

DETOX *to* RETOX



When the superrich need a quick clean-up before they party again, they head to the £80,000-a-week hi-tech Zurich clinic that specialises in 'harm reduction'. We sent *Kate Spicer* to test it out

How do you detox when the party has to stop? Solpadeine and a sickie? Juice fast? "Mumhab" at home in your teenage bedroom? Or do your staff shovel you onto a private jet to fly to Zurich, where a chauffeur is waiting on the tarmac and drives you to a secret location, where a crack team of progressive shrinks and eminent therapists from across the medical and complementary-therapy spectrum are waiting to work with you, and only you, at a rehab facility for one.

For only £80,000, you, too, can clean up your body while unravelling your mind on Paracelsus Recovery's seven-day Executive Detox, a mini-rehab for busy addicts and clapped-out party monsters. The clinic's director, Jan Gerber, says that normally, visitors stay for six weeks (price: £360,000). "But we are pragmatists. We realise there are people who are struggling with addiction but who don't have the time or inclination to commit to full rehab. If you are a head of state, you can't disappear for a month."

One client, a London-based hedge-fund manager, 33, says: "Drink and drugs are central to my lifestyle. We are always out with clients and it would be deemed odd not to drink. Snorting cocaine is as normal as having a cup of coffee, it isn't really considered a drug. I don't want to stop; without using, life is dull. Full-on rehabilitation isn't for me."

Broadly, Gerber says, the exec detoxer falls into two categories: those who are over 40 and "have high-profile jobs and need to function", and seasoned party-goers, usually under 40, who have no intention of giving up. "The stigma of rehab is not an option. They say to their friends, 'Yeah, I go crazy, then I pay £80K to this Swiss clinic to clean me up again.' It's a kind of boast." The busiest times are the end of summer, New Year and after peak Alps ski season. "Some book months ahead, knowing what state they'll be in," Gerber says. "Others come at short notice when they are crashing and frightened."

Gerber describes the clientele as royals, politicians, CEOs, financiers, the superrich and the superfamous. When he tries to recall the last person who arrived so drunk, they actually fell out of their private jet, he thoughtfully taps a pen to his lips. "It was that Hollywood actress. I think. We had one [Arab royal] wake up here with no recollection of flying across the world in his jet with his entourage to get here."

Finding therapists who are unaffected by

extreme wealth and power is a challenge, and confidentiality is paramount at Paracelsus. "No last names. We only need an age, which we change in any documentation for security purposes. We can do an eight-week programme without knowing who you are. We are alert to any of the clinics or residences we use in the programme being compromised. We changed one because staff noticed someone hanging round." Journalists? "Maybe. Or spies. One client told us that they only booked to come after their secret service checked us out."

So, why am I here? The owners have never spoken to the press before. Do they need business? No, word of mouth serves them just fine, and besides, they can only host 10 or so patients a year. What Gerber wants is an open discussion about short detox programmes as an alternative path for addicts. "Some people don't want to or can't stop. So either they come to us and we contain some of the damage until they're ready to quit, or they don't come at all."

This approach is known in addiction-treatment parlance as "harm reduction". One of the centre's psychiatrists, Thilo Beck, is a world-famous proponent of it. "I have seen people in this income group who have been to

rehab 30 or 40 times," he says. "It's bullshit."

However, Dr Karen Ersche, a lecturer at the University of Cambridge department of psychiatry, is sceptical about this approach. "Drug habits become hardwired by processes of learning, which result in changes in brain structure and function; changing this requires a long-term process of relearning," she says. "I doubt this can be done in seven days. Treating addiction is not just about detoxification."

The clinic's doctor is Ingrid Riedel, famous in German-speaking countries for her integrative approach, another effective trend in addiction medicine. Executive detoxers undergo a battery of tests: allergies, EEGs, ECGs, ultrasound, thorough blood analysis. Then there is the Metatron, an engrossing and almost implausible diagnostic tool, based on Russian technology developed during the space race, that draws on big data to make diagnoses. I try to imagine I am an oligarch as I sit down, holding pads in each hand that send bioelectrical data about my cells to a computer, at which the cheerily taciturn Riedel sits, watching visual scans of my body in varying states of anatomical undress: skin, bones, cardiovascular, organs, muscular, nervous system. Click, click, click, on she goes,

zooming in on areas showing weakened cells. Kidneys: "Drink more water!" Lower intestine: "You have been in India? You have parasite." Click, click, click, right into the stem cells in my femur. Apparently, it can not only diagnose cell health but also boost it at the click of a mouse. Click, click, click. "That should help," she says.

"Clients love the Metatron. This is when they get invested in their health," Gerber says. Health issues are shared with patients rather like due diligence in a corporate takeover. "They can see the damage their lifestyle causes. Dr Riedel sugarcoats nothing."

Once the biodata has been analysed, bespoke infusions are mixed in Riedel's lab. The client takes these intravenously, daily, along with Metatron therapy, while sitting in a white leather chair at a secret clinic. "The first time one oligarch came, he had been at a wedding, then he had a board meeting on Monday and he needed to function urgently," Gerber says. "His doctor found us and he came the next day and we patched him up in two days." The next time, he came for the full week. "He did all the therapies: psychiatrist, yoga, nutrition, the lot. Now he spends six hours a day having Metatron therapy and infusions."

The whole Gerber family is dedicated to treating the ills of ultra-high-net-worth individuals. The centre was founded five years ago after Gerber's psychiatrist

father, Werner, helped the CEO of a listed company dry out in secret in the family's spare room. Jan's mother, Christine Merzedwer, the clinical co-ordinator and a nurse, is an author and a campaigner for recognition of emotional abuse and improving the quality of elderly care. They are good people, not chancers. Merzedwer says the clinic is popular with Middle Eastern clients: "They trust us, and these people trust no one. They have so much money and there are a lot of charlatans out there. They're suspicious because they're often ripped off."

I struggle to feel sympathy. Visiting Paracelsus is bittersweet. Periods of foolish excess in my own life have been blundered through with yoga retreats and weekends on my parents' sofa. More poignantly, I have friends who are functioning albies and addicts while still busy working and parenting. This form of recovery for the rich, one that throws every efficient therapy their way — from psychiatric genius and psychotherapeutic handholding to space-age tech and elixirs of health — is the epitome of having your cake and eating it. Shame only 0.001% could ever afford it. ●

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We are PRAGMATISTS. If you are a head of state, you CAN'T disappear for a MONTH