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HEALTH

Boutique bathhouse opening in Brooklyn

It's not a neighborhood traditionally known for its healing waters, but Gowanus will soon be home to a bathhouse where women can soak away their cares and nurture their bodies.

CityWell Brooklyn (496 President St., Gowanus, 646-467-4865, citywellbrooklyn.com) will have its soft opening Nov. 11 and a grand opening in the spring.

Owner Liz Tortolani's goal is to create a relaxing space where women can unwind in a steam room, take "luxurious" showers and get massages.

There's also a sprawling backyard where Tortolani plans to install an outdoor cedar sauna, a hot tub and a fire pit. In one corner is a giant hammock where clients will be able to sway gently to and fro and relish the quiet (cellphones won't be allowed).

"Who gets to lay in a hammock in New York City? That's something you do on vacation in Mexico," said Tortolani, who is developing the space with architect and designer Deborah Mariotti of Mariotti-Studio.

Tortolani prefers to call CityWell a "boutique bathhouse" and not a spa because it will be an intimate space with a communal vibe inspired by spots like Seattle's Hothouse Spa and San Francisco's now-closed Oseno.

The 500-square-foot interior space is still under construction, but Tortolani is confident that customers will like what they find. During the soft opening period, CityWell will cost \$25 for two hours, and \$5 for each additional half-hour.

CityWell isn't just a business venture to Tortolani. It's an expression of a personal philosophy that has helped her recover from serious health problems, she said. Now 39, Tortolani was diagnosed with the digestive disorder Crohn's disease as a child



Liz Tortolani, owner of CityWell Brooklyn

'It's affordable, accessible, preventive health care.'

— Liz Tortolani

and spent years in and out of hospitals.

Her health improved greatly during a college study abroad trip to Sydney, Australia, where she made her first trip to a Korean bathhouse. She found the experience to be restorative, and years later during another period of poor health, she found similar respite at Seattle's Hothouse Spa.

She also turned to yoga, meditation and careful eating to heal herself, and became a yoga instructor

and licensed massage therapist. After moving to New York a decade ago, she studied at the Institute for Integrative Nutrition and started her own massage practice, then a wellness coaching business called LiveWell NYC.

She sees hydrotherapy as an essential part of healthy living, and says steam baths and saunas followed by cool dips help flush toxins out of the body, improve circulation and relieve stress.

"What I want to bring to the community is a space where people feel comfortable and safe and it's purely about caring for their bodies," Tortolani said. "It's affordable, accessible, preventive health care."

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