

Sound, Cold, and Compression

Japanese-inspired Shou Sugi Ban House in Water Mill, New York, is a wellness retreat dedicated to healing.



The 5-acre compound is a serene world unto itself. Above: Himalayan singing bowls are part of the Healing Arts program.

IT'S MY FIRST NIGHT at Shou Sugi Ban House, a Japanese-inspired spa and wellness center in Water Mill, New York, and I'm curled up on a pile of sheepskin rugs in a candlelit meditation hall. Notes of patchouli and ylang-ylang fill the room, as does burning sage and the salty smell of the ocean, just three miles away. Jodie Webber, creative director and head of the center's Healing Arts program, hands me an eye mask and covers me in a blanket. I've never experienced a sound bath before, though as a musician, I'm intrigued by the 60-inch gongs, chimes, and Himalayan singing bowls Jodie tells me are over 300

years old. Lying in the silence, I feel the anxiety that always finds me at night. But as Jodie guides my breath, my worries are soon submerged in sound.

I had come to Shou Sugi Ban House seeking a Hamptons spa experience, which in my mind meant a few days of sun-soaked peace, minimalist luxury, and their much buzzed about hyperseasonal cuisine (conceived with Noma co-founder Mads Refslund). I had no idea I would find something deeper. Though only steps from Montauk Highway, the 5-acre compound is a serene world unto itself, connected by meditative stone pathways and edged

with evergreens and abundant grasses. With its organic lines and monochromatic interiors, inside and outside are blurred, as are the boundaries between Eastern and Western healing modalities, which coexist and complement each other at this wabi-sabi oasis.

At breakfast in the airy Main Barn, I meet co-founder and CEO Amy Cherry-Abitbol, a warm, effusive woman who lived in Japan for many years in her previous life as a lawyer. Over perfectly soft-boiled eggs, porridge, foraged berries, and the purest, grassiest matcha I've ever tasted, I learn that the center's namesake, *shou sugi ban*, is an ancient Japanese building technique that preserves wood by charring it. The method transforms the wood, making it more resilient to the elements and increasing its longevity. Having felt burned myself these last few years by illness and the chaos of the world, I'm inspired by Amy's stories, and grateful for her wisdom to trust the process.

I spend the rest of the morning with biohacking consultant John Hoekman, plunging in and out of a 40-degree pool and a hot sauna for contrast hydrotherapy. With John guiding my breath as Jodie had done the night before, I push through my initial fear, lasting two whole minutes in the freezing water. Invigorated, I follow John to the Shou Sugi Ban Lab to sample the longevity circuit, a handful of cutting-edge, Western-based deep relaxation and



rejuvenation technologies. Zipped into the Ballancer Pro, a body compression suit that uses rhythmic pressure to stimulate the lymphatic system and eliminate body toxins, I listen to calming neuro-acoustic tracks from NuCalm, my nerves aligning with the vibrational frequencies, much like with Jodie and her antique bowls. I'm amazed how two totally different experiences can yield the same results.

For the afternoon, Jodie tweaks my itinerary so I can experience a Crystal Healing session with Deborah Marshall, a celestial seer with such kind eyes I trust her immediately. While John's technologies sought to rebalance me on a cellular level, Deborah works with me energetically, unblocking my chakras with grounding cornelian, clearing ruby, and loving rose quartz. She calls in my spirit team, asking for their support so I can release what no longer serves me. Maybe it's the ethereal music that emanates from every space, but I'm brought to tears. I didn't realize how ready I was to let go of my expired identity as a singer-songwriter and move into a new phase.

After a nourishing dinner of local fish and greens, I meet Christiana Eva Schelfhout back in the Meditation Hall for Deep Release Yoga. Jodie, whom I've come to regard as the guardian angel of my stay, had a feeling that, as two singers, Christiana and I would click. Settling me into a nest of bolsters, we commiserate about the relentless music industry. Christiana sings over the gentle beat of a drum. I breathe into my heart's newly opened space, wondering at the ways this short stay has reset and repaired my frayed relationship with sound.

In the morning, I wait in front of the spa for one of the house Teslas to take me to the Hampton Jitney. I look at the windswept grasses surrounding a larger-than-life Buddha left over from the ground's former life as a sculpture park. I also raise my hands in namaste, with gratitude for my time here and the many lives I've led. For the first time in years, I'm excited for what's to come. ●



Monochromatic interiors lend a sense of calm.

SHOU SUGI BAN HOUSE, 337 Montauk Highway, Water Mill, New York.