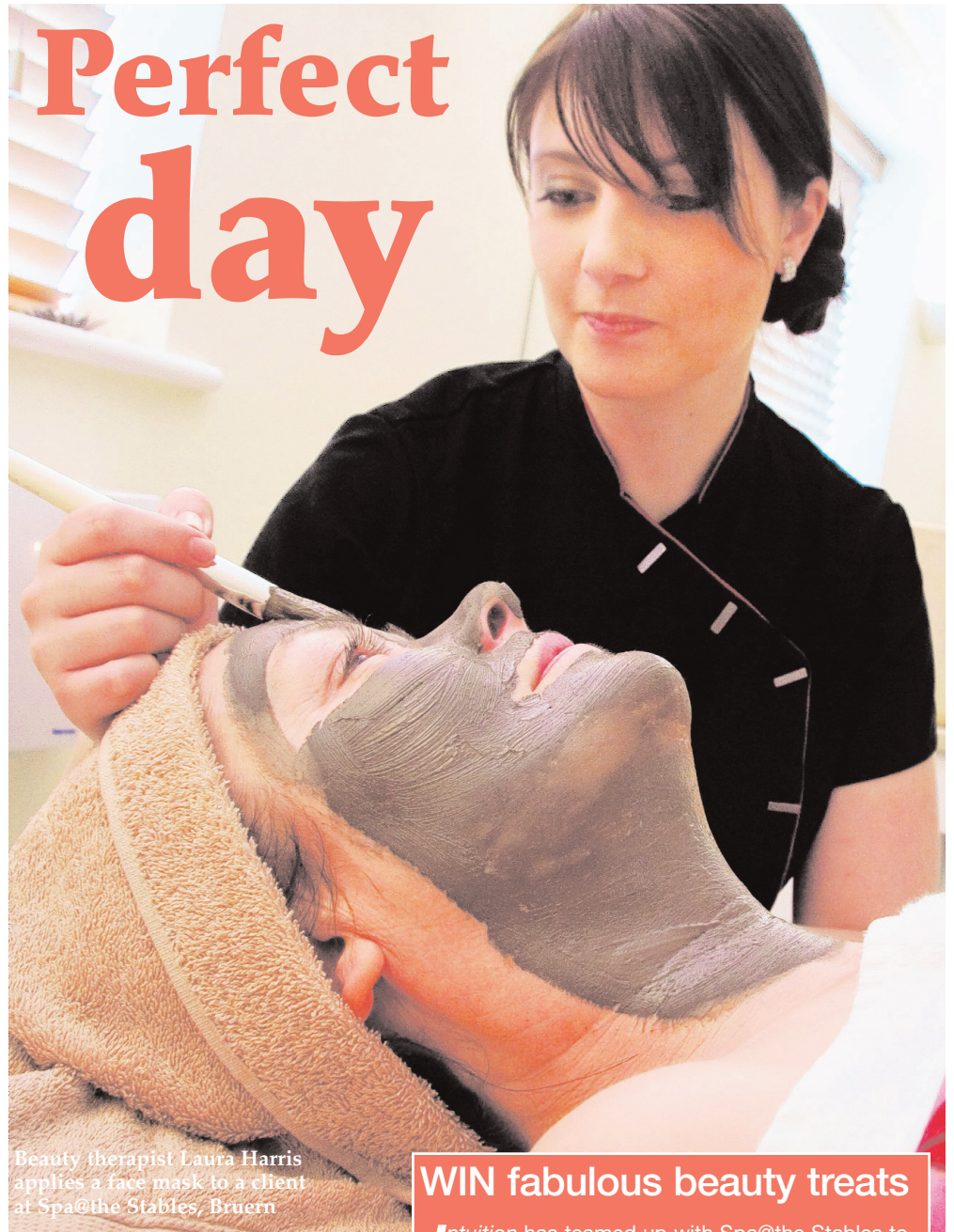
In terms of style and situation, locally I don't think there is anything to touch Spa@the Stables other than The Hay Barn at Daylesford Organic Farm, near Kingham, the very upmarket and much larger spa with breathtaking countryside views from the panoramic first-floor yoga studio — though there is no swimming pool.

Spa@the Stables is a hit with cottage guests and beauty clients, and featured among *The Tatler 101 Best Spas in the World* last year.

So, with the aim of letting the rest of Oxfordshire know that the spa beauty rooms are now open to everyone, Laura, who trained at the renowned Oxford College of International Beauty in Witney, invited me along to experience what is on offer.

I was impressed to see that the spa uses Aromatherapy Associates products, and offers Jessica manicures and St Tropez tanning — all respected brands. There is also support for a local organic beauty business, PUREbliss, based near Burford.

After a relaxing but firm massage of my back, neck and shoulders, Laura



Beauty therapist Laura Harris applies a face mask to a client at Spa@the Stables, Bruern

moved onto a PUREbliss prescriptive facial. This was 60 minutes of, guess what?, pure bliss! After being cleansed, massaged, polished and sculpted to a state of deep relaxation, there was the bonus that I looked and felt absolutely fantastic afterwards. Laura's soothing hands and the gorgeously pure and rejuvenating products brightened my skin, especially around the eyes. My skin looked and felt fresh and, dare I say, youthful. Wonderful.

Because the Bruern location is so lovely, it makes your 'me time' even more special. It is an easy trip to Bruern, just a few miles down country lanes off the A424 Burford to Stow road, with plenty of free parking — and, of course, those views and absolute tranquility. Perfect.

■ Spa@the Stables, Bruern, Oxon OX7 6PY, tel 01993 833015, www.bruern-holiday-cottages.co.uk

WIN fabulous beauty treats

Intuition has teamed up with Spa@the Stables to offer some fabulous beauty prizes to five lucky winners.

Our first prize is a two-hour Total Indulgence face and body treatment worth £120 plus a gift box of products worth more than £60. After exfoliation of the body you will be pampered with rich oils and creams then cocooned in a wrap while you have a Renew Radiance facial.

The second prize is an 80-minute Real Aromatherapy Experience worth £90 — a traditional aromatherapy full body massage followed by a facial massage.

The third prize is a 60-minute Pure Bliss Prescriptive facial worth £55 and we also have two runners-up prizes of 25-minute back massages, each worth £35.

To be in with a chance of winning, just send your name, address and daytime telephone number on a postcard to: *Intuition* Spa@the Stables Competition, Promotions Department, Newsquest Oxfordshire, Osney Mead, Oxford OX2 0EJ, to arrive no later than Friday, May 21, 2010. Normal Newsquest competition rules apply and the editor's decision is final.