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Casa R. Caballero

Santa Fe meets New York City at Casa Caballero. At this unisex salon located at 9729 N. Armenia Avenue, about a half mile north of Busch Boulevard, you can be soothed, styled and even satisfy your shopping fix!

The decor has a Latin flair; the decorative tiles and weathered-looking light fixtures lead you to believe you'll see ocean waves lapping at the backside of the building. You're only snapped to reality from the chatter and constant stream of hustling clients and technicians getting down to the business of beauty.

You walk through "Cabi's Closet" to get to the facial room, where I received my first service. Cabi's Closet is the spa's boutique featuring unique clothing and accessories that the owner says he picks up every time he travels outside of the Tampa Bay area. If you think "boutique" equals "big price tag" you'll be pleasantly surprised: the hip outfits are very reasonably priced, as are the one-of-a-kind jewelry.

The facialist used Bioelements products, that carry an orange-citrus, nuts and lavender scents. Her touch was the firmest I have ever received for a mini-facial. You won't just receive the typical cleansing, exfoliation and moisturizing - she used a high-frequency wand to sterilize and infuse my pores with oxygen. An even bigger shock - extraction. I'll admit, it was painful! But I was blown away by the results afterwards: smooth, clear, soft skin that glowed.

With a fresh face, I was now ready for my shampoo and style - completed by the owner himself. His assistant gave my locks a good washing and scalp massage, finishing with a rich conditioner - all Redken products. My coarse, long hair was no match for this stylist, who twirled and curled my hair into a fun, full 'do. A not-so-secret weapon he used: this "magic" potion called White Sand which laughs in the face of heat and humidity to keep a style set, but leaves your hair soft to the touch. Hours later, after dancing the night away at an outdoor-deck club, my hair still looked as if I had just left the salon.

If the treatments aren't enough to lure you back, this may: the VIP card. Every dollar you spend at the spa equals one point. You can start redeeming your points for services starting at 100 points, maxing out at 2,000 points... so there's no excuse not to return again and again.

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