

INTERIOR DESIGN®

JANUARY
2007

soak it in

mirror image

With a private spa hotel and a public bathhouse, Ciel Rouge Création reveals the two faces of beauty on Japan's Shikoku island

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Known for its rocky coastline, pummeling waves, and thrashing winds, Japan's southern Shikoku island seems an odd spot for a spa. So why did cosmetics legend Shu Uemura make the island's city of Muroto the location of his Utoco Deep Sea Therapy Center & Hotel? First off, his factory is there. Second, pumps right offshore deliver pure, mineral-rich water from the depths of the Pacific—an elixir said to benefit both digestion and complexion. Turns out Muroto's rough waters are perfect for cultivating smooth skin.

To design the Utoco, his first such undertaking, Uemura contacted architect Henri Gueydan, principal of Ciel Rouge Création. He and fellow principal Fumiko Kaneko, the firm's business manager, were well acquainted with Uemura, having already completed his vacation home. →

Previous spread: One of two adjacent Ciel Rouge Création projects in Muroto, Japan, the *Bath House* is a public bathhouse. It offers a soaking pool that incorporates a whirlpool as well as individual stations for water gymnastics and hydro-massage.

Top, from left: At one end of Shu Uemura's Utoco Deep Sea Therapy Center & Hotel is the pavilion housing the lobby, boutique, and restaurant. The restaurant features a custom lacquered buffet. **Bottom, from left:** Custom upholstered chairs in the restaurant have ebonized legs. The restaurant overlooks a concrete terrace.

Opposite: In the Utoco's lobby, custom chairs pull up to the lacquered reception desk. Beyond is one of the hotel boutiques.





Top: Built-in seating lines Pacific-facing windows in one of the Utoco's suites. **Bottom, from left:** Decking surrounds a suite's outdoor hot tub. Ceramic mosaic tile clads the bathrooms.

water," Gueydon says. Or opt for a snake image, with the oval therapy center as the snake's head. Undulating gracefully behind, a ribbon of 17 hotel rooms terminates at a smaller pavilion, which curves around to house lobby, boutique, and restaurant. The entire structure is concrete, raw at the base and painted white above.

Inside, Kaneko says, "Everything is also white, like a canvas." Or almost everything. On entering the lobby, you can't miss the reception desk with its matching armchairs, all lacquered in Uemura-worthy lipstick red. Cross the polished concrete floor, past the spare white boutique, and arrive in the restaurant. That's where, sitting on white-upholstered chairs, freshly exfoliated guests might sip green tea—brewed with deep-sea water, of course.

The restaurant's inland wall has only porthole windows. "They remind you of moons," Gueydon says. "The shape has a soothing effect on the spirit." Facing the ocean is a curving glass wall shaded by a roof overhang. Palm trees soften the concrete-paved terrace.

In the guest rooms, broad windows open up the view toward the ocean—unobstructed by the low built-in seating beneath. Upholstery and bedspreads give each room a splash of individuality: Their floral patterns come in moss green and turquoise →

several makeup boutiques, and the Muroto Factory Museum, a showcase for the company's deep-sea water moisturizers, facial sprays, and creams.

Occupying a narrow strip of property between mountains and coast, the 35,000-square-foot Utoco project ripples across the landscape to "accentuate the area's natural beauty and reflect the smooth, fluid movement of



Top, from left: At the Bade Haus, shoes go in lockers to protect the birch floor. A urethane-coated panel wraps an internally lit display fixture. Center: Pebbles pave the Utoco therapy center's pool area. Bottom: The Bade House pool pavilion's roof of local sugi timber stretches 418 feet from end to end.



or other rich combinations. The dominant palette, however, stays hushed and neutral. Walls and cabinets are white, bathroom tiles off-white, and carpets beige.

Some suites have private hot tubs, but the main attraction is naturally the therapy center. Ringing the perimeter of this part of the building, treatment rooms offer everything from hammam-style steam to jet baths and hydro-massage. At the building's heart is the soaking pool, where views again connect guests to the horizon—and the source of the water they've come to luxuriate in. (It's heated to body temperature.)

The level of luxury barely decreases next door to Utoco, at the public bathhouse Ciel Rouge designed simultaneously for the city of Muroto. Called the Bade Haus, it comprises three oval pavilions. The main one contains the soaking pool, with the same pebbled surround as the Utoco's and, along the perimeter, individual stations for massage and water gymnastics. Capping each building, an exposed timber ceiling resembles an upturned hull.

"The Bade Haus is like three boats on the beach," Gueydon says. "The Utoco is like a foamy white wave." —

WHIRLPOOL/BATHHOUSE: HIKOKI CORPORATION; CUSTOM CHAIRS, TABLE CLOTHS (RESTAURANT), CUSTOM CHAIRS (RECEPTION), ROCK-STONE, SOFA, BEDSPREAD FABRIC (SUITE): CRÉATION BAUMANN; GENERAL CONTRACTORS: SHIMIZU SANGYO CORPORATION (BADE HAUS), TODOROKI CORPORATION (UTOCO).