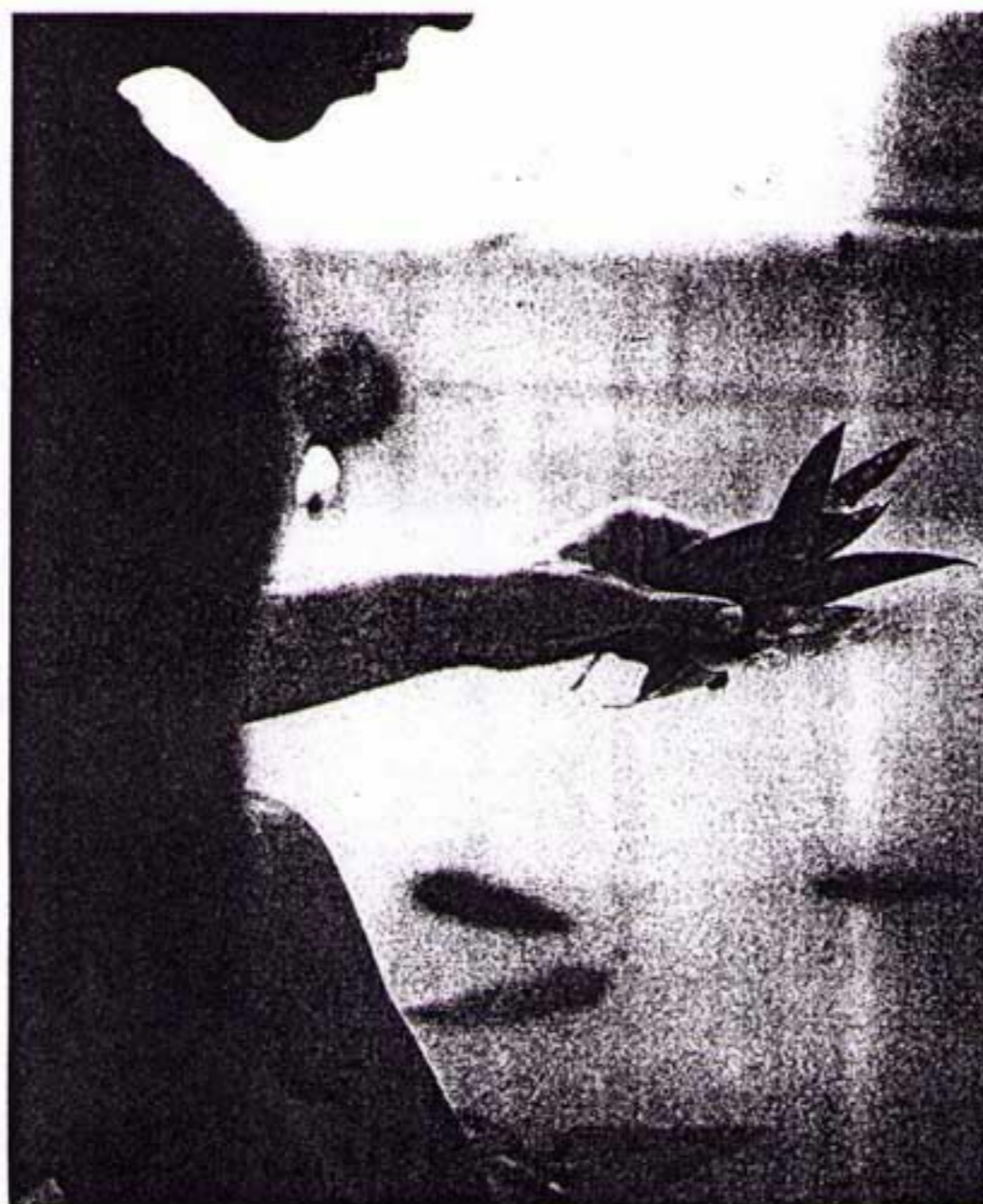


healing

TEXT BY PENELOPE GREEN PHOTOGRAPHS BY AMY NUENSINGER



MY FRIEND GLONE IS VERY HERBAL. AND I MEAN THAT IN THE NICEST POSSIBLE WAY. WHEN HER CHILDREN ARE sick or sad, she throws them in the bathtub with some chamomile flowers or some catnip. “Here is a lovely tea, my dears,” she says. “We’ll add the milk and sugar later.” Glone drops essential oils—geranium, or “whatever takes my fancy”—on cotton balls, and puts them in her vacuum-cleaner bags. She keeps witch hazel in her refrigerator as her answer to bacitracin. Her house smells terrific.

Actually, the whole country has gone a bit herbal, as the various threads of the alternative world—from the truly out-there types to the most grounded practitioners of Chinese medicine—have combined and grown to such an extent that much of America has felt their influence. The common denominator is a belief in the folkloric plant tra-

Soothing Baths

ditions that remained the principal form of medicine in developing countries, even as they waned in the Western world. I tripped into this alternative world by way of a bath. The problem was sciatica. “St.-John’s-Wort,” advised Joanne Pelletiere, manager of Aphrodisia, an herb store in New York City. “Steep the leaves, and pour the liquid in your bath.” The bath turns out to be the safest route, because many herbs are poisonous if ingested but relatively harmless if used topically. And so hurling oneself into an herbal tea, as Glone’s family does, means you get to play with the

Herbs and essential oils add medicinal value to baths. But their soothing properties may be the most important element. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: Eucalyptus relieves congestion. An herb bouquet can be tied to the faucet or bundled in a sachet. Rose petals for the bath should be organic; commercially bought flowers may have been treated with chemicals.

One day she handed me a sheaf of papers: recipes for making hard water soft, for getting rid of cellulite (hel-lo), for making herbal sachets for the bath. Horse chestnut. Pennywort. Cypress. The ingredients made a sonorous, medieval chant. I didn't have a clue where to find any of them, so she sent me to Penny's General Store.

Penny's General Store is hard-core herbal, a real apothecary. It's dusty and dark and serious-looking, set below street level in New York City's East Village. Jars and jars of herbs are

The perfect way to begin your day or end a long week: A warm bath, blanketed with rose petals, that soothes your skin and surrounds you with a natural, delicate perfume.



there. So are bags of clay and sea salts, various balms and salves and ointments, and hundreds of tiny brown bottles of essential oils. There's a wooden bench to wait on, and you wait, most days, because there are usually a number of clients there, some of them older people, some with serious ailments.

Kim Turim opened Penny's General Store fifteen years ago, naming it after a cat he once had. Filling Miraglia's prescriptions cost me just over \$100 cash, because sales at Penny's are cash only. Here is what I bought: essential oils of bergamot, sage, cypress, ivy, pennywort, sandalwood, lemon, chamomile. A cup of clay. A

pound of sea salt. An ounce of calendula flowers. One of Miraglia's recipes calls for essential oils of rose, but at \$50 for an eighth of an ounce, it wasn't in the budget (you can substitute geranium, she says). Turim teased me by dropping some rose oil on a Kleenex and waving it under my nose. "Heaven," I said, and tucked the tissue into my sleeve. (He asked me for the tissue back before I left the store.)

At home, my bathtub became a stockpot: Cider vinegar should go in first to neutralize the minerals in the hard water, says Miraglia. I made sachets from the garden—a sprig each of rosemary, lavender, and thyme, stuffed into the little muslin bags Pen-

HOW TO GET WET

First, go shopping. Basic bath stuff includes: **MUSLIN BAGS** to make sachets **GLASS DROPPER TOPS** for essential oils **CLAY** draws impurities out of the skin **OATMEAL** soothes irritated skin **BRAN** softens skin and bath-water **SEA SALT** (or use Kosher salt) draws impurities out of the skin, specifically acidic wastes from muscles and joints **POWDERED SEAWEED** (or flakes; at health-food stores) draws impurities out of the skin.

An assortment of essential oils to your taste: **LAVENDER** (a balancing oil) calms you down or revs you up, depending on your need **ROMAN CHAMOMILE** is almost soporific **BERGAMOT** stimulates **ROSEMARY** is a light astringent; it stimulates, rejuvenates, promotes elimination of waste **SAGE** is purifying; restores skin tone **ROSE** and **GERANIUM** are reputedly deeply healing **LEMON** is antiviral, antibacterial **EUCALYPTUS** is good for respiratory congestion **ALMOND OIL** Peeka Trenkle and Joanne Pelletiere both suggest mixing essential oils with a carrier oil, such as sweet almond oil, before adding to the bath. Otherwise, says Trenkle, the essential oil may not disperse evenly in the bath and could irritate sensitive skin. Use twelve to fifteen drops to one ounce of oil, says Trenkle, and shake well. Or, mix one tablespoon scented oil with one-quarter cup milk or yogurt—the milk emulsifies the oil. Then pour that into the tub.