

EDITORIAL CALENDAR

Special Edition

4 Quarterly Digital Issues

Fitness

Sophie Matis is one such guru aiming to revolutionise gyms with her paradigmatic lane-based, no-subscription facility, Training Lane.

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Photos courtesy of Sophie Matis



Sophie Matis

Training Lane

by Jericho Tadeo

Sophie Matis has a lot to be proud of. The Toronto entrepreneur is changing the health and wellness industry with her gym, Training Lane. Nestled in Corktown, Training Lane is set up uniquely with fully equipped individual lanes, an infrared sauna, and a cold plunge shower. Geared towards empowering personal trainers and gym-goers to make the best of their training sessions, Training Lane's no-hassle, membership-free structure and app allow users to exercise whenever they wished to.

Elixuer spoke with Matis on her journey into the health and wellness industry, the void she's trying to fill with her gym, and, above all, the importance of prioritizing your physical well-being now more than ever.

You have a deeply personal connection to health and wellness — can you talk about what inspired you to transition into this industry? Where did the idea of Training Lane start for you?

About four years ago, I had some pretty serious nerve issues where a nerve had become pinched in my C5-C6 vertebra. It caused me to lose strength and mobility down my left arm. [I wasn't able to] lift

a water bottle to my mouth, shampoo my own hair, [or] push a door open with my left side. I was told that I would — if I was lucky, with hundreds of hours of physio — maybe get 50 per cent of my strength and mobility back.

It was through physiotherapy and personal training that I realized there was this void in the industry. I'd go with these trainers to these open gyms, [where] you have like 60 elliptical machines, 25 treadmills, two squat racks, and one cable machine. And [we found ourselves] waiting and working in with other people, readjusting our settings, readjusting our

weights. [In that time], your heart rate goes down, you get distracted, you're on your phone — it was this really inefficient way to execute these programs.

I wanted something where all the equipment was within a close radius so that you're just bouncing [between] what you need. And, I wanted something that guaranteed equipment; it's going to be there 100 per cent if you book your time. That's kind of where the idea for Training Lane came from — it's out of a necessity.

What I liked about the gym was how malleable and personal it was, which lent a feeling of empowerment and ownership. What was the thought process behind this structure?

I love that that's coming across! I went to various gyms, and it was all the same: it was all dark, dingy floors, the equipment was kind of thrown in there haphazardly — and not necessarily the most state-of-the-art — and the music was all over the place.

It was seeing these deficiencies in other gyms that sparked the idea to go out there, and find a better solution that fits into my own aesthetic. Coming from the hospitality industry, where you're looking at all these details and where every single material that you select affects the customer experience, I took that experience and applied it to the design.

The facility rounds out the physical exercise aspect of health and wellness with infrared sauna sessions and cold plunge shower services. For those who are unfamiliar with these practices, how would you describe the importance of both?

I actually went out to LA for about three weeks. LA is kind of the Mecca of fitness; if it's happening in fitness, it's happening there. I went to every single gym in West Hollywood and just took from [them] elements that I really enjoyed, that spoke to me. I came back to Toronto, and I started using infrared saunas, and I found it helped so much with my injury. When you open up those blood vessels and let all that blood circulate, [what happens is that blood gets] into all these areas for detoxification, as well as helping with your bone density and osteoporosis and arthritis.

Sealing up those blood vessels again is what gives you that elated feeling. I was reading stuff by all the Tony Robinsons [of the world], and what all these great minds and great thinkers and inspirational people do is take a cold plunge. They'll jump into cold water just to have that clarity of mind [...] you're not thinking about anything except where you are in that cold shower.

I really wanted to bring that element into Training Lane because it is such an incredible tool for recovery. I think it works so well in tandem with a workout: having that workout, having the heat to help with draining your lymphatic systems so that you don't have muscle soreness, and then having it end off with a cold plunge. I don't think there's a better trio!

What is your advice for those with extremely busy schedules who think they are unable to prioritize their health and wellness in such circumstances?

I think, for a long time, we've been in this culture of these membership gyms, where as soon as you sign up, you're signing a piece of paper that says you can come anytime — it's unlimited. When you say that to someone, you're already kind of telling yourself, well, this isn't very important: "I can come whenever I want," [...] it doesn't matter [when or how often I come]. When you book a hair appointment, a dental cleaning, a time with your mechanic, it's a set time and you never miss it.

I think [it's about] changing the mindset into, *no, the gym is not whenever you want*. You have to book it and get it on your calendar. That deliberation and commitment to yourself is what's going to give you consistency and hold you accountable. I think it's the most important appointment you could make. ♦

