

Lifestyle / Health & Wellness

How a breast cancer survivor who studied TCM and healing opened her own wellness resort to 'repay the chances I had been given'

- Traditional Chinese medicine and energy work helped Marina Efraimoglou beat breast cancer, after visualisations had helped her overcome non-Hodgkin lymphoma
- She travelled the world to study alternative healing and seek out spiritual healers. Now at her Euphoria Retreat she shares the lessons she learned



Tara Loader Wilkinson

+ FOLLOW

Published: 4:15pm, 7 Aug, 2022

Why you can trust SCMP

129



Marina Efraimoglou was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a cancer of the blood, aged 29, and later with breast cancer - which she says she overcame with just energy work, traditional Chinese medicine and self-awareness work. Photo: Euphoria Retreat

129



When Marina Efraimoglou was a newlywed high-flying banker in her twenties with a master's degree from the London School of Economics, it seemed the world was her oyster. That was until she was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin lymphoma, a cancer of the blood, aged 29.

"I went to New York for a biopsy and they gave me a not-very-positive prognosis of a 20 to 25 per cent survival rate," she says, on a call from her native Greece.

She underwent a clinical trial of chemotherapy at her doctors' suggestion and after five months was in remission.

South China Morning Post

Understand China
Understand the World

Discover more

SCMP Poll

129



129



She attributes her recovery in part to the healing power of love she received from her husband, family and friends. She also credits the strength of her own visualisations.

Don't dwell on cancer – live in spite of it, says filmmaker

19 Oct 2020



“I was constantly visualising the cancer leaving my body, even while I was vomiting from the chemo,” she says. “Everyone was saying, ‘How can you not be angry that you could die so young?’ But I felt there was a reason this was happening to me, there was knowledge to gain from this experience,” she says.

“Although it was a difficult period, with fear and a lot of pain, there was a sense of love and union, and I connected with my own deep love of life. I kept thinking, ‘I really, really want to live.’”



Guests practise yoga at Efraimoglou's Euphoria Retreat in Greece. Photo: Euphoria Retreat

129



Within a few months of being told she was in remission, with her hair only just starting to regrow, she wanted to return to work. But she didn't want to be a cog in a corporate wheel, and she knew she had to prioritise her health.

She called up two close contacts and together they set up a boutique investment bank and asset management company called Telesis, a Greek word meaning "coming to fruition".

"We were all quite young and we were doing banking differently, for example, giving 10 per cent of our profits to charity," she says.

129



Efraimoglou leads guests at the start of a forest treasure hunt at Euphoria Retreat. Photo: Euphoria Retreat



For nine years from 1993, she worked as president and CEO of Telesis Capital and Telesis Investment Bank, which "became the success story of the '90s in Greece", she says.

129



Efraimoglou was named business person of the year in Greece in 2000; two years later Telesis was acquired by Swiss private bank EFG International and merged with the Greek-headquartered financial company EFG Eurobank Ergasias.

Efraimoglou stayed for a couple of years to facilitate the merger, but knew that that part of her life was ending. She was ready to start a new journey, in wellness.

“As a cancer survivor, I was always looking for ways to boost my immunity, for example doing yoga and meditation and going to places to detox,” she says.

129



Efraimoglou uses the masks of ancient Greek tragedy to help guests explore their feelings and emotions. Photo: Euphoria Retreat



In the late '90s she booked into the Golden Door in California, one of the most exclusive health resorts in the US, which was co-founded by American wellness pioneer Deborah Szekely in 1958 (now aged 100, Szekely makes for an excellent poster child for ageing well). Efraimoglou's healing experience inspired her to set up her own healing resort, Euphoria Retreat, in Greece.

129



“I was searching my heart for a way to share my experience and repay the chances I had been given,” she says.

In 2007, she bought a large plot of land in the pineclad hills of the Peloponnese peninsula, at the foothills of Greece’s Mount Taygetos. As the land is located within the Unesco World Heritage Site of Mystras, it took years to win planning permission.



In the meantime she travelled the world, seeking out spiritual healers to better understand what was needed to deliver world-class therapies.

129



She studied under [alternative medicine guru Deepak Chopra](#) and Taoism grandmaster Mantak Chia. She also completed advanced studies in [traditional Chinese medicine \(TCM\)](#) and spent the next decade working in transformational healing.

She discovered an analogy between ancient Greek medicine and TCM.

“From going east to find knowledge, I then went back to my roots,” she says. “Chinese medicine and Hippocratic medicine [that which relates to the ancient Greek doctor Hippocrates] both have this strong link connecting nature and man, especially how the seasonal changes affect us.”

129



A guest sits atop a glass roof at the central point of Euphoria Retreat, a 25-metre-deep empty water well. Photo: Euphoria Retreat



In the lead-up to the launch of Euphoria Retreat, she was diagnosed with breast cancer – which she overcame armed with knowledge of holistic healing from her TCM learning.

129



“I decided I didn’t want to do radiation [therapy, nor chemotherapy] and just used energy work combined with Chinese medicine and self-awareness work,” she says.

With Mary Vandaorou, a spiritual mentor, Efraimoglou opened Euphoria Retreat in 2018, representing her personal journey of transformation combining TCM and ancient Greek healing practices.

A Hong Kong woman learned to meditate her cancer stress away

21 May 2020



The retreat’s programmes include weight loss, detox, energy boosting, immunity reset, yoga, fitness and healing. Most weave in the philosophies of TCM and the five elements of metal, water, fire, air and earth, combined with advanced diagnostics.

129



Guests typically come to heal or feel closer in their relationships. The feedback is usually very satisfying, especially from repeat customers, Efraimoglou says.



“One family has come back 10 times and when I thanked them, the daughter said to me, ‘Every time we leave here, we feel we are better people.’”

Marina Efraimoglou's 5 tips for daily balance

1. Visit a TCM practitioner for a bazi – or Chinese astrology – reading. Alternatively, read up online yourself, to learn which of the “five elements” you are.

2. Eat according to the season. This is easy to do when you understand the seasonal colours and that TCM splits the year into five seasons.

Blue/black is for winter, when you should eat aubergines, beans and black sesame.

In spring the colour is green, so eat a lot of greens, especially those with a bitter taste.

129



Summer is red, so eat red foods that calm heat, like watermelon, berries and tomatoes.

“Late summer”, or the Earth season, is yellow, so eat squash, peaches, corn and oranges.

Autumn is white/silver/grey, so eat foods such as mushrooms and ginger.

Eating two mushrooms a day nearly halves cancer risk, study finds

21 Jun 2021



3. Consider how your body uses energy in the cooler and warmer seasons. For example, in winter you need to conserve energy, relax and rest. In summer your body needs to expend energy and sweat.



4. Try to be in harmony with, and take cues from, nature. For example, when leaves fall, we should also let go of what we no longer need.

5. Practise qigong. Rooted in TCM, its calming qualities help improve your sleep while reducing stress. Make time to embrace the positive power of gentle exercise by discovering the important role yin and yang can play in our lives.

Like what you read? Follow SCMP Lifestyle on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). You can also sign up for our eNewsletter [here](#).