

# Sonic *cure*

THE HEALING NATURE  
OF A SOUND BATH AT THE  
INTEGRATRON IS WHAT YOU MAKE IT.

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I'm not sure what to expect when I walk into the Integratron for a sound bath. A tuned set of high-pitched hand bells? A series of reverberating gongs? A chorus of angels like those I heard every year at Crystal Cathedral's "Glory of Christmas"? Desert locals were decidedly split on the plausibility of sonic healing in the weeks leading up to my visit: Some fell asleep during the hour-long experience, others called it "transformative."

"A sound bath is something between a lovely crystal bowl concert and a profound steep incline to the inner landscape," Integratron co-owner Joanne Karl had explained a few days earlier. "And everything in between for all the individual people."

About 1,000 visitors per month make the trek out to this white dome in the middle of Landers. Myriad join me as I walk through the door – tourists in khakis and polo shirts, and locals with long beards and flowy dresses. Sheryl Crow's drummer, Wally Ingram, is also in line. Our group is asked to remove our shoes before we climb up a small ladder to the second floor, where we're greeted by a towering umbrella of curved wooden beams interrupted by small rectangular windows. The perfectly acoustic space was first built in the 1950s by UFOlogist George Van Tassel as a vehicle for human rejuvenation, before coming under the present care of Joanne and her sisters, Nancy and Patty. Van Tassel claimed extraterrestrials gave him directions for constructing this all-wood dome, 38 feet high and 55 feet in diameter, on top of a geomagnetic vortex in the middle of the desert. "A man's Field of Dreams," Joanne calls it.

"George's stuff was never about the metal ships with the little lights," she explains. "His were always about fields of energy. Did you ever see the movie *Interstellar*? If you remember Matthew McConaughey when he was behind the shelf? My hair still stands on end when I see that. All I could think of was, 'That's probably how it really is.'"

According to its website, "Magnetometers read a significant spike in the Earth's magnetic field in the center of the Integratron." This, combined with its construction, results in what Joanne describes as "richer, fuller sounds." She and Nancy first started experimenting with recordings inside the dome in the 1980s – think ZZ Top and chanting monks. Back then, they jumped fences to get onto the property that had been sold to a mutual friend by Van Tassel's widow.

"We found that when we were in the building with the sound, we began to have a different experience

in our perception and our brain," Joanne explains.

"Sound does connect the hemispheres of the brain, that's why you can get chills from a piece of music."

It was the quartz bowls that resulted in the most awareness and relaxation, as recommended by acoustic brain researcher Tom Kenyon. "Tom explained to us that we share geometry with crystal, so it really works on the neurology of the body, a very specific ringing tone," says Joanne, a former cardiac nurse. "The quartz bowls are very soothing to the brain and very easy to integrate." After years of visiting from the East Coast, the sisters jumped at the opportunity to "steward" the building when it hit the market in 2000. Shortly thereafter, it was a visit from TV personality Huell Howser – who encouraged the pair to utilize the sound baths as a "collaborative restoration project" – that they started hosting sessions for the public.

"We call this a 'conspiracy of grace' here at the Integratron," Joanne says. "... People very often come out and say, 'What can I do to help you?' [We ask them], 'Well, what's your story?' And they'll say, 'Well, I'm an expert in paint.' 'Oh really? Because we need an expert in paint.' ... It's the non-random nature of the open gate at the Integratron that really helped us to understand that we weren't the only ones that thought it was completely amazing. This is really something. It's a beautiful piece of architecture, it's in a unique location, it has very unique and unusual energies – those that George described as 'earth energy.' That's really been the basis of everything: creating a way for the building to get preserved."

Inside the Integratron, I take my place on a striped bed palette in the second of two rows forming half circles. At the other end of the building is a collection of white quartz bowls in various sizes across the floor. Nancy instructs us to sit before taking her place behind the crystal and says there will be 25 minutes of bowl playing before another 35 of recorded music. I lay my head back and close my eyes, sunlight beaming down onto my bare leg from the window above me. Silence falls over the room.



IF YOU GO  
Group sound  
baths are by online  
reservation only;  
tickets start at  
\$25 per person at  
integratron.com

Then a low hum breaks the stillness. Like an eerie phonetics machine, the sound reverberates through my body with a guttural pull. It's as if I'm being split in all different directions, yet equally weighed down by the force of gravity.

It's a visceral expansion, the way the sounds fill each crack in my body. Different octaves, different keys – the variations swell in my chest. For you to understand where the Integratron took me, you need to know how I arrived: in pieces – wounds not yet turned to scars at the hand of a man I'd called my husband. When the sound of quartz permeates my body, I brace for an all-too-familiar feeling. And yet, I do not shatter.

Then the room goes black.

When I wake up, I'm one of two people still lying on their mat. At the other end of the dome, Joanne and Nancy talk quietly with Ingram and his family. It takes me about a minute to figure out where I am. I clutch my abdomen, my hips to make sure they're still part of me. I realize it's the first time in a year that sleep hasn't been as frightening as reality.

I stumble over to Joanne, and she hugs me like we've been friends for a decade. She's more – normal – than I expect, in a jean vest and pink scarf. We don't really talk about my experience; instead, she tells me about her family (her son and daughter-in-law, and Nancy's daughter and son-in-law now work on-site) and recalls old visits to the property. She reveals to me that Nancy has a saying, and she clenches both fists as she says it: "Let me be braver than this."

I say goodbye before descending the ladder and signing the guest book on the first floor. When I emerge from the building, the sun hovers over the western mountains. What is it about the sound bath that felt so relaxing and yet so utterly empowering?

"Our motivation wasn't to have people drink the Koolaid but to really get a sense of who they are," Joanne had told me earlier. "I'm really proud of the Integratron for being that self-aware beacon that non-randomly brings to it exactly what it needs. I respect it. I wish I knew how to do it, because I think it is the Integratron. Maybe it's George with some big control panel."

It's as if I was surprised by my own ability to accommodate the infiltration of my body. The sounds of the bowls unnerved me but didn't overtake me. As I drove down the dirt road away from the Integratron, I considered the possibility that perhaps I'd never been broken in the first place.

*I can be braver than this.*

Maybe tuning in to the inner landscape doesn't just force us to notice our role as both patron and recipient in the conspiracy of grace. Maybe it forces us to offer grace to ourselves. 🌱