



SPA DIRECTOR'S GUIDE

The Spa Director's Guide to Meeting Forbes Standards

How the right brand choice helps embed Forbes-aligned excellence into the treatment room, without adding complexity.

BY LYNNE LEON, VILASA · 12 MIN READ



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

“

More and more five-star properties are aligning their spa experience to Forbes Standards. What's becoming increasingly clear, the more I speak to Spa Directors about it, is that meeting those standards isn't about adding more.

It's about refining what already happens in the treatment room. And that is where brand choice becomes critical.

This guide sets out what Forbes inspectors are actually assessing, and how the right brand can help a spa meet those standards through the treatment itself, rather than through extra layers of process.

Lynne Leon — Founder & Managing Director, VILASA.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The short version

Forbes Standards reward refinement, not addition. Inspectors are assessing how well existing treatments are delivered, not how many extra steps have been layered on.

Inspectors assess personalisation, therapist confidence, consistency of the guest journey, storytelling, sustainability and aftercare, not just which products sit on the shelf.

Anne Semonin's made-to-measure approach, built on therapist-led consultation and the Intensive Complexes system, naturally supports all six of these areas.

An exclusive, advanced technique such as the Energetic Drainage Massage gives therapists a genuine point of expertise to build confidence and consistency around.

The strongest brands for Forbes-aligned spas don't announce the standard. They enable it, treatment by treatment, guest by guest.

What Forbes Inspectors Are Actually Assessing

Across the UK, an increasing number of five-star hotel spas are reviewing their treatment menus, their brand mix and their therapist training against Forbes Travel Guide Standards. It's a welcome shift. But it's also one that gets misunderstood.

Forbes inspectors aren't just assessing products or protocols. They're observing how personalisation shows up, how confident therapists feel, how consistent the guest journey is, and how seamlessly aftercare is handled.

That distinction matters, because it changes where a Spa Director should actually be looking. Meeting Forbes Standards is rarely about adding a new treatment, a new device or a new supplier relationship on top of what already exists. It's about whether what already happens in the treatment room, the consultation, the technique, the result, the story, the send-off, holds up to genuine scrutiny.

"Once you start trying to game the system... you've already lost."

Amanda Frasier, President of Standards and Ratings, Forbes Travel Guide

Up to 900

objective criteria assessed per property across the full Forbes Travel Guide evaluation.

75% / 25%

For spas specifically, service accounts for roughly 75% of the score, facility quality the remaining 25%.

3-star minimum

Spas are the one category where the lowest published Forbes rating is three stars, not one.

THE INSPECTOR'S PERSPECTIVE

The Six Areas Forbes Standards Actually Measure

Forbes Standards aren't a single checklist item. They're a lens applied across the whole treatment experience.

Personalisation

Is the guest genuinely consulted, or moved through a fixed protocol regardless of their skin or concern?

Therapist Confidence

Does the therapist execute an advanced, exclusive technique with visible skill and precision?

Visible Results

Can the guest see or feel a tangible difference before they leave the treatment room?

Storytelling

Is there an authentic narrative the therapist can share, building rapport beyond the treatment itself?

Sustainability

Do formulations, packaging and process reflect genuine attention to responsible luxury?

Aftercare

Does the experience continue at home, or end the moment the guest leaves the room?

A guest may forget the name of an active ingredient. They rarely forget being asked the right question, or noticing a result in the mirror before they've even got dressed.

How Anne Semonin Aligns With What's Being Measured

Anne Semonin wasn't built to chase a standards framework. It was built over 40 years of French spa heritage around a genuinely made-to-measure philosophy. What's notable is how closely that philosophy already maps onto what Forbes inspectors are assessing.

01 Personalisation & Consultation

Made-to-measure skincare using Intensive Complexes and therapist-led skin prescriptions. Every guest experience is visibly bespoke.

02 Therapist Confidence & Technique

The Energetic Drainage Massage is an exclusive Anne Semonin protocol requiring advanced training, giving therapists a genuine point of technical expertise.

03 Visible Results & Innovation

Cryotherapy Ice Cubes, Cryo-Lift facials and cryo tools provide immediate, noticeable results before the guest leaves the room.

04 Emotional Connection & Storytelling

A clear Parisian narrative and four decades of spa heritage give therapists something authentic to communicate.

05 Sustainability & Attention to Detail

Vegan-friendly actives, recyclable packaging and considered formulation reflect Forbes' focus on responsible luxury.

06 Aftercare & Retail Excellence

The Beauty Prescription method extends the treatment into personalised home care, supporting continuity long after checkout.

Where Forbes Alignment Goes Wrong

COMMON MISTAKES

1. Treating Forbes Standards as a checklist to satisfy, rather than a lens for refining what already happens in the treatment room
2. Adding new treatments or devices instead of deepening consultation and technique within the existing menu
3. Training therapists on product knowledge without giving them an exclusive, advanced technique to build real confidence around
4. Under-investing in the story behind the brand, leaving therapists with nothing authentic to share beyond generic luxury language
5. Treating retail as a transaction at the till rather than a continuation of the treatment the guest has just experienced

How to Align Your Spa Experience, Step by Step

1. **Audit your current consultation process.** Decide honestly whether guests are genuinely consulted, or moved through a fixed protocol.
2. **Review therapist training and signature technique.** Identify whether therapists have an exclusive, advanced technique to build confidence around.
3. **Check for visible results within your existing menu.** Assess whether guests see or feel a tangible difference before they leave.
4. **Strengthen brand storytelling.** Give therapists an authentic heritage narrative to share, rather than generic luxury language.
5. **Assess sustainability credentials.** Review formulation, packaging and sourcing against what Forbes inspectors increasingly look for.
6. **Build a genuine retail and aftercare continuation.** Replace till-point upselling with a personalised home-care recommendation.

Six Questions to Ask Before Switching Spa Brands

1. What's the minimum order commitment, and is a phased trial possible before switching fully?
2. How is therapist training handled once terms are agreed, and how quickly can we be ready?
3. What happens to existing stock and treatment menus during the changeover?
4. If we trial a single treatment first, what does the path to a fuller commitment look like?
5. What ongoing support exists after the initial switch, not just at launch?
6. If we're still under contract elsewhere, is it worth talking now to be ready for renewal?

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Forbes Travel Guide Standards for spas?

A set of detailed service and experience benchmarks used to assess five-star hotel spas. Inspectors assess personalisation, therapist confidence and technique, consistency of the guest journey, and aftercare, rather than simply checking which products are on the shelf.

Do I need a specific brand to meet Forbes Standards?

No single brand is required. What matters is whether the treatment demonstrates genuine personalisation, therapist confidence, visible results, authentic storytelling, sustainability and proper aftercare. Brand choice matters because some brands make this far easier to embed.

How does Anne Semonin support Forbes-aligned spas?

Its made-to-measure approach, built around therapist-led consultation and the Intensive Complexes system, supports all six areas Forbes assesses without adding complexity to an existing menu.

What is the Energetic Drainage Massage?

An exclusive Anne Semonin protocol requiring advanced therapist training, designed to deliver a consistent, recognisable guest journey while building genuine therapist confidence.

How do I start aligning my spa experience to Forbes Standards?

Start by auditing your consultation process, reviewing therapist training and signature technique, checking for visible results, strengthening storytelling, assessing sustainability, and building genuine retail continuation. Most spas need refinement, not a menu overhaul.

SPEAK TO OUR TEAM

Reviewing your spa's alignment to Forbes Standards?

Our team works directly with Spa Directors to assess fit, review therapist training needs, and recommend the right product selection for your menu and treatment room setup.

No obligation, no minimum order required to have a conversation.

hello@vilasa.co.uk · +44 (0)7921 330 242 · vilasa.co.uk