

WWD WEEKEND

MAY 2023



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L.A. Is Tapped Into the Healing Power of Sound

A look at the sound healing community of Southern California. BY RYMA CHIKHOUNE

A breeze cuts through the ocean air and into a geodesic dome in Malibu, nestled between trees just above the gray-blue waters. A foggy horizon is in view, blending with the surface on a gloomy afternoon.

All around are sounds – the winding coastal road humming to a seaside symphony. A backdrop of birds are chirping, dogs occasionally barking, but it's the crashing waves that resonate loudest and envelop the space.

"I welcome you to set an intention," says Kirscha Cramer inside the structure, which is known as Five Sense Collective. The dome is its hub, offering a practice of vibrational therapy.

It was once home to a Native American sweat lodge led by the late Floyd Westerman, she explains. It's owned by Earthways Foundation, a Malibu nonprofit that supports social and environmental responsibility. Cramer, invited to develop the grounds, created Five Sense Collective in 2017. It's now grown, attracting Hollywood names and corporate clients, with private sessions starting at \$600. She was tapped by Chanel recently to host international guests in town for the brand's L.A. cruise show. (A week later, Louis Vuitton also offered a sound bath experience as part of a wellness day in Malibu for a fragrance launch.)

Cramer brings an elevated, holistic experience using an array of instruments. Certified in sound frequency healing, mindful meditation, emotional freedom technique, as well as thought field therapy – working to heal mental and physical ailments through touch – and with a degree in interpersonal and group communication, she utilizes her skills to provide a safe space for energy healing; much of it is transmitted through sound.

Sound bowls – typically made of either quartz or copper, originating from Tibet – are present at most sound healing experiences, which also incorporate other musical tools like drums, chimes and gongs.

"What sound healing does is, it induces what they say is an altered state of consciousness, and it does that by vibrating our cells at different frequencies," says Staci Levine, founder of Sacred Woman Collective. She was a few miles down the coast that evening hosting her monthly beachside gathering – a sunset circle – by lifeguard tower 26 in Santa Monica.

Each meeting has a theme; priced at \$25, uniting about 20 women for 90 minutes, the most recent one was dedicated to the power of sound.

"All these different instruments all vibrate at different frequencies and when they are vibrating our cells, it's the most relaxing experience," continues Levine, a certified sound healer and breathwork facilitator. Her goal is to bring women together to uplift and support each other in life and business.

"We invite everybody to lie down," she explains of the ceremony. "People bring blankets. It's super cozy. I'm seated for the bowls. And then when I play the ocean drum or the chimes, I walk around the circle so that I can get closer to each person."

Barbara Kramer was among the guests, who numbered about a dozen.

"It was a sweet gathering," Kramer reflects afterward. Her first experience with a sound bath – as the meditative experience is often called – was seven years ago. "I immediately loved it."

About five years ago, after attending a sound bath concert in an old church in L.A., she discovered alchemy bowls, which are made of precious gemstones.

"Every one is unique and has its own harmonics," she goes on. "They're really magical. Like, when you have a sound bath and they play these bowls, it's liftoff."

Alchemy bowls are among the priciest of instruments in the world of sound healing.

"The practitioner was there from Copenhagen and she literally had \$40,000 worth of alchemy bowls that she was playing," Kramer continues. "And afterwards, I was so mesmerized by the bowls, and I'd never seen so many of those. I was watching her pack them off and saw that she was wrapping them in plastic bubble wrap, and like, I freaked out. She said, 'It's how they come shipped from the manufacturer. It's how I protect them when I travel.'"



Staci Levine at the Sacred Woman Collective sunset circle in Santa Monica, California.



Kirscha Cramer founded Five Sense Collective in 2017.



Barbara Kramer using the Harmonic Covers.



A Sol & Sound sound bath.

Kramer has found a solution: knitted bowl covers. Produced in L.A., with colorful tassels made in Peru (in the seven colors of the chakras), they are created with 94.5 percent sustainable materials using recycled fabric scraps and plastic bottles, with 5.5 percent Lycra for added stretch. Branded Harmonic Covers, they're available in various sizes for all types of bowls, which are protected when nested and transported. Each is priced between \$85 and \$105.

"She showed them to me, and I was like, 'These are so great,'" says Sacred Light owner Arlene Uribe.

Her shop, located in Los Feliz, specializes in alchemy bowls, while selling other items like crystals and candles. With a clientele of practitioners, Uribe sees a market for the covers: "The sound bowls are really expensive, and usually the way you nest them – which is putting them inside of each other – is with bubble wrap or a certain foamy thing to protect them. But it's really not aesthetically beautiful, and it doesn't match their beauty. It's such a delicate item, it does need a proper cover."

Kramer plans to showcase in-store QR codes with her cover samples for shoppers to order directly through the brand site, harmoniccovers.com. She's offering retailers a percentage of sales.

Like many followers of sound healing, Kramer – cofounder of Designers & Agents and creator of The Plant Lore Agency – discovered the practice through being immersed in a yoga community. She first found Hatha yoga while living in New York City in 1981 at Integral Yoga Institute in Greenwich Village. These days, living in L.A., she does hot yoga twice a week and listens to sound bath recordings every day.

"I experience a heightened state of equanimity, bliss and peace," she says of sound baths. "My entire system is rebooted, and I feel deeply rooted and yet elevated at the same time. I am someone who dreams a lot and quite vividly and when I awaken each morning and listen to these harmonics, it brings me back into present time. It's like pushing the refresh button each time."

Hotels have been offering the experience to guests as of late, like at the Terranea Resort in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Its setting stands it apart: The sound bath sessions are hosted in a glass room overlooking the Pacific Ocean on a 102-acre peninsula property with sweeping views. They're guided by Yuka, a Japanese-American woman who also works as a hypnotherapist.

"At Terranea, our goal with sound baths is to create a state of harmony in the listener by using sound to clear discordance from the guests' energy fields," says Betty Gonzalez, the fitness supervisor at the hotel. "Among the benefits of sound baths are an increased sense of well-being, expanded awareness and access to inner visionary experience."

Sound has an ancient connection to meditation and healing, rooted in various cultures from around the world. Science has shown music can improve mood, reduce stress, and rhythm can provide pain relief. In California, the land of wellness, the practice of sound healing is nothing new, but it's grown tremendously in recent years. In L.A., it's become mainstream; a sound bath can be found around town on any given day.

There's even a festival, Sol & Sound. Founded during COVID-19, it's been uniting people of color, though everyone is welcome.

"What inspired the festival actually began in 2020 during the pandemic and during the racial justice protests when George Floyd passed, and Breonna Taylor," says cofounder Jasmine Amirah, who created Sol & Sound with good friend Janelle Ross. The two were born and raised in Inglewood.

"I, myself, have a heavy background in meditation and of experiencing all of the different spiritual practices that bring balance to your life, yoga, meditation, sound baths," continues Amirah, who is Native American and Black. "I felt in the atmosphere that my community was really, really in pain. The collective was hurting, and I knew that people like myself, that look like me, Black people, Black and brown people did not really have access to these tools. And so, my spirit was really pulling on me to do something."

It was in August 2022 that it all came together at L.A. High Memorial Park, gathering 50 people for a free sound bath and access to a Black, Indigenous and people of color marketplace.

"We just wanted people to come and learn about sound healing and actually meditate in community with one another to release that heavy pain that we were all experiencing at such a chaotic time," adds Amirah.

What began as a neighborhood event is now a wellness festival, attracting nearly 450 visitors. The day, with tickets starting at \$40, includes musical performances.

"It's a tool that can really change your life," she adds, of sound and its power. "It can bring you the solace and clarity and the healing that you need in the times that we're living in."