


The Cult of



A growing cohort of Torontonians are
swapping the coke-fuelled, booze-soaked
club scene for cold plunges, sobriety
and superfood smoothies

Inside the expensive, obsessive,
addictive quest for a
perfect life

Wellness

By Olivia
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It's

an almost objectionably perfect May afternoon, with magnolia trees in luxuriant bloom and skies as crystalline as the blue eyes gazing back at me. I'm sitting on a crescent-shaped banquette in the Riverdale home of Kate Taylor Martin, founder of the organic superfood café Nutbar. The three-storey semi-detached—which she shares with her husband, Conrad, and their three young children—is set to storybook effect over Withrow Park. The house faces east, ideal for

its 39-year-old owner's morning routine: a 5:10 a.m. wake-up with no snooze-button negotiations; a hot shower turned ice cold for its final two minutes; a full-body dry-brushing with sisal bristles to promote lymphatic drainage and circulation; a gua sha facial massage to release tension and smooth skin; yoga—mostly twists and cat cows because, as Joseph Pilates said, “You're only as young as your spine is flexible”—and meditation. Finally, Kate whisks up a ceremonial-grade matcha with Nutbar's own nut milk, doctoring it with magnesium, marine collagen and a reishi mushroom tincture known as the “elixir of immortality,” savouring it as she watches the sun rise from her third-floor picture window.

“By the time the kids come down, I feel calm and centred—I'm so ready,” Kate tells me, her glossy bob disciplined into a bun the size of a plump organic medjool date. Her gaze is so bright and direct that I wonder if I've ever been as ready for anything in my entire life as she seems to be by 6 a.m. “I know it's eye-roll-y if you don't do it,” she says of her routine. “Con used to be the one getting up in the fives and taking an ice-cold shower, and I thought, *Are you a serial killer?*” But, in April of 2020, a month into the pandemic, Kate took the plunge. She had faith that she could—cue self-help author Glennon Doyle—do hard things: “I feel I've unlocked a secret—something that, without exaggerating, has changed my whole life.” As Kate talks, my mind stretches, in a way that my spine does not, back to my own morning. I emerged, reluctantly, from my warm bed in the sevens, indulged in a scalding shower, drank a cortisol-kindling coffee and engaged in an ongoing argument with my nine-year-old over screen time. If Kate had flexed her body and her resilience pathways, the only pathway I could focus on was the one that would get my son to school.

Harrison Taylor, Kate's younger brother, soon joins us at her place—he and his partner, a former model named Amanda Laine, live just an *Om* breath away in Cabbagetown. Harrison, whom everyone calls Harry, seems to have simply appeared, as if without feet, noiseless as a pool of sunlight. He has this vaporizing way of entering and exiting that makes me scan Kate's living room for a genie bottle. In early 2022, Harry, Laine and three of their friends—married couple Robbie and Emily Bent and Myles Farmer, a co-owner of Baro and Dasho—founded a modern bathhouse called Othership on Adelaide Street, right next to Nutbar's third outpost. (Robbie is the CEO, Emily is the director of brands and runs the Othership Breathwork app, and Farmer is the director of expansion.) Today, the siblings' businesses exist in a conjoined orbit, peddling nourishment of body and soul. Nutbar's tag line is “feel good here”; Othership's is “feel good now.” Both brands exhort their followers to extract the most out of every experience, calorie, sauna, second. In a culture held in thrall to efficiency and optimization, where every morsel of time or food is subject to betterment, it's a canny strategy.

Nutbar, much like California's upscale organic grocery chain Erewhon, exists at the fashionable intersection of commerce and cult. Today, everything is a “cult”—clothing brands, Peloton instructors, wellness practices—in the same way that everything is “radical”: political discourse, compassion, honesty. If you want to transform your life, practise radical self-compassion. If you want an endorphin high, don't go for a run, take an ice bath. Better

yet, go for a run and then take an ice bath. We live in a time when intensity serves as a stand-in for virtue and the hardness of conviction is valued over the fuzziness of nuance.

At Othership, for \$55 per visit, patrons can join 75-minute classes with names such as Inner Power, Rose, Thorn, Bud and Loving Kindness, all led by a velvet-voiced, taut-bodied guide. The sessions involve group sweating, ice bathing and collective sharing. In the words of Robbie Bent, Othership “provides a mix of Cirque du Soleil and a group therapy session. It's a Trojan horse for helping people experience their emotions.”

Othership's clients—called “journeymen”—are trading the high of booze for the rush of ice baths set between zero and four degrees, the therapist's couch for the sauna's cedar benches. For these mostly millennials and Gen Zers, saunas and cold plunges are the new pathway to regulating anxiety, processing grief, maintaining sobriety, managing depression, spiking dopamine and, in a time of Tinder fatigue, dating. The partners self-funded Othership's first \$2-million location; within a month, the ‘Ship, as it's known to acolytes, had a three-week wait list for peak-hour classes. A month after that, the business was apparently already making a profit. Last November, the founders spent \$4 million opening a second location in Yorkville.

Together, the bathhouses have pulled in 150,000 journeymen, many of whom return again and again. Singer Shawn Mendes, who has visited at least 100 times, likes to cap off his



OPENER BY GRAYDON HERRIOTT/OTHERSHIP; KATE, HARRY WITH LAINE BY NAOMI HARRIS; BENT BY SLOMI AMIGA



They feel good: Kate Taylor Martin, Harry Taylor and Amanda Laine, and Robbie Bent at Othership's Toronto and New York locations

plunge by heading to Nutbar for an ultimate recovery smoothie (\$15.75), a confection of blueberries, collagen, cashews, matcha, vegan protein powder, chia seeds, dates and sea salt. After his own Othership experience in 2023, UFC president Dana White took to social media to pronounce it “the greatest place on earth.”

This year has been about bringing Othership's gospel stateside with a \$9.7-million flagship in Manhattan's Flatiron District. The company's recent \$8-million A-series funding was half-bankrolled by roughly 100 angel investors, including Mendes and SoulCycle founder Elizabeth Cutler. Vine Ventures kicked in the rest of the money; its principal is Robbie Bent's friend Ryan Zurrer, a venture capitalist who invests in psychedelics and Web3 gaming. After visiting the Toronto Othership, Zurrer called Bent and asked him, point blank, what his goal was. The men agreed that he'd done well in a local sense. But, if Bent really looked inside himself, what did he find? The answer was clear: he wanted to go global—to cure loneliness for everyone, everywhere.

In a 1970s *60 Minutes* segment about a fringe movement blossoming in California, Dan Rather quipped, “Wellness—there's a word you don't hear every day.” Four and a half decades later, escaping the term is impossible. It's a buzzy catch-all for everything from nutrient-dense food, Reformer Pilates and starting your day with cayenne-spiked lemon water to the dubious practice of wearing surgical mouth-tape to bed. (If you don't know what mouth-taping is, look it up. Actually, don't—scrolling is not wellness.)

For this ever-expanding list, we can thank actor turned wellness imprimatur Gwyneth Paltrow and her many-tentacled lifestyle conglomerate, Goop. Since its 2008 inception, Goop has monetized the magical thinking that all that stands between us and our happier, more actualized selves is the intervention of a rose-quartz facial roller or an infrared sauna blanket. Hot-and-

cold therapy, wellness's current cure-all darling, dates back to Hippocrates, the Romans, the Vikings and, in this eon, Wim Hof, the Dutch motivational speaker and extreme athlete. Hof, who ran a half-marathon above the Arctic Circle barefoot, introduced the concept of cold-immersion therapy to the mainstream. At Othership, his name is invoked in reverent tones. Harry and Bent pause and inhale deeply at the mention of it, haloing it with deferential silence, like a sort of breath curtsy. Hof teaches his disciples that, through controlled discomfort, we can maximize our potential and be stronger, braver, more resilient and thinner. We can be better at things like breathing and sleeping and loving and living.

Here's the catch: wellness can also inflame that which it purports to soothe, like pressure, guilt, shame, inadequacy, malaise—the sort of feeling that could have some of us (I'll speak for myself) overspending on smoothies. A couple of years ago, I bought a magazine with the cover line “Wellness Guilt” only to realize that the line was, in fact, “Wellness Guide” and I was projecting. For many of us, wellness is stressful—a stress that the industry will have you believe can be cured with the right supplement or morning routine.

When the Othership founders signed their first lease during Covid, they seemed doomed to fail, positive manifestation be damned. In early 2022, the prospect of perspiring next to a stranger sat somewhere between ill-advised and revolting. But many Torontonians were also lonely, depressed, on the brink of full-scale nervous

collapses. That first Othership landed like E.T.'s flying saucer, and we flocked to it, ready to head home to ourselves. According to physician and bestselling author Gabor Maté, someone who has certainly benefited from the cult of personality, healing is not self-improvement but self-retrieval.

Toronto may not strike the average wellness investor as fertile ground for business—we come across as too reserved, our bodies hidden away for most of the year. But that is apparently why both Nutbar and Othership are thriving: we're just the right amount of depleted. "Los Angeles isn't our customer," Bent says. "We need a hub of working people who are on their phones all the time, where the weather is cold and everyone is a bit miserable. A place where people are struggling."

In many ways, the world feels more chaotic and unpredictable than it was five years ago, and people are looking for new ways to metabolize grief and trauma and confusion. Othership offers its followers safety, community and pleasure by delivering them from distraction via soft deprivation and aestheticized discomfort. Wellness, like mental health, is a booming business. As reported by the Global Wellness Institute, the industry pulled in \$7.7 trillion in 2022. And Othership is riding that crest: the company brought in more than \$10 million in sales in the first seven months of this year alone and has enough capital for two more locations. The plan is to open a second US location, this one in Brooklyn, next January, and the long-term goal is to launch up to 25 Otherships, ideally by 2030, in New York, New Jersey, Boston and DC. "We have a lot of options," says Bent. "We're very confident." The more time I spend in the Othership and Nutbar airspace, the more I realize that self-doubt has no place here.

Kate and Harry are the second and third of four Taylor children—boy, girl, boy, girl, each born two years apart. Their parents, Eli and Phil, met as business students at Carleton University in Ottawa and later settled in Toronto. Phil, the anchor, worked in financial services and instilled in the children the value of hard work, integrity, honesty. Eli, the nurturer, ran the household and cultivated curiosity and an appreciation of beauty. The couple offered their children a winning two-step combo: parental guard rails and the confidence to dismantle them. Growing up, Kate and Harry were gifted with a sense of possibility and a faith in their own singular potential. Of the four siblings, they were the fiery ones, vying for attention and clashing, but they're best friends now, says Kate, and a gentle ribbing is as far as they'll go, at least in the presence of a journalist.

"Harry's good at everything; it's so annoying," she fake-gripes, rolling her eyes. Humility doesn't compel Harry to disagree—authenticity overrides modesty in his world. About his first time on ice skates, at the age of three: "Out of the gates, I was just firing—it was like I was born with this ability." (Kate: eye roll.) Harry was as artistic as he was athletic. He attended Dartmouth College on a hockey scholarship, but his interest in painting, sculpture and photography eventually beat out

his passion for the game, and he graduated with a degree in studio arts. "Both disciplines influence each other," says Harry. "You're in a state of flow when you're on the ice. You also create your best artistic work when your mind is shut down and you're fully present." He channels the same hyperfocus in conversation, listening with an almost athletic discipline. Harry harnesses these skills as an Othership guide, sauna master, steam-room ritual master and essential-oils master. (Yes, these are things.)

If the siblings are similar in many ways, they're also, they insist, wildly different. "I'm more type A; Harry is more chill," says Kate. "I'm nowhere near Harry chill." But I'm not getting chill Harry today. He's overwhelmed, he tells me, which is a feeling that seems unfamiliar to him. He reminds me of a cat who has missed a jump and is vexed, even puzzled, by his own inelegance. He and Laine are moving to New York in a few days: they will be living in a house in Williamsburg with the Bents and their toddler son, Onyx, as well as Robbie's sister Shannon, the head of partnerships at Othership, and her dog. (Myles Farmer has a house in Manhattan.) Their arrangement makes me think of the Beat poets, or a Netflix reality show waiting to happen, or a cult. Harry's stress could also be attributed to that most Toronto of subjects: he and Laine hit some traffic on the drive over here. Harry admits, flushing slightly, that he snapped at Laine, the love of his life, and feels terrible about it. Upon owning up to this with me, he self-regulates and regains his composure. He's back to baseline.

A couple of days after we met, right before the move to New York, Harry posted a photo to Instagram: Laine, eyes closed, in a bath heaped with magnolia petals and surrounded by candlelight. Harry had collected 555 petals—an "angel number" in numerology—from the tree in their backyard. There was an intention and a meditation to counting and appreciating every single pink petal. "It was a moment of reverence and ceremony—for the tree and for Amanda. I thought, *We need to remember who we are and where we came from before the next chapter.*"

All the Othership founders are tattooed with the company's logo, literally branded with the brand. I tell Harry that his tattoo, on his forearm, looks like a spaceship or a flying saucer. "You see a spaceship, and it very well might be that," he says, unwilling to police perception. "Some people see black holes

Close in age if not in temperament, young Kate and Harry Taylor were encouraged to follow their passions



or spinning tops, the most ancient toy. It also represents ripples. It speaks to community and interconnectedness.”

There’s no denying the company’s ripple effect. Othership and Nutbar begat an ecosystem of wellness spaces and products: there’s now the sauna-and-ice-bath studio Alter Wellness on College Street, opened late last year; Element Outdoor Sauna on Danforth has a Morozko Forge Prism ice bath; the 5,000-square-foot Trove, which lies a crystal’s throw from Othership’s Adelaide outpost, offers IV drips, osteopathy, acupuncture and a Himalayan salt cave. Tonya Papanikolov, one of Nutbar’s first employees and now a close family friend, founded Rainbo, a medicinal-mushroom business and movement. In another brother-sister power move, Bent’s sister Barbie, who started Pilates-and-infrared studio Jaybird, recently opened a second location in Yorkville, beside Othership. “It’s an exciting time to be a wellness brand in Toronto,” says Kate. “We’re all lifting each other up.”

Kate and Harry talk a lot about intentionality, but they swear that their intention was never to start a trend or even become entrepreneurs. “It’s never been about business first,” says Kate, “It’s always been more about a feeling. That’s the *why* for us.” Her dream of opening a superfood café took root around 2012, while she was working in the communications department at St. Michael’s Hospital. “I’d see sick people waiting at Tim Hortons,” she says, “fuelling themselves with refined sugar and flour that spiked their glucose levels and didn’t provide nourishment.” So Kate enrolled at the Institute of Holistic Nutrition to become a certified nutritional practitioner, learning about the benefits of moringa, maca and lucuma.

She and her husband self-financed the first Nutbar in Summerhill in 2016. Kate signed a 10-year lease without breaking a sweat—failure never crossed her mind. In 2021, she leased a factory in the east end, near Danforth and Woodbine, to produce Nutbar’s hero product: Barmilk, an unctuous concentrate of cashews, almonds, coconut, maple syrup, sea salt and filtered water. The formula contains 30 per cent organic nuts, a dramatic contrast to the average boxed nut milk, says Kate, which is two per cent nuts and kept shelf-stable with preservatives. When she gives me her tour of the factory, I take a sip of fresh Barmilk, and it’s so delicious and creamy that I feel weirdly elated, like I’m Robinson Crusoe and I’ve discovered the coconut. The company got into wholesaling during Covid and now produces more than 4,000 litres of the nut milk a month, selling it in-store and at Summerhill Market locations for \$22 a bag.

As we leave the facility, Kate’s phone pings. Peeking at the screen, she beams: American actor Jacob Elordi and his girlfriend, influencer Olivia Jade, just stopped by Nutbar’s Ossington pop-up for açais—again. The bowls, landscaped with rows of coconut, cocoa nibs and house-made granola, are as beautiful as aerial views of Dutch tulip fields in springtime. The young couple has been in town for two months, and they’ve bought one every day.

A midtown Nutbar, on Yonge north of Eglinton, is opening next month, bringing Kate’s official store tally to five. She also plans to cut the ribbon on a new location

in Yorkville in 2025. I ask, given everything she’s juggling, if she ever experiences the creep of anxiety. I think of my own upbringing, with a French mother for whom the glass isn’t just half empty; it’s a sieve. I tell Kate about how, when I informed my mom that I was quitting a full-time media job to become a freelance writer, she cautioned that “sometimes baby birds leave the nest too early and snap their necks.” I scan her face for a flash of recognition, but she simply says, about anxiety, “I don’t have...that.”

Angst isn’t a family trait. Within a few hours of first meeting his Othership co-founders, Harry was certain that they were destined for great things. They were introduced in June of 2019 by Robbie Bent’s aunt Brenda—celebrity chef Susur Lee’s wife and

Many “journeymen” return again and again: Shawn Mendes has visited at least 100 times

one of Eli Taylor’s close friends. Harry and Laine had recently returned from Holland, where they had become certified sauna masters. “Amanda and I fell in love with Robbie and Emily and Myles at first sight,” says Harry. “We dove in unabashedly, wholeheartedly, like, *What sort of magic can we create together?*”

For fun, the five friends installed a horse trough in Bent’s backyard, filled it with 80 bags of ice and jumped in. Then, two weeks later, they spent \$80,000 building a proper ice bath, a tea room and a commons in Bent’s three-car garage, naming it Inward. They started a WhatsApp group called Inward Underground—first it was free, then it took donations, then it had a membership list that grew to 2,000 people. “It was a hang!” recalls Bent. “We got to thinking, *How can we make this more fun?*” Harry and Laine offered a class on Valentine’s Day in 2020—to plunge and gaze into a lover’s eyes, to plunge and hug, to plunge in darkness. And something surprising happened: people started sharing—and weeping. “This 40-year-old finance guy said he couldn’t stop thinking about his daughter and how much he loved her. He was crying,” Bent says. “And I thought, *What the fuck is happening?* I had never seen strangers open up and connect about their emotions in a sober environment.”

Launched in 2016, Nutbar serves up supercharged smoothies, salads and small bites to clean-eating devotees across the city



Bent was intimately familiar with the power of an ice bath. In 2017, after years of self-medicating with cocaine and alcohol, he booked himself into a 10-day silent-meditation retreat in the Jordan River Valley. He later headed to Peru, where he took the psychedelic ayahuasca to help treat his addictions. Like the rest of the co-founders, Bent is now Cali sober (as in, weed and psychedelics only). “I’m very extreme,” he says, “and I don’t think personalities change. This is why cold-plunging helps me—I can get the dopamine rush, but in a healthy way.”

The data supporting Bent’s claim is largely anecdotal, but a study published in the *European Journal of Applied Physiology* found that subjecting one’s body to short bursts of hormetic stress (basically, microdosing on suffering) generates a 530 per cent hormonal surge of norepinephrine and a 250 per cent spike in dopamine, the neurotransmitter associated with alertness, pleasure and motivation. Proponents of the practice say it speeds up metabolism, boosts the immune system, and reduces inflammation and anxiety.

What I hear from journeyers, again and again, is less about the science and more about how Othership has changed their life. For Rosa Scarcelli, a dog mom and resource coordinator at the accounting firm BDO, the transformative moment came this past New Year’s Eve. Scarcelli had just gone through a break-up, so she took herself out for a three-course dinner, put on a swimsuit in the restaurant’s bathroom, snapped a selfie and headed to Othership in Yorkville for its “Orbiting 2024” event. Instead of “Auld Lang Syne” and Champagne, there was somatic breathing and decaf tea. “When the ball dropped, we took a collective breath—in and out—and it was amazing,” she recalls. She followed that up with the January challenge: every day for a month, she submerged herself in the tubs, spent time in the sauna, regained her self-confidence and rediscovered a sense of community she’d lost in the lonely grind of remote work. Before the month was up, she had spent more than \$3,000 on a 100-class pass.

Arvin Reyes Tamboowalla, also single, is a real-estate broker whose rapid-fire sentences pursue one another like burpees in a HIIT fitness drill. But, when he recalls his first visit to Othership, his pace slows, and he sinks into the retelling the way one might sink into a hot bath: “My first guide, Erin, told me, ‘You are safe, you are safe,’ and I felt like Jesus was talking to me.” Tamboowalla had decided to try Othership after hearing about it from a member of his Sigma Chi fraternity, now a Barry’s Bootcamp fitness trainer. He liked the idea of community, friendship, and a social life that didn’t involve waiting in line at a nightclub, downing shots and hating himself afterward. His first class was in the fall of 2022. He was immediately hooked.

“The ice teaches you Life Lessons 101,” he tells me. “When you’re in an ice bath, you learn that your only option is to surrender and let go—you have to surf the wave.” In the past year and a half, he’s visited Othership 222 times. As one of Othership Yorkville’s 33 founding members, Tamboowalla was “robed” by Bent in a bath-side ceremony, a moment he likens to being cloaked by a Jedi master. His current goal is to be the first journeyer

to make it to 1,111 visits. (His “master number” in numerology is 11.) When I ask him how much this Othership habit has cost him, he guesses \$11,000.

I’m in an Uber with Kate and Eli, en route to Othership’s new outpost in New York. They’re getting emotional as the car pulls up on West 20th Street. “Mom! Can you believe this? Remember when Harry wondered what he was going to be? Look where he ended up!” Kate exclaims. Presumably, Eli could not have imagined, when Harry was in diapers or at Dartmouth, that he’d end up sauna-mastering in Manhattan.

When Harry greets us in the cedar-panelled reception area, he’s barefoot and buzzing. Next to him is a man who goes by the name of DJ Roxy Boomba, sporting a red leather jacket and a mullet-adjacent haircut. Another team member, Adam Lewis, who looks like a petite Adam Driver with a Burt Reynolds mustache, is wearing a tofu-coloured T-shirt and loudly playing a gigantic wooden flute. A former competitive sprinter from Toronto, he got into cold-water immersion when he was training and returned to it a decade later, when his Japanese-style cold-brew company collapsed during Covid. In need of deep emotional healing and wanting to get back in touch with his masculinity, he bought a trailer on Kijiji, ordered lumber and spent a winter at his family’s farm in Bobcaygeon building a sauna. In November of 2021, in search of a like-minded community, he started attending breathwork classes with Inward.

“Prepare to have your mind blown!” Lewis announces to me. We head into the Tea Room, a “hearth” that feels both primeval and futuristic, BC and AI. An 18-foot-tall fireplace, encased in glass, is surrounded by marine-leather banquettes; the floors are lined with cut river stone; the lighting is as tender and golden as candlelight. Lewis gazes devotionally at the fireplace. “Othership changed my life. It was a divine coming together,” he tells me. “We’re a family now, and we’re starting a mission.”

Harry paces the 100-person “performance sauna,” the largest in North America. He’s primed, high on pre-show adrenalin. In a few hours, he’ll be waving towels, tossing them into the air like a cross between David Copperfield and a pizzaiolo. (A trademark activity at Othership, the towel-waving is meant to move hot air throughout the space, encourage relaxation and boost the immune system.) This sauna is three feet wider than Toronto’s—it’s Harry’s Broadway. The analogy isn’t pure hyperbole. Of the five founders, Harry and Laine are the creatives. When they hire guides, they hold auditions, not interviews. In Manhattan, where 250 would-be guides were whittled down to 15, many of those who won the parts are working Broadway actors and musicians.

“I’m feeling all the feelings,” says Harry. “The gamut: excitement, nerves, gratitude.” His share is met with hugs and “Yeah, brother” and “This is sick!” from Lewis, Boomba and a team member in a Hawaiian shirt who has just hand-rolled 6,000 cedar-perfumed incense sticks and has 64,000 more to go. My phone pings: it’s Othership, reminding me about this evening’s event. “We only ask that you bring a bathing suit and a willingness to evolve,” the message reads. I have brought a bathing suit and my fear.





There's a pre-curtains buzz in the Tea Room—Othership is wellness as theatre. “You’re seeing a show, but you’re also part of the show,” says Bent. In this case, you’re costumed in a bathing suit and cast among intimidatingly fit strangers. (Mirrors, like phones, are verboten at Othership, but I have eyes, and the crowd here is exceedingly good looking.) Tracks with names like “Men on Mycelium” are blasting, everybody is sipping passion-flower-and-rose-petal tea, and Bent, draped in a towel, is emanating the vainglory of a Roman strutting around the Baths of Carthage. The party is hosted by Toronto-born, New York-based Tory Gossage, a close friend of the Taylors. Gossage works in hedge funds and has vacationed with Princess Eugenie. Othership’s parties attract the A-list adjacent, from Dustin Hoffman’s son to Madonna’s plastic surgeon to Glennon Doyle’s publicist—all of whom, I soon learn, are also on tonight’s guest list, ready to launch into orbit with me.

We all pour into the sauna, as obedient as schoolchildren, trained on Harry’s soothing voice. Harry talks about vibrations, resonance and alignment, encouraging us to trust in our capacity to shed inhibitions. He plays a flute made of cedar, like the sauna. The flute, second to his voice, is his favourite instrument. “As I play, how wholeheartedly can you be here? How in tune can you become to the breathiness of the wind as it rattles through the warmth of the wood?” he asks. He also rings 90-pound chimes, inviting us to recall a core sound memory, and bangs a gong, inciting us to reflect on how we might unstick ourselves from a pattern.

The language of Othership is heavy on therapy-speak and the vocabulary of trauma. *If Carl Jung had a podcast and a smoothie practice, this is how he’d talk*, I think but don’t say out loud. Because jokes, a close relative of judgment and irreverence, require a distance, yanking you out of the moment. They don’t really land here—unless you’ve come for Comedy Night, when stand-up comedians perform in the sauna. (I’m not kidding.) In any case, I can joke, or judge, but the joke’s on me. I have an aversion to self-seriousness that is both temperamental and generational, and this is a hyper-earnest place. Yet everyone here seems so profoundly at peace with their bodies, their life choices and themselves that I can’t help feeling like I’ve locked myself out of the secret. Maybe it’s time to evolve? I remember how Kate asked me, searchingly, “Why does changing your morning routine feel out of reach for you?” “Umm,” I replied. My mind was blank—and not in a serene way.

Harry picks up his guitar for a rendition of “Hallelujah,” telling those assembled how he’d played the Leonard Cohen song the night

In two and a half years, the Othership locations in Toronto and New York have attracted 150,000 “journeymen” who’ve visited the bathhouses a total of 250,000 times

he met the love of his life. He sings, and people cry and sweat. Then it’s time to cool off. We step into the cold-plunge room, a soaring church-like space with 18-foot ceilings, brick walls lined with LED “candles” and 16 tubs set in the ground like liquid tombs. I think back to what Ashley Bryant, a 41-year-old actor and guide at Othership in Toronto, told me: “Think of the baths as an ego death.” Ultra-macho podcaster and ice-bath evangelist Joe Rogan puts it another way: it’s about “conquering your inner bitch.”

Kate and I plunge together. She is a supportive coach, keeping eye contact, advising me to step in as if into a hot bath and encouraging me to take deep, long breaths to activate my parasympathetic nervous system, which

Othership’s parties attract the A-list adjacent, from Dustin Hoffman’s son to Madonna’s plastic surgeon to Glennon Doyle’s publicist

should keep me from fleeing the scene. I feel like I’ve been transported into an episode of *The Bachelor*, the part when dating couples bond by participating in simulated adversity, like rappelling down cliffs. It also feels like I’m being pricked all over my body with microscopic needles. Two minutes later, Laine extends her hand and helps me climb out. The mood and movement are about ascension. I feel triumphant and clean and somehow, thrillingly, new. I’ve never taken to baptismal waters to be reborn, but I assume it must feel a bit like this.

We're all back in the sauna, Debussy's ethereal "Claire de Lune" cranked to 11, to share how we're feeling. (Saunas and sweat spike oxytocin, the hormone involved in love and trust and social bonding.) One man, perched in the highest, hottest row, appears to be mid-breakthrough. "When you sounded the gong, I felt like another body inside of me was knocking to get out," he says, looking genuinely shook. Everybody snaps their fingers in appreciation. A woman in a gold bikini reminiscent of Carrie Fisher's in *Return of the Jedi* says that Othership has given her a sense of belonging, of finally fitting in. More snapping.

Now, I've long been open to things others might deem quackery: astrologer Linda Goodman's books *Sun Signs* and *Love Signs* were family bibles. I had food allergies as a child, when being dairy-free and eating Tofutti spelled social doom, and I've been on and off the proverbial couch for the past 20 years. Still, I feel like an alien here. I've never been a joiner, and I'm disoriented amid all this ecstatic belonging. Maybe it's the heat or the lack of clothing, but the partygoers are channelling the giddiness of castaways waving down a rescue chopper—they've been found.

When we spoke, Ashley Bryant told me, "It took Othership for me to understand who I am. I needed that deep dive." Bryant also credits the company with keeping her sober. Othership gave her a fresh identity and a new career: about four months after she attended a class called Release, she auditioned to become a guide.

Journeymen love sharing their Othership origin stories in the same clouds-parting way other people might delight in recounting stories about having a baby or finding the Lord. Shalom Rosenzweig, a soft-spoken 44-year-old accountant, told me over drinks at Nutbar's Summerhill location that he'll soon be celebrating his one-year Othership anniversary. In that time, he's attended nearly 500 sessions. "Othership has given me, for lack of a better word, inner peace," he said, visibly moved.

Like a therapist's office or a church congregation, Othership provides a public portal into interior landscapes. Twenty years ago, Rosenzweig's father was stabbed to death by a stranger at Bathurst and Lawrence. "I tried a bunch of therapists, and they weren't able to help me," he tells me. "At Othership, I was able to get to a place of comfort." He guesses that he's spent \$10,000 there over the past year—an estimate that strikes me as low, even with passes and discounts. "Whatever it is," he says, "it's worth it. The financial perspective is insignificant to me and my personal journey."

Post-party, as I walk the 12 blocks back to my hotel in New York, it starts raining violently. On another night, I might have called an Uber in desperation or at least huddled under an awning. Instead, I carry on, umbrella-less, high on dopamine—transformed? deranged?—in the downpour. I feel different. I feel good.

Every era has its wellness mores. In the 1980s, we did the *20 Minute Workout*, read *Fit for Life* and ate can't-pinch-an-inch Special K, followed a decade later by step aerobics, Cindy Crawford's *Shape Your Body*, and cantaloupe and cottage cheese.

Now, we're lacing our cortados with cordyceps, taking ice baths, drinking status smoothies and socializing in saunas. Part of the problem with fads is that one minute you're eating brown rice and running half-marathons and the next minute you find out you might die of arsenic poisoning and are destroying your knees. These days, everything is too hard ("If you live in a big city," says Bent, "you're baseline unhappy") and also too easy (you can order your avocado toast on UberEats). We need more comfort and more discomfort, and Nutbar and Othership deliver both. Emotions are also vulnerable to the vagaries of style. Awe and enchantment are the current fashion, and Othership, which serves up peak experiences in two hours or less, traffics in this new economy.

A few weeks ago, I was sitting at a café (not Nutbar) when I overheard a couple discussing their afternoon plans. A fresh-faced 28-year-old named Michelle who works in tech at Labatt suggested

Ultra-macho podcaster and ice-bath evangelist Joe Rogan puts it this way: cold plunges are about "conquering your inner bitch"

they head to Othership. "Nah, it's too culty," said her boyfriend, a 31-year-old economics prof who wanted to go for a run instead. Curious about Michelle's Othership origin story, I approached. She started going when her friend was dealing with a break-up and needed a psychic reset. She loved it. Her record for staying in the ice bath is seven minutes. "For our generation, it seems vain to spend money on material things, but it's not vain to spend on an experience, on your body, your mental health, your wellness." She paused, then added cheerfully, "It's still about status and vanity."

At Michelle's first class, the guide asked the group to picture their younger selves. A grown man began to weep and left the sauna. "He was definitely picturing," said Michelle. "I wasn't picturing, but it was relaxing, and I felt high afterward." I picture myself in my 20s, wearing my '90s plaid going-out shirt and getting drunk on pints at the Guv'nor, a space that would, in late 2016, become the first Nutbar. My fellow Gen Xers and I were extreme too, but in a debauched and messy way. The Adelaide Othership, once a nightclub called Footwork, is now a hangout for people looking to recalibrate their nervous systems at the feet of their masters. We haven't gotten rid of our addictions; we've just tidied them up.

Let's be authentic: I am well-journeyed in the yawning void and at least as empty as the next person. I think we're all just trying to fill the emptiness however we can, and we all, at certain points, are scanning the horizon for a lifeboat. True to form, the Taylor siblings have a sunnier perspective. "It's hard to navigate modern-day life without filling our cup," says Kate. "It can be with a superfood smoothie at Nutbar, a conscious deep breath, a cold dip in Lake Ontario or going to Othership." Harry adds, summarily, "It's about an inherent: *I want to feel good. I want to feel amazing.*" Amen to that. Maybe I should finally take up wall Pilates like my phone keeps telling me to or turn my shower tap all the way to cold. But I'm going to opt for radical honesty, and right now, in this moment, I'm going to put those thoughts on ice. ■