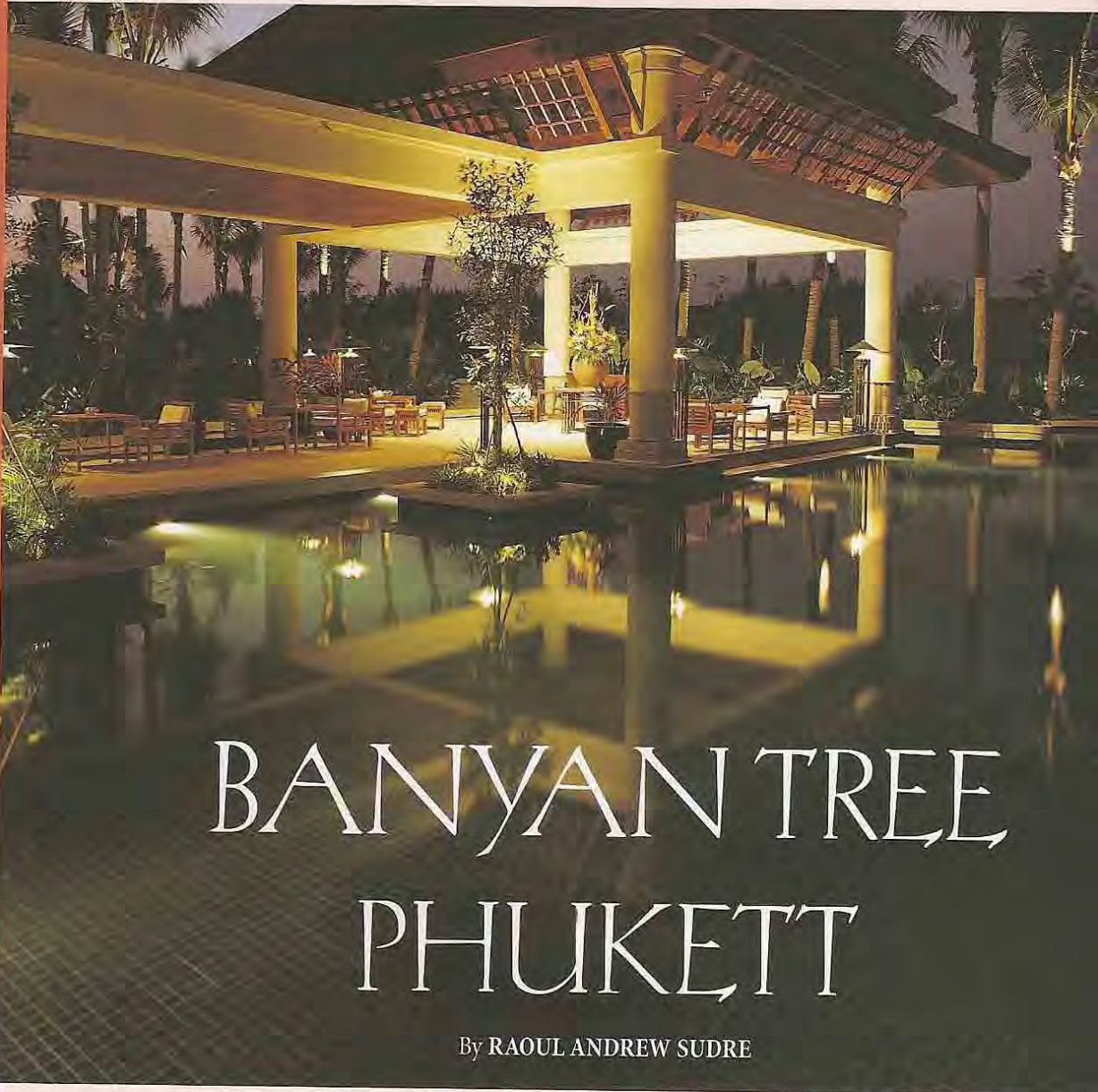


THE BANYAN TREE RESORT WAS SPARED FROM THE TSUNAMI!



BANYAN TREE PHUKETT

By RAOUL ANDREW SUDRE

There are some mythical destinations in the world and Phuket in Thailand is certainly one. Only six months after the Tsunami hit that part of the country life was back to normal, most of the damage repaired. The “Banyan Tree” resort was spared and its natural beauty continues to amaze the traveler. Built on a parcel of land; “The Laguna” that was earmarked for luxury hotels is constructed around canals and water features that bring calm and peace to the area.

The resorts are connected by shuttle buses and shuttle boats, so guests staying at the Banyan Tree can also use the facilities and services of the other resorts in the “Laguna area”. The “Banyan Tree



AND ITS NATURAL BEAUTY CONTINUES TO AMAZE THE TRAVELER



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Phuket" is the flagship of the company with 115 luxuriously appointed villas. Some of the villas have their own private pools; some have their own in villa spas.

The Spa at the resort has 12 Thai style spa pavilions where a variety of treatments can be received individually or for couples in an intimate atmosphere. No doubt a most romantic setting, and ideal "honeymoon destination". There are a number of exquisite restaurants on the property, all different, all exceptional. Since the resort is quite spread out, a 24 hour service of golf cart transportation is available to move around from one area to the other. In suite dining is an extraordinary experience. Whether it is

THE SPA AT THE BANYAN TREE IS LOCATED IN A SUPERB SETTING

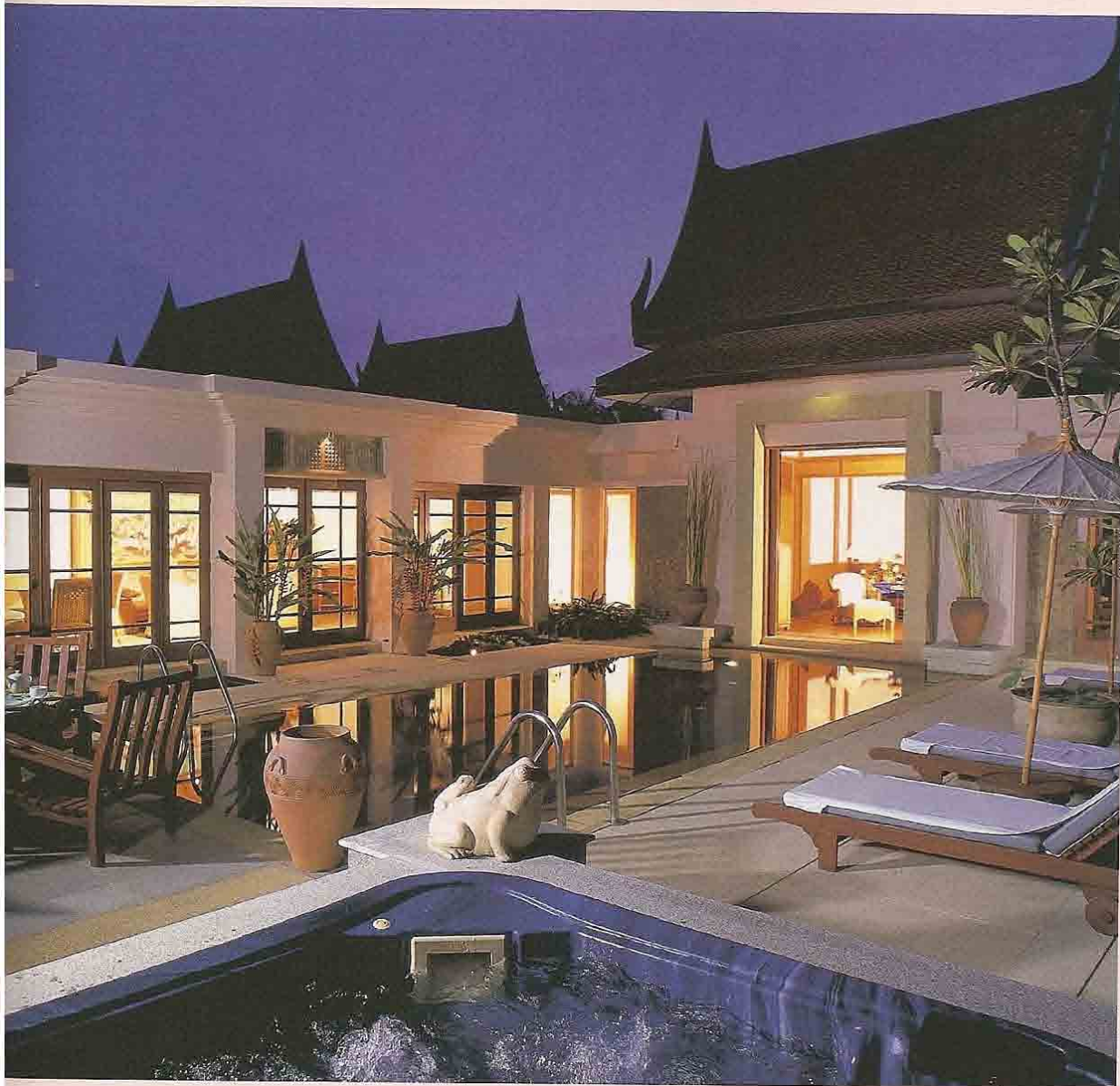


Breakfast, Lunch, or Dinner, two or three valets come to your villa, set up the table, prepare and serve the fares. One cannot understand the word "service" until having had the opportunity to witness Asian service in general and Thai service in particular. To make every client feel as if they are a V.I.P. is the norm there rather than the exception.

The Spa at the Banyan Tree is no exception to that rule, the setting is superb and the spa pavilions where most of the treatments are provided are just a delight. In a country where massage is an intimate part of the Thai culture, the delivery of the services were somewhat disappointing. The different massages that I ordered; the Lomi-Lomi and the Balinese were only different in their title. In no way were they what they purported to be...essentially the same which for many would not be noticed but savvy clients now do know the differences.



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In my case I have spent long periods of time both in Hawaii and Bali where, I designed Spas and had the opportunity not only to receive their native massages but also to learn them from local practitioners. The best way to explain this idiosyncrasy is to assume that these resorts cut corners on training and assume that most clients won't notice.

Unfortunately even if this might have been true in the past, it is no longer so today. So like with most spas in hotels and resorts in Thailand, the hardware is spectacular, the software is disappointing, and to receive exceptional treatments the best way to get them is to go outside of the resort to Day Spas and Massage Parlors of which there are many to experience the real thing...and at a tenth of the price! ■