

GOOD MEDICINE

March 6, 2020



Pictured here, a gathering at Good Medicine Collective in alliance with the Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN), which provides new Mainers with LB Kitchen bowls, Qi Gong with Ronnie Wilson, yoga with Lara Nordenson, acupuncture, and other healing modalities with Liz Strawbridge. One of Good Medicine's main objectives is to "provide nourishing and nurturing healing experiences and meals in the community," says Liz.

By Allison Paige | Photos by Sarah Morrill

Dr. Elizabeth Strawbridge creates a collective for whole health and healing in Portland's West End

When Dr. Elizabeth Strawbridge, known to most as Liz, was a teen, a concerning bout with anemia landed her in an oncologist's office. Little did she realize then that this frightening experience would be so formative and become an essential source of inspiration.

"As a 15-year-old, I figured out that meant cancer doctor," she says, remembering that she felt scared on the drive there. But then something surprising happened. "We pull up, and my mom and I thought we had the address wrong because we'd arrived at a barn. We walked in and there was a fireplace, there were books, there was a rocking chair. We went in one of the rooms, which had a simple bed and wood walls and was really cozy. It was amazing. You would have had no idea that you were in a doctor's office, and here this is a Yale New Haven pediatric oncologist! It was the most amazing medical experience I've ever had, and that opened my mind. A seed was planted that there was a different way."



A view of LB Kitchen/West from the comfy living room area.



Utilizing the former kitchen of Co Outliers restaurant, LB Kitchen/West offers healthy options in a sunny and inviting space. A communal table invites diners to share a conversation as well as a meal.

Liz's anemia resolved, but the experience stayed with her. As she studied to become a doctor of integrative medicine, first at the Andrew Weil Center at University of Arizona, then as a fellow of the Integrative Medicine program at Maine Medical Center, she kept it in mind. "Throughout all of my years of training, I never saw anything like that again," she says. But that changed in the spring of 2019, when Liz and her husband, Stewart, purchased a building in Portland's West End and realized her dream of opening Good Medicine Collective, a health and wellness space that offers patients and visitors the same kind of warm and welcoming environment Liz experienced in her youth.

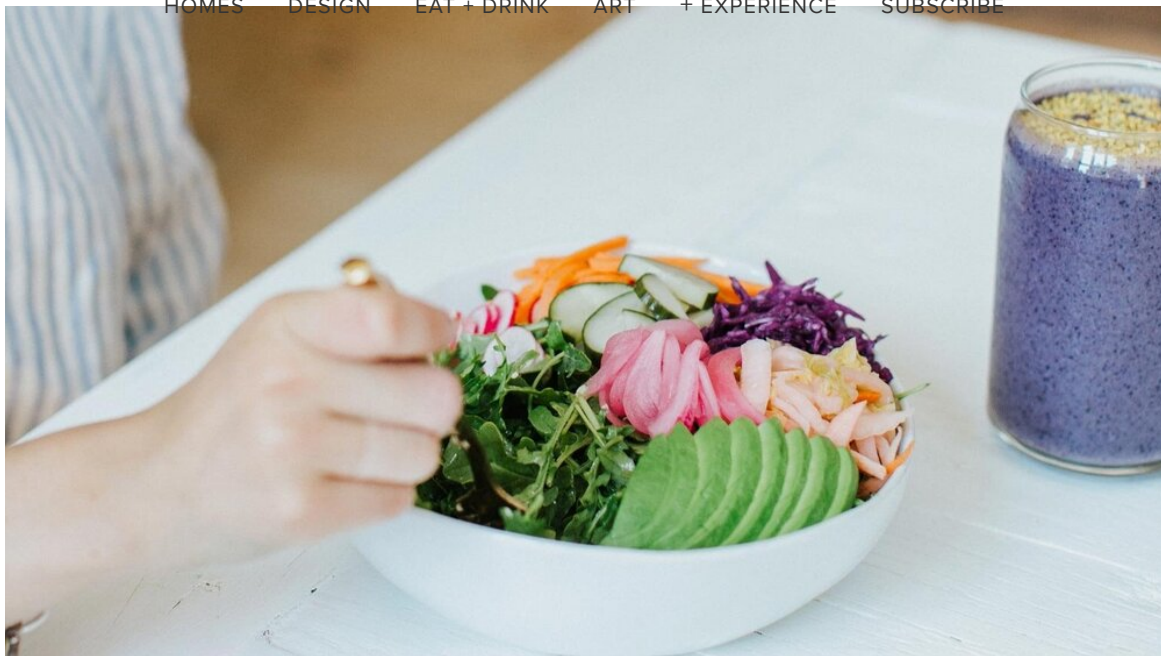
"It's a nonprofit," explains Liz. "And the mission, in short, is to reimagine and reclaim whole health."

The good doctor herself exudes warmth, more likely to give a hug than a handshake, and her enthusiasm for whole health is, well, infectious. Liz says she envisions Good Medicine like a living room ("The Living Room" was an early name for the space). "I really wanted the space itself to feel cozy and welcoming, really alive, really imperfect." The 1920s-era building on York Street most recently contained Outliers Eatery. The just over 4,000-square-foot shingle-sided structure featured lofty ceilings and southerly-facing windows overlooking Casco Bay—great bones—that promised harbor views and copious light.

Optimum Construction performed the extensive renovation required to transform the former restaurant into a multipurpose wellness space. Vice President Ryan Lessard, who worked closely on the project, calls Good Medicine Collective "a complete wellness package" and "a space that Portland needs." He carefully adhered to Liz's ideas to make the space feel homey. For example, to ensure that the rooms had a lived-in, welcoming feel, the flooring of Eastern white pine was installed early, allowing subcontractors to tread the boards during renovation and give the wood what Lessard calls a "man-made patina."

Contractor Mike Poole, of PW Design in Pennsylvania, advised on the interior. Reclaimed wood from an 1890s barn in Hershey, Pennsylvania, was used to panel much of the common areas, with accent walls in the treatment rooms carrying through the feeling of rustic simplicity.

On the ground floor, LB Kitchen/West makes use of the original kitchen, serving up healthy vegan meals seven days a week. They also hold nutrition classes and offer subsidized “Good Medicine bowls” to reach as many diners as possible.



An LB Kitchen bowl. The eatery is committed to providing fresh, healthy food to the community and also offers a “Good Medicine bowl” made at cost for the nonprofit

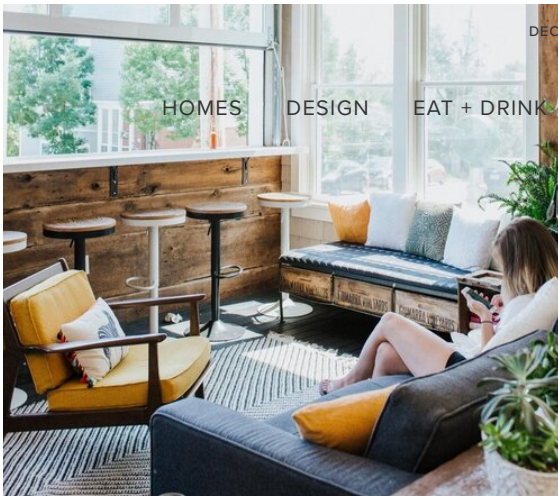
The former dining room has been converted into six offices where patients and visitors can receive primary medical care, mental health treatment, acupuncture, osteopathy, traditional Chinese medicine, nutritional guidance, bodywork, breathwork, and other modalities. (See goodmedicinecollective.org for a full list of providers.) One of Good Medicine’s mottos is “It takes a village to heal,” and the wide-ranging specialties of its practitioners reflect that sentiment.

The restaurant’s porch was converted into a solarium-like space, with retractable glass walls, comfy seating, a gas fireplace, and plenty of books. In good weather, the windows are raised to open the room out to the fresh air and harbor view.

The second floor contains a large multipurpose studio with a vaulted, cathedral ceiling that was painted white to maximize the feeling of light and expansion. Large windows overlooking Casco Bay bring in sunlight and water views, making the studio the perfect place for yoga and meditation. Genell Huston of Lila East End Yoga oversees the classes of Lila Yoga West, and Open Door Meditation Community offers weekly sats. The space is also used for Qoya, Qi Gong, sound healing, and many other classes and workshops.

The lower level features two plunge pools, one cold, one room temperature, and a cedarwood 10-person sauna. Slate tiles over radiant heat ensure that bare feet stay warm. Various styles of hydrotherapy are offered, from Moroccan to Korean to Finnish.

The collective offers donation-based one-on-one conversations, “helping people reframe health so that they can start to realize where there are places that they can take ownership over it, whether that’s nutrition or lifestyle,” says Liz. “We’re just reframing their experience of wellness and vitality away from a medical diagnosis, towards more of a life-learning path and supporting that with weekly group conversations.”



In the Living Room area, retractable glass windows allow in fresh air and ocean breezes. In the wintertime, a gas stove offers both light and warmth.



A Qi Gong class lead by Ronnie Wilson promotes healing and balance through movement.



The lower-level sauna features two plunge pools, one cold and one lukewarm, made by Northern Lights Cedar Tubs, as well as a variety of hydro-therapy offerings

In an effort to keep services accessible, appointments are offered on a sliding scale and classes are likewise donation-based. As an additional part of their outreach, the collective hosts events for groups such as Outside In Maine, which serves incarcerated youth, and Liberty Bay Recovery Center, an addiction rehabilitation facility. “A huge part of the collective’s initiative is centered around reaching underserved populations,” Liz continues, adding that her hope is to reach more patients preventively.

“Everybody working and practicing here is devoted to making this kind of care accessible to people of color, other marginalized populations, immigrants, asylees, and the socioeconomically underserved. The goal, over all,” she concludes, “is to empower people to take their whole health into their own hands.”

The calm, cozy space Liz Strawbridge has created—perhaps a sister to the one she visited years ago—feels like the right place to start. With its multiple modalities of healing on offer, this inviting and inclusive gathering place is on its way to becoming a locus of wellness and community. Good Medicine, indeed.

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