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Transformative Leadership at Euphoria Retreats, Greece – Review

This holistic and spiritual wellbeing centre stands on the slopes of Mount Taygetus

By **Annabel Heseltine** | 4 Days Ago

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As the world cries out for new leaders, **Annabel Heseltine** joins former banker and twice cancer survivor Marina Efraimoglou at Euphoria Retreats in the **Peloponnese** to learn about a new style of leadership; more empathetic, more intuitive, more effective.

Review: Euphoria Retreat, Greece



Wind rushing in from across the Peloponnese-Mani rips the torn pieces of white paper covered in scribbles from my hand. I watch them flutter and dance in the wind but to my surprise it doesn't throw them back at me; it's as if a huge unseen hand has reached out to take them away, folding them back into the mysterious forest of tall, elegant Cyprus trees over my right shoulder.

On them I have written the negative traits of my character holding me back from being a leader. We have all been there: procrastination, hyperbole, imposter syndrome, distrust. I have been wrestling with them on the Leadership Initiation retreat held by Marina Ephraimoglou, founder of Euphoria Retreat on the forested lower slopes of Mount Taygetus, looking out to pink clouds floating over gentle mountains. It's the only holistic and spiritual wellbeing centre in the world combining the study of the five elements of Asian medicine with Ancient Greek philosophy and in many ways, Ephraimoglou's latest privately curated retreat embodies her life's work.

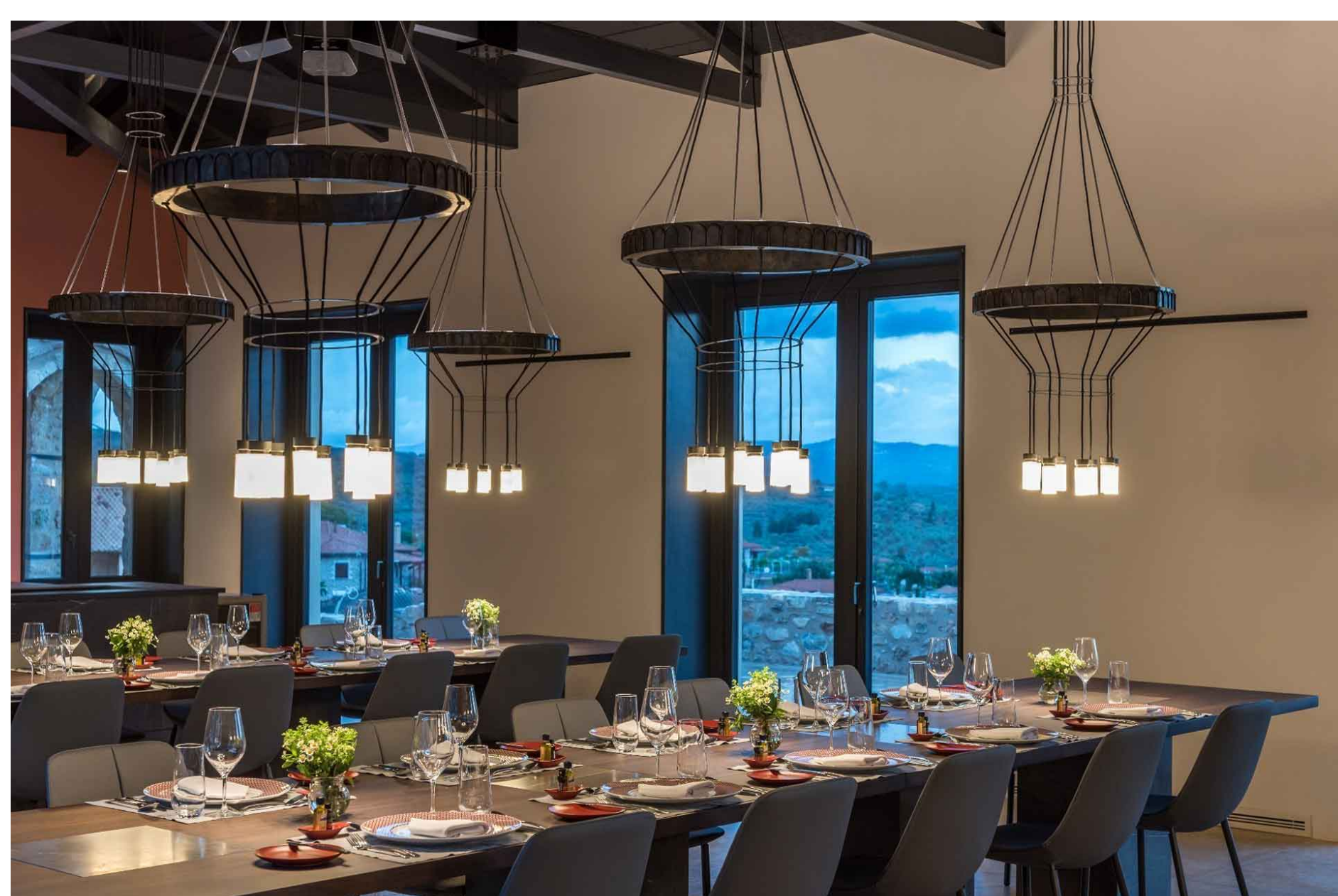
Ephraimoglou who has survived cancer twice, found her calling when visiting The Golden Door in California as a successful but exhausted banker. 'I knew then that I wanted to help other people.' Never one to do things by halves, this powerful, warm, wise woman was soon welcoming guests from all over the world to a 45-roomed retreat at the end of an ancient, paved road in the UNESCO protected village of Mystras.



Three days ago six women, drawn from **New York, Paris, Rome, Athens and London**, amongst us writers, entrepreneurs, humanitarian leaders, tech gurus and sustainability influencers walked that paved road to join her and her business partner and best friend, Mary Vadorou, a former ballerina and spiritual teacher in exploring a different kind of leadership, defining a new archetypal leader who is feminine, compassionate, intuitive and empathetic.

'We will be working together to find this new archetype of a leader because we don't feel it is there,' she said on the first evening, articulating three levels of leadership all founded on a bedrock of authenticity. Leading thyself is to take control of one's life with self-awareness. Leadership in the context of friends, family and business colleagues is a process of constant learning, checking in on our authenticity so we don't follow the ego or become pleasers.

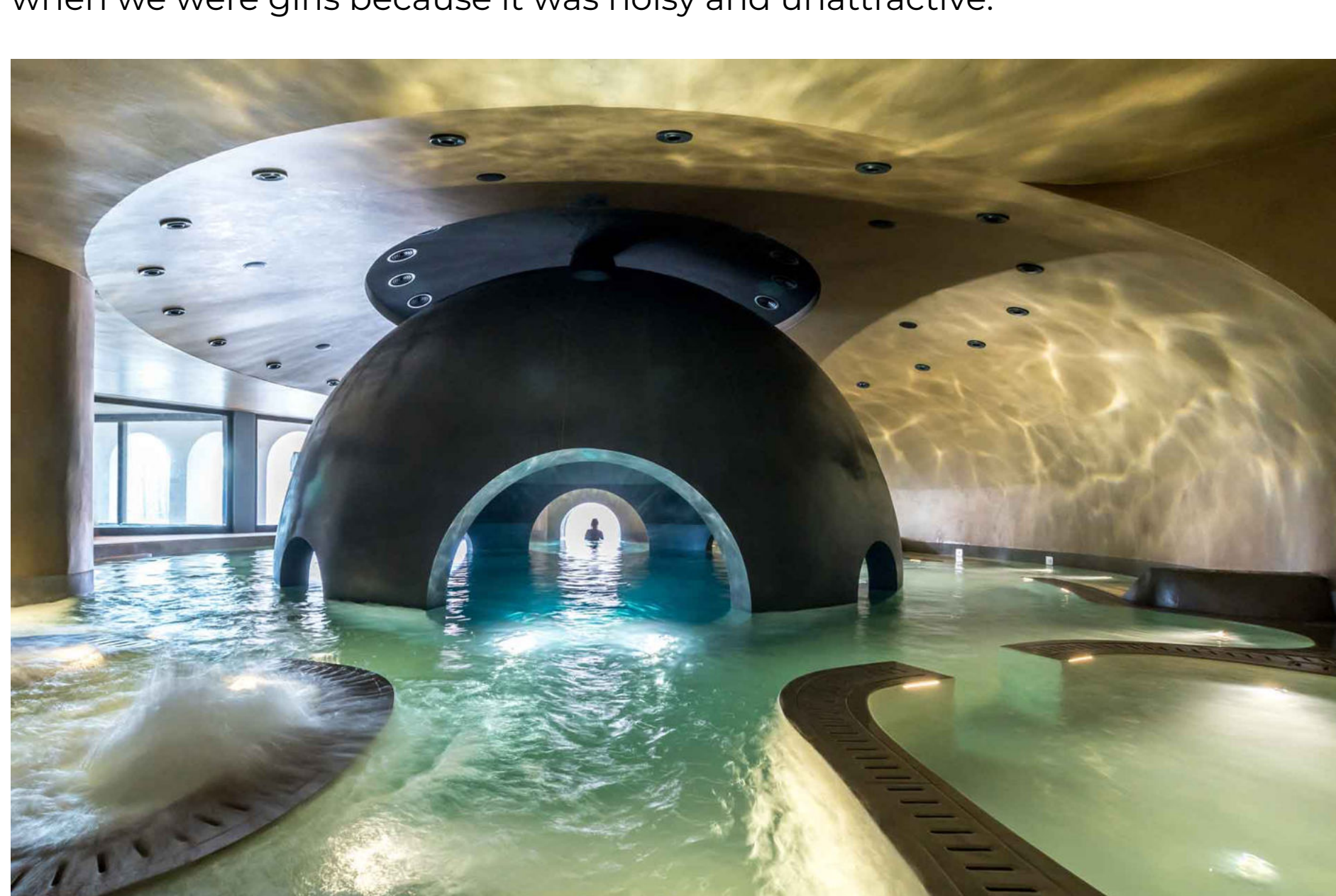
Not everyone aspires to the third stage of being a global leader – but, says Ephraimoglou, referring to the Greek word 'idiotis' (which describes people who don't look outside their immediate lives), we all have the responsibility to explore what it means, so that we choose our leaders responsibly and don't behave like sheep.



It seems fitting that only two hours away from Athens, the first society derived from philosophy and democracy, we should be discussing a new leadership style. Without throwing out the baby, she invokes the wisdom of Socrates, 'Know thyself', as well as of Plato, Pythagoras and Hippocrates, Confucious, Buddha and Lao Chu, who all around the 6th or 7th century BC independently observed our connection with nature, drawing similar conclusions about our relationship with the sun. Its trajectory being the greatest determinant of nature by day and night, but also the seasons. 'Five elements is nothing more than the energy of the seasons and how they influence us on three levels of existence: physical, emotional and spiritual,' explains Ephraimoglou.

It's powerful stuff, and straight off a ferry from an emergency summit in Paris called by Macron to discuss the cryosphere crisis of melting ice and glaciers in the three poles – the third being the Himalayas – it feels timely, if overwhelming.

The following morning, Euphoria's drama therapist brings me down to earth when she starts working on our breathwork. I thought that mine was quite good, but I am so wrong. Ignoring generations of maternal conditioning, demanding we hold in our stomachs to be feminine, Hrysanthi, shows us how to stand and breathe the more confidently from a deeper place, moving our breath right down into our belly. Some of us cry. Releasing old pain we scream in a high-pitched child-like voice, a scratchy sound stifled by our mothers when we were girls because it was noisy and unattractive.



Through improvisation using scenes from the Greek tragedy of Antigoni, who defies her uncle the king when she is forbidden to bury her treacherous brother, we learn subtle lessons on how we react to power and authority, acting as teachers to each other but also mirrors. Then it's the day of silence, meditative in enchanted forests, connecting with nature through sound, sight, dance and music as we spiral through the seasons, discovering where we belong through our own creations of a personal human tableau; each one so different but so strong.

My ferry home was delayed by the same wind which had whisked away those little pieces of paper. So, after everyone else had left, I returned to the forest, climbing high to watch the sun setting behind the mountains. The forest whispered restlessly, echoing back the sounds of daily lives, cats yowling, human voices muffled by distance, the occasional bird and a snap of a twig. It felt comforting and reassuring. Then it hit me. I had left something off the list: that dogged fear of failing. I heard again the call to trust that I had heard in the pebbled labyrinth we had walked the day before and bowed in gratitude. On the ground was a pinecone. I picked it up. It looked dead but in its tiny crevices it carried the seeds of tomorrow. I slipped it into my pocket and scrambled back down the slope to pack for my journey home.

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Euphoria Retreat, Mystras, Sparta, Greece, +30 2731 306 111, 6956612049. Visit euphoriaretreat.com or contact reservations@euphoriaretreat.com

Annabel travelled by train from London to Greece, overnighting in Milan and taking a night ferry from Bari to Patras in the Peloponnese.

Next retreat dates for Leadership Reimagined: March 6th – 10th 2024.