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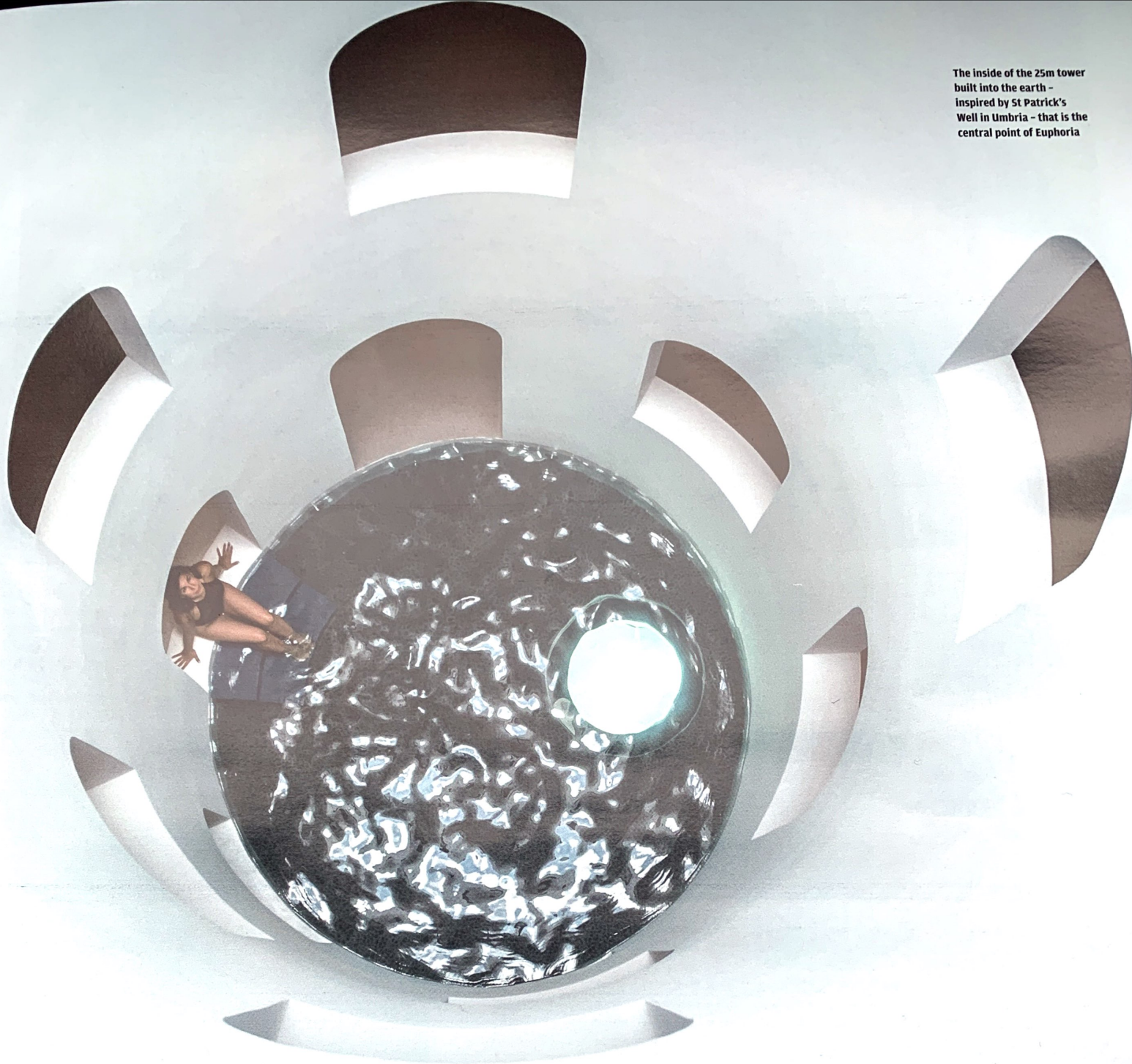
fine times

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BEAUTY SPECIAL

how to spend it celebration edition



The inside of the 25m tower built into the earth – inspired by St Patrick's Well in Umbria – that is the central point of Euphoria



ALL'S WELL...

At a groundbreaking Greek spa built deep into the earth, Mary Lussiana embarks on a pioneering programme that promises to mend her metabolism with nutrigenomic science

A few hours southwest of Athens, on the lemon-scented slopes of the Peloponnese's Mount Taygetus, is Mystras, the last stronghold of the Byzantines. Its ruined castle crowns the summit, dominating the bell-towered monastery of Pantanassa beneath it, where candles still flicker in the dark, illuminating 15th-century frescoed domes. Tucked into the shadow of this mountain is Euphoria Retreat (pictured overleaf). At its core and built right into the earth is a 25m tower

(pictured above), inspired by 16th-century St Patrick's Well in Orvieto, Umbria. Stairs spiral upwards in the inner shaft, from the dark, cobbled Kneipp baths to blue sky framed at the top, representing our inner journey. Scattered openings in the white walls reveal two outer shafts, off which radiate treatment rooms, a Byzantine hammam (pictured on final page), a salt room and an indoor pool. The centrepiece of the pool is a womb-like dome inspired by the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. Whales and dolphins sing in the waters beneath it.

No ordinary spa, Euphoria is perhaps best explained as following the philosophy of *ef zin*, or living well, developed by the Ancient Greeks. It fuses east and west; Byzantine and Zen; energy medicine and the five elements of traditional Chinese medicine; Theta Healing with meditation; and biomedicine with innovative science. This truly holistic approach is the vision of founder Marina Efraimoglou (pictured overleaf), whose serious brush with cancer in her late 20s led her to explore the world of healing, eventually



abandoning her highly successful banking career to study traditional Chinese medicine. She travelled to retreats with Donna Eden, the celebrated author of *Energy Medicine*, and Mantak Chia, the Taoist master, building up a body of learning that she hoped could be shared under one roof in Greece, alongside a joyfulness that she found so many other spas lacked.

This, then, is Marina's life-affirming Euphoria, an 11-year dream in the making, which opened in July this year. Designed by Marina's architect sister Natalia – "to

bring the female, yin energy," says Marina – and acclaimed Greek architectural firm Deca ("to bring the yang"), the 45 peaceful bedrooms draw on the reds and burnished golds of Byzantine monastic art and are centred around a 19th-century, honey-coloured stone house. The "flower of life" is repeated throughout the hotel, engraved in the marble floors and walls, worked into metal screens and takes centre stage in the hotel's logo of the seven circles of life, recreated in sand from all corners of Greece and present in every bedroom. The four-storey spa is cut into the mountain and topped by a private forest of pine and cypress trees, ideal for forest bathing, or exploring the wood element as part of Euphoria's signature Emotional and Physical Transformation Retreat.

But transformation of the kind I was looking for happens on the ground floor, in the hands of the unassuming, charming and highly acclaimed molecular nutritionist George Leon. His programme is, like the rest of the spa, about achieving balance, a state that Hippocrates referred to as "eucrasia", the name that Leon has adopted for his pioneering firm. In this case, it is metabolic balance, and Eucrasia has partnered with Euphoria to offer its innovative 3GL test to spa guests, as well as what I had come to do, a nutrigenomics programme that looks at the influence of our lifestyle and nutrition on our gene expression.

"This is the way forward in medicine," said Dr Ioannis Charizanis, a pathologist and medical specialist in metabolism from Eucrasia, who was sitting with Leon across the table from me. "It is the way that today's conventional doctors will see medicine in the future."

"There is a need to customise medicine to each individual," explained Leon, who is well ahead of the curve with his work on nutrigenomics, which only now is entering the public consciousness, "to work at the molecular level that differentiates people, and



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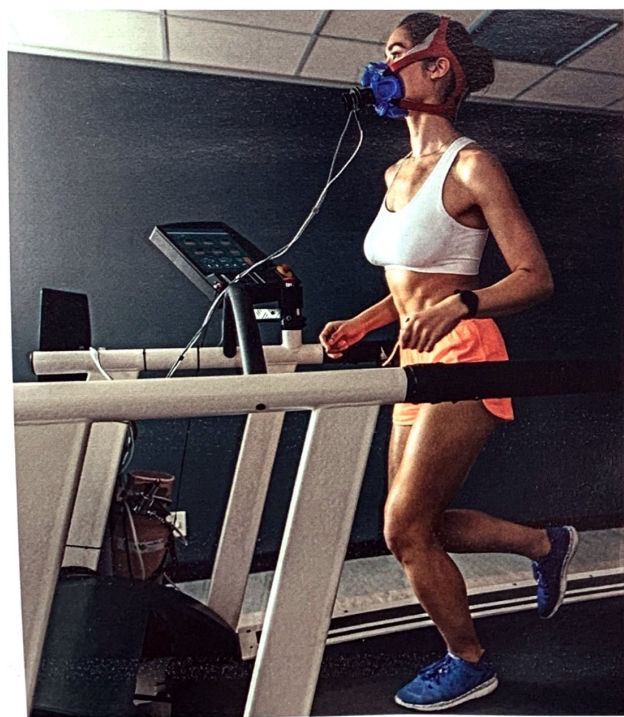
allows you to balance their metabolism accordingly. International pharmaceutical companies will start to think about how they can influence the market, but at the moment it is still part of the fight between conventional and alternative medicine." It is, he told me, no longer "you are what you eat" but rather "you are how you eat", for he sees endless cellular damage from intermittent fasting and stressed lifestyles.

The 3GL therapy, which is patented, combines a detailed questionnaire with Euphoria's nutritionist Antonia Vasilakou, who has the ability to explain the science in layman's terms and via a prick of blood that she takes from your fingertip to measure your glutathione level. Leon discovered that this biomarker gives a fast and remarkably valuable insight into someone's metabolic system. This allows him to intervene with his Mediterranean isoglycemic five-meal

plan to regulate blood glucose and a biochemical food plan to balance the glycogen in the liver and muscles, as well as to ensure that antioxidants are delivered to protect against cellular damage and reactivate metabolic homeostasis (where the metabolism is in a state of equilibrium).

And so to my results: my glutathione level was high, indicating a metabolic disorder, making me the ideal candidate to dig deeper with the nutrigenomics programme. It is done through blood tests that measure more than 200 metabolic parameters and an

Clockwise from top: Euphoria Retreat, in the shadow of the Peloponnese's Mount Taygetus. The retreat's founder, Marina Efraimoglou. The Euphoria's nutrigenomics programme includes a stress test to establish, among other things, "respiratory quotient"



The ergophysiology evaluation reveals which fuel is metabolised to supply the body with energy – ideally fat. In my case, it was 94 per cent carbohydrates



ergophysiology evaluation. The latter involved wearing a mask while doing a stress test on a treadmill, which measured, among other things, my respiratory quotient. This reveals which fuel is being metabolised to supply the body with energy. Ideally, it is fat, but in my case it was 94 per cent carbohydrates, six per cent fat – another cause for concern.

Armed with this information and the blood-test results, I met with Dr Charizanis and George Leon. As they talked me through the lab results, I learnt that my body has low blood glucose, which leads proteins to be broken down from the muscle tissue and sent to the liver to transform into blood glucose; that I have an underactive thyroid and an elevated cortisol level. This imbalance, probably triggered by a hormonal event like childbirth, is too high to burn fat, explaining my weight gain.

None of this was good but there were several key points to focus on. Most importantly, Leon

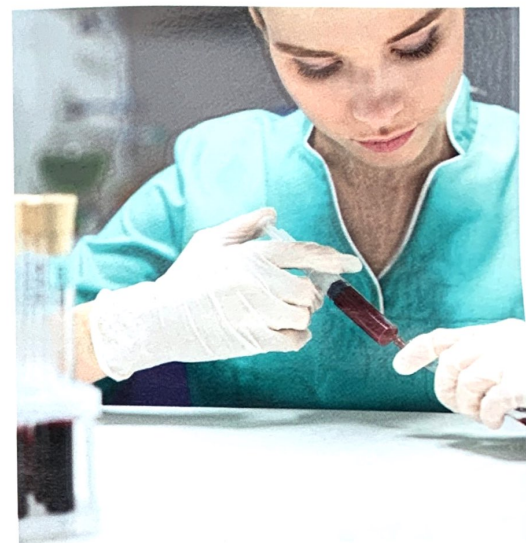
Clockwise from top: the hammam room at Euphoria. Tests on blood samples are key to the retreat's nutrigenomics programme. Broccoli soup with almond flakes and goat's cheese – one of the dishes in the author's culinary "reset" prescribed to help correct her metabolic imbalance

was confident that these could be reversed through his nutritional programme, alongside moderate exercise – as long as I tried to eliminate some of the stress in my life (also part of the nutrigenomics programme here are meditation and Theta Healing). Secondly, the sobering comment from Dr Charizanis that if I had gone to a traditional doctor to explore my problems, they would have taken blood tests and prescribed pills for my thyroid without having looked at the full story on the

molecular level – not, therefore, solving the problem.

And so to the food, the core of Leon's three-step medicine: reset the metabolism, balance the metabolism and maintain that balance. It is plentiful (three main meals and two snacks a day) and delicious and receives as much attention to detail from Leon as his patients do. With his biolab glutathione monitor, all the food is tested for antioxidants quarterly to guard against seasonal fluctuations. Meal plans are tailored

A pinprick of blood is taken to measure your glutathione level, which gives a fast and valuable insight into the metabolic system



to individual needs. Mine were to deliver carbohydrates with enough slow-release glucose to ensure that my body would avoid converting proteins into glucose and would balance my cortisol. My level of antioxidants was good, but because of my metabolic imbalance, they weren't being used properly to fight free radicals. So my "reset" in culinary terms meant dishes like broccoli soup with almond flakes and a dollop of soft goat's cheese (pictured below), Greek salads and grilled chicken with vegetables.

An exercise plan was prepared for me with low-intensity interval training on a treadmill. Meanwhile, between the meals and exercise, I had time for the more sybaritic aspects of the programme, like a Biologique Recherche Algae Slimming and Detox Treatment and the signature Euphoria Byzantine Hammam Ritual.

After seven days of eating more carbohydrates than I had in the past two years, I remained the same weight but my glutathione level had come down from 4.25 to 3.8; Leon declared himself happy with my progress. But it is only the beginning. For now I have a three-month personalised programme with a nutritional plan sent to me every three weeks and a lifeline to Eucrasia for any problems, all included as part of the nutrigenomics programme. After that, I will be on my own to complete the weight loss needed, which I should start to see happening in the next few days, and to maintain metabolic balance. Cellular memory lasts two to three years, Leon told me, so if I veer off course in that time, it will return to its default imbalance position. After that, I will be in the clear and able to see if Hippocrates was right all those centuries ago when he said: "Let food be thy medicine." ♦

HELLENE OF JOY

Mary Lussiana travelled as a guest of **Healing Holidays** (020-7843 3597; healingholidays.co.uk) and **Euphoria Retreat** (euphoria-retreat.com). A seven-night nutrigenomics programme costs from £4,829 per person based on two sharing, and from £5,245 single. This includes flights, transfers and accommodation in a Classic room on a full-board basis.



Food plans are tailored to individual needs – mine were to ensure that my body avoided converting protein into glucose and would balance my cortisol