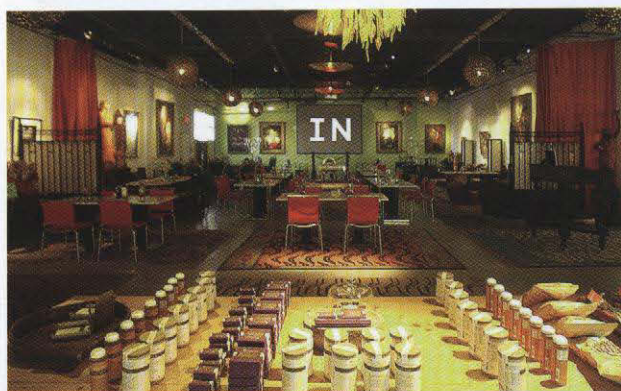


interview | chris mcbeath | journalist | spa business

# HORST RECHELBACHER

The Austrian-born founder of Aveda may have sold the company that made him famous, but when it comes to environmentally ethical business practices, he's still showing the spa industry how it's done. His latest venture explores the potential of 'functional food'



Rechelbacher spent US\$1.5m remodelling his Minneapolis IN Centre

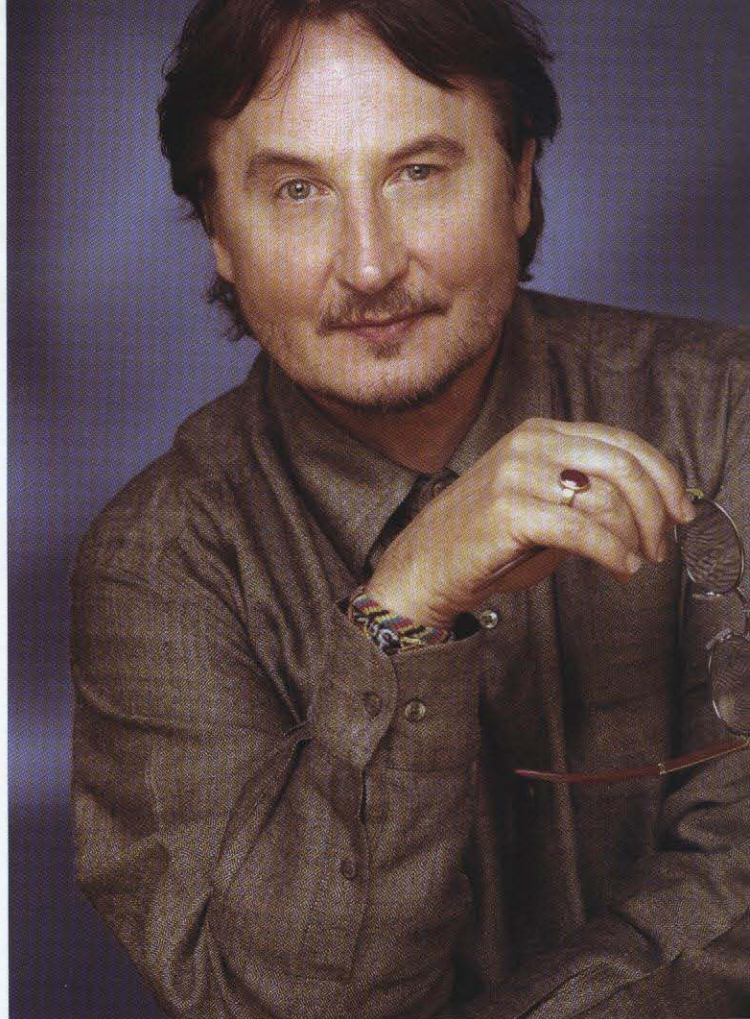
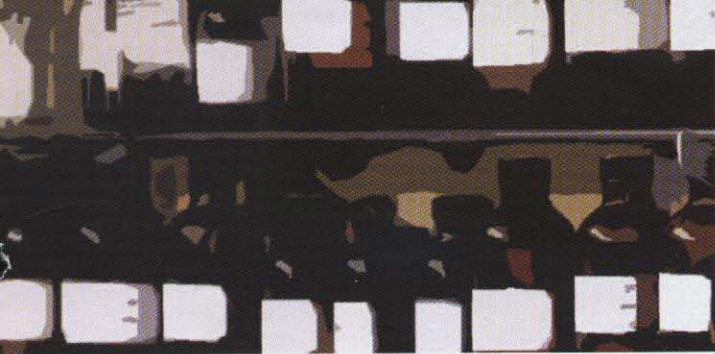
With more than 50 years in the business, Austrian-born Horst Rechelbacher knows a thing or two about health and wellness. As founder of Aveda, the international hair and skincare brand, Rechelbacher has played a prominent role in the development of the modern hair, beauty and spa industries, while also giving an insight into how to create an eco-friendly business that nourishes people, the planet and the bottom line.

Rechelbacher's current book, *The Business Of Being*, is about just that, while his latest business venture – Intelligent Nutrients – challenges the way we look at another area: food. The recipient of the North American Hairstyling Awards' 2004 Lifetime Achievement Award, and recently voted one of Austria's most influential citizens in the world, Horst Rechelbacher just keeps on reinventing himself.

## ECO ENTREPRENEURS

Spa Business meets Rechelbacher at the international Leading Spas of Canada conference, where he is a keynote speaker. As he moves through the crowds, he shakes hands graciously, always finding a moment to be fully present with whoever wants to talk to him. Rechelbacher has always encouraged others to live with environmental awareness, and now he's no longer at the helm of Aveda – he sold the business to Estée Lauder in 1997 – he has the independence to crank up the volume of his message.

"I believe we must all become eco-entrepreneurs, more self-conscious and more mindful of our elements," he says. "Because our chemical make-up is so symbiotic with nature, it stands to reason that the better we understand ourselves, the better we understand our surroundings. That's why we must study ourselves – study cause



Rechelbacher (above) launched Intelligent Nutrients (inset) in 1995

## BUSINESS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

In September 2000, the UN Global Compact laid out 10 principles for doing business in an ethical way, in four key areas: human rights, labour standards, the environment and anti-corruption. Following on from this, a number of influential individuals, including Horst Rechelbacher, came together to found Business for Social Responsibility ([www.bsr.org](http://www.bsr.org)) – a consortium of large companies including Aveda, Gap, Levi Strauss, Walt Disney, Alcan and Chiquita – to set the parameters for a worldwide movement that encourages organisations to do business with a social and ethical conscience.

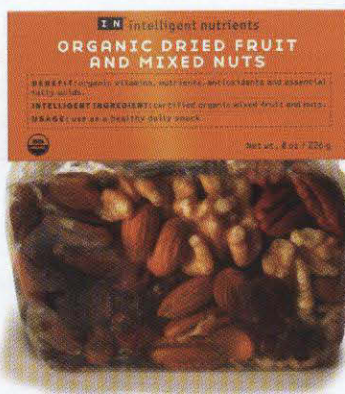
Several other corporate social responsibility groups exist, in Europe ([www.csreurope.org](http://www.csreurope.org)), the Americas ([www.empresa.org](http://www.empresa.org)) and Canada ([www.cbsr.ca](http://www.cbsr.ca)). In Britain, government regulation has dictated that all UK-listed firms will, by April 2006, have to report on social and environmental risks alongside traditional financial results. Groups such as Business in the Community ([www.bitc.org.uk](http://www.bitc.org.uk)) have already picked up the gauntlet.

and effect, and how they impact on our health. If I am in fear, my heart is heavy – that heaviness creates stress and stress inflames our organs and body fluids. So the way we calm ourselves, through touch, plant essence, or meditation, becomes an essential practice. And spas, by their very nature, are in a unique position to promote this wellness in people, which in turn nurtures wellness of the planet.

“The spa experience can have a profound effect on our emotions, so if we understand our autonomic system and the way in which our body stores memories, there’s a tremendous opportunity to move spa therapies to a very profound level of healing.”

Coming from anyone other than Rechelbacher, these may sound like overblown claims. But this is the man who once argued that if salon and spa operators substituted polluting, chemical-based beauty products with harmless, plant-derived alternatives, they wouldn’t just change their clients, they would change the world. And through Aveda, he showed it could be done.

Today, the Aveda network ranges across four continents, with a presence in the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, Italy, the Benelux countries, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Australia. It includes 5,542 Aveda salons and spas in North America alone and 1,145 in the rest of the world; 131 corporate-owned stores in North America with 100 elsewhere; and 31 Aveda Institutes (training centres for beauty and spa professionals) with three more in the pipeline, in key locations across the globe.



## NEW DIRECTIONS

Rechelbacher’s latest venture, Intelligent Nutrients ([www.intelligentnutrients.com](http://www.intelligentnutrients.com)), is now being prepared for the global stage. Originally dealing in nutritional supplements, the company was started by Rechelbacher in 1995 and managed by his son until he opted out last year. Back at the helm, Rechelbacher saw the potential to take the business in new directions.

“We’re no longer dealing with food supplements,” he explains. “We’re developing brand new, bio-dynamic, organic and high-function foods or ‘nutraceuticals’. They are derived from the nuclei of seeds, which have a much stronger potency and higher vibrational frequency than the rest of the plant.”

Many of these ‘functional foods’, from snack bars and teas to spices and chocolates, are designed to ease specific ailments, from sinus problems to Crohns Disease. Rechelbacher has even developed a line of dietary supplements using added essential oils, a concept he has called ‘flavor aromatherapy’. Learning from past experience (he claims he coined the term ‘aromatherapy’), he has been careful to trademark the name.

The company has also recreated several biblical remedies, such as the spikenard herbal blend Mary Magdalen used to soothe Christ’s wounds. Even chocolates get a look in. “Well, why not?” says Rechelbacher. “Real cacao, sweetened with cactus glycerin and filled with the right essential oil, is very calming. In fact, chocolates are an ideal sampler to give to guests before a spa treatment.”

As in the early days of Aveda, Rechelbacher places great emphasis



**HORST RECHELBACHER:  
FAVOURITES**

**Book** *Sadana* by Swami Rama, who simplified all he ever taught  
**Film** *Ghandi*, for its undying message  
**Place** Takeschwa, a 500-year-old retreat temple  
**Food** Everything spicy (my 'pita' personality coming through)  
**Leisure activity** Meditation, sometimes up to eight hours in one sitting  
**Spa treatment** Massage, which I enjoy once or twice a week

*Rechelbacher maintains close links with Aveda, whose lines include Caribbean Therapy (opposite page, top and bottom right) and Pure Essences (bottom); the first IN Centre opened in Minneapolis (below)*

on sampling. "Sampling is not about giving," he says. "It's about selling products and can literally double your retail revenue." This is an area Rechelbacher has always taken very seriously: "Retail should constitute 60 per cent and service 40 per cent of your total revenue."

Last year, Rechelbacher spent US\$1.2m (€950,000 or £653,000) on remodelling the original Aveda warehouse in Minneapolis, Minnesota, into a flagship destination for Intelligent Nutrients. The 1,400sq m (15,000sq ft) IN Centre, which opened last December, includes an extensive retail store showcasing all manner of sprays, oils, perfumes and organic functional foods, as well as an organic café and an educational centre. It is also home to the first Wunderbar, which is staffed by trained nutritionists ready to dispense tasty but therapeutic plant-based concoctions with an ayurvedic twist – "they have a solid knowledge of ayurveda wellness concepts, such as body types," says Rechelbacher.

Like Aveda, Intelligent Nutrients combines the supply of products with education and sustainability, and works with local farmers and communities to help raise their standard of living. With an eye to replenishing the soil, the company is also experimenting with bio-dynamic soil restoration through the administration of nutrient compounds at full moon and by influencing the matrix of water. Here, Rechelbacher refers to the teachings of Dr Masaru Emoto, whose work on how intention affects the quality of water is attracting the attention of the scientific world. "Water is [essential to] life and the essence of the spa experience, so it's a terribly important connection for spa owners to understand," he says.

Intelligent Nutrients is also working with the Mayo Clinic in the US on cancer-related studies. "There are 80 known cancer-causing chemicals used in the cosmetics industry, as well as in household products and popular baby products," says Rechelbacher, who is a



loyal supporter of the US-based Cancer Prevention Coalition ([www.preventcancer.com](http://www.preventcancer.com)).

A second, seven-storey IN Centre is set to open in New York in late 2005 and promises to include an organic shopping store of Intelligent Nutrients functional foods and products, as well as an organic restaurant, an Aveda Concept Spa and a Wunderbar.

**A MAN CALLED HORST**

Growing up in Austria, Rechelbacher, who is dyslexic, was a poor student. At the age of 12, he was encouraged to leave school to find a trade and, having lived across the road from a beauty salon for most of his childhood, hairdressing seemed like a logical choice. Within two years, he had become an accomplished competitive stylist and by the time he was 17, he was one of the European jet set, travelling all over the world to enter high-profile competitions.

In the mid-1960s, he was on tour in the US when a near-fatal car accident in Minneapolis laid him low. Forced to stay in the States to pay off a mountain of medical bills, he decided to set up his own salon. The business soon turned into a chain – Horst Salons – and Rechelbacher quickly became one of the glitterati's most sought-after stylists, representing companies such as Revlon and L'Oreal in competitive events. The accident was a personal as well as professional turning point. Rechelbacher's mother, a herbalist,

**HORST RECHELBACHER: SIDELINES**

- Books by Rechelbacher include *Rejuvenation* and *Aveda Rituals. The Business Of Being* is his third book
- Rechelbacher is a teacher of intuitive diagnostics (massage) at the University of Minnesota, Centre of Spirituality and Medicine
- The Horst M. Rechelbacher Foundation, a charitable organisation set up in 1997, supports grass-roots social and environmental projects around the world
- HMR Enterprises specialises in film, arts and antiques. Projects have included the film *Hidden Medicine*, which premiered at the 1999 Sundance Film Festival in America and won the Toronto Film Festival, and Horst Galleries in Minneapolis, which feature work by emerging artists

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Rechelbacher's 15,000sq ft IN Centre (above) houses an organic café and an education centre alongside a vast retail area; the first line of plant shampoos manufactured by Horst Salons, the forerunner of Aveda, were made from cloves (right)

## Rechelbacher believes 'cultural creatives' are redefining what success means, moving it away from work and making money and towards personal fulfilment, social conscience and creating a better future

*continued from p70*

played a key role in his recovery and he quickly learned to appreciate the healing properties of her remedies. "As a boy, I remember my mother dispensing home-made, medicinal blends of herbs she had collected on alpine hikes," he says. "I was so impressed with their efficacy in my own path to wellness, I experimented with them for hair care. As a competitive stylist, I was always being asked to try new products, but I didn't get the results I wanted until I incorporated her herbal blends."

It was also during this period that Rechelbacher started to explore the teachings of ayurveda. They quickly became the basis of his life – he studied with Swami Rama, visited India on a regular basis, and in 1996 he earned an Honoris Causa doctorate in ayurveda from Gurukul Mahavidyalaya Twalapur, Haridwar University, and an Honoris Causa doctorate from Hindi University, both in India.

So it was that Horst Salons became an experimental laboratory for a line of haircare products that combined ancient ayurvedic principles with powerful herbal blends – its first plant shampoos were made from cloves and an almond-bark conditioner. However, it was Shirley Hutton, a regular client and top recruiter for skincare company Mary Kay, who really got the business rolling.

"I was frenetically busy," says Rechelbacher, "yet Shirley told me I wasn't being smart because I wasn't selling anything. 'You have a terrific party going on in your salon and a great product, but you're not telling people what you're doing,' she said. When she told me MK parties earned her US\$5,000 a go (€4,000 or £2,700), I almost became a Mary Kay representative there and then!"

From that moment, Horst started making his products in earnest. In order to sell them beyond Horst Salons, he changed the company's name to Aveda and adopted Mary Kay's sampling concept. In 1977, he opened the Aveda Institute Minneapolis and the rest, as they say, is history.

Through Aveda, Rechelbacher has undoubtedly helped to popularise ayurveda, but he is quick to distinguish spa treatments that incorporate some ayurvedic principles from the real deal. In today's spa industry, ayurvedic treatments are considered mainstream, yet many practitioners either don't understand the depth of the therapies they're providing or else they easily confuse ayurvedic spa treatments with ayurvedic medicine, he says. "The two

are certainly related, but very, very different. Therapies involve wellness and lifestyle choices and are only a fraction of the ayurvedic system."

Ayurvedic medicine involves medical diagnostics and a complex set of interdependent disciplines that touch upon the physical, mental and energetic make-up of every individual. "A true practitioner of ayurveda practises these as a way of life," he says.

### CULTURAL CREATIVITY

For Rechelbacher, Aveda and Intelligent Nutrients are part of a new phenomenon that sociologist Paul H. Ray calls 'integral culture'. Research into the movement shows that its followers, dubbed 'cultural creatives', are 80 per cent female and, while they come from all backgrounds, they share a concern for spiritual transformation, ecological sustainability and the worth of the feminine.

"Aveda has always been a very feminine and culture-creative workplace," says Rechelbacher. "When I started, it was an incubator for different ideas – I simply listened and responded. For example, I noticed how disconnected women were when separated from their babies, so I built an on-site day care centre. It was a blissful place."

Other benefits enjoyed by Aveda employees include fitness facilities with personal trainers, yoga classes, an organic restaurant, an environmentally friendly dry-cleaning service, tuition reimbursements, bus shuttles and car-pooling incentives.

Today, Rechelbacher believes that 'cultural creatives' – of which there already more than 80 million in North America alone – are redefining what success means, moving it away from work and making money towards personal fulfilment, social conscience and creating a better future for everyone on the planet. They are even spawning a new industry, purveying lifestyles of health and sustainability, worth US\$230bn (€182bn or £125bn) in the US last year and US\$540bn (€427bn or £294bn) worldwide.

So how can spa owners and operators make the most of this? "For a business to click, you must have vision," says Rechelbacher. "And for a business to manifest [become reality], you must have grace." In Rechelbacher's case, these qualities are matched by a curious mind, marketing talent and passion to make the world a better place. ●

