



Seeds of Innovation

In each issue of The Healing Arts Guide, we feature inspirational stories that highlight the motivating and compelling experiences of entrepreneurs. Oftentimes, these personal accounts go unnoticed. However, we feel that the challenging and adventurous beginnings of these healing arts heavyweights are just as interesting as their well-deserved achievements.

Q&A with Jon Canas, President and CEO of Phytobiodermie

In 1997, Jon Canas and a few friends acquired Laboratoire Gibro S.A. a Swiss company making and distributing the PHYTO 5™ full skincare line of natural and energetic products. This decision was based on a fascination for the traditional Chinese medicine concepts that are the base for the formulation and application of PHYTO 5™. In 1998 the company received a Prize for Innovation in Paris for its novel and advanced use of light-therapy. As a result, the same year, they launched Phyto Distribution Inc, a Florida based company with the exclusive right to distribute the products in the US. Jon is president of both companies.

Jon has had a couple of career switches. He was following his father's foot steps as an MD, when he went from being a premed in France, to studying hotel management at Cornell University, and on to an MBA at Northeastern University, and later on to attend the AMP program at Harvard Business School. After an early retirement as a senior executive of an international hotel company, Jon opted for the life of an entrepreneur in the skincare and spa industry. He lives in Central Florida with his wife Gina who is an aesthetician and LMT. She runs the Phyto Institute in Eustis/Mount Dora where the Phytobiodermie training Center is located.

What inspired you to begin your business?

My first career was in hotel management. My desire was to do something on my own that had some relationship to the Hospitality industry. Then, I became exposed to a Swiss company manufacturing natural skincare products with a unique method based on the energetic principles of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), called Phytobiodermie. Interestingly, my father was a French M.D. who became a TCM doctor. As a teenager, my sprains and various ailments were treated with acupuncture and other energy-medicine modalities. I was enchanted to realize that no other competitors had the approach of this company and that I had an affinity for the uniqueness of its TCM-based method. The deciding factor was my discovery of the high commitment the company had to its philosophy encapsulated in its motto: "Beauty is health made visible!" It led to the acquisition of the Swiss company in 1997. Then, in 1998 we started the US distribution company, based in Central Florida.

What was your initial vision for the company?

Having anticipated that the spa demand would boom, it was clear that the better hotels and resorts would look for solutions to meet customer demand while creating competitive advantages for themselves. My vision was to offer a wellness-based program, resting on three premises: All vital-energy medicines postulate that the body is not simply matter but vital-energy as well. TCM teaches that skin conditions and body shapes are tell-tale signs of what is going on internally. Treatments and products need to be selected not only according to the needs of each individual, but also with consideration for the effects of each energetic season of which there are five in TCM. That is a unique specialty of Phytobiodermie.

What void were you hoping to fill in the wellness market?

With greater demand for non-invasive treatments, I saw this company very well positioned, thanks to the Phytobiodermie method, its PHYTO 5 “energetic” skin products and energybalancing proprietary equipment. Those natural products and energetic tools provide results in a progressive, holistic and non-invasive way.

What is the philosophy/mission behind your work?

Spas can make a contribution to wellness and beauty by working on vital-energy, without risks, and as a by-product of generally accepted spa treatments. We feel gratified when our clients get off the table and declare: “I feel better!”

This happens when the flow of vital-energy is stimulated and balanced as a result of our treatments. The notion of prevention is also central to energy-work. It is at the core of Phytobiodermie—not only to address skin conditions but to maintain balanced skin at its best. Our mission is to educate professionals to the possibilities of TCM and present them with the solutions we offer to spas and wellness centers.

What were some of the early obstacles/sacrifices?

We quickly found out that our primary targeted market, hotel and resort spas, was obsessed by the architecture, interior design and elements of marketing and image building while often paying too little attention to the methodology behind treatments. As a result, we had to re-direct our efforts. We found greater reception in medium-size day spas often owned by former technicians who understand the value of a common method for all treatments and training.



What innovations have you brought to the wellness market?

Our company has a long list of pioneering activities with results. Consider that in the sixties and seventies, our industry was following the lead of the drug industry, seeking and introducing new chemical solutions as the modern answers to both medicine and beauty. Phytobiodermie went counter-current by using natural ingredients: blends of essential oils in bases such as algae, clays, minerals, cereals, to which are included value-added ingredients such as vitamins and oligo-elements. We introduced the use of light therapy, using different colors of light, as a systematic adjunct to face and body treatments. We also created the Biostimulator™, a very unique piece of equipment to work on energetic points and reflex zones, for advanced practitioners. Overall, our truly innovative breakthrough was the notion of working not only with matter (products) on matter (skin) but also using energetic tools to work on vital energy with energetic essential oils and light, the purest form of energy.

What does the future hold for your company?

Our line is not for everyone. We sell only through professionals. And, only to those willing to be trained to our unique method. Clearly, it requires them to have an affinity for the concept that the body is more than matter but vital energy as wells. As more people demand holistic treatments, and as more of them become aware of the importance of vital-energy balance, we will be in greater demand. However, I anticipate that we will remain a specialty or niche line limited to spas motivated to go beyond.

What advice would you give other hopeful entrepreneurs?

It will be harder, and you will need more capital than anticipated. When you enter a booming industry you compete with those you can identify, but eventually with others who will join in. The bigger the potential gets, the more players in related industries will enter the fray. Trouble is, they bring more resources than any entrepreneur can. Authenticity and integrity makes it easier to stand behind your products and increase the coherence of your story. As always, perseverance and hard work remains essential.