

The new bliss

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Stepping into Michelle Humen's brand new massage space, Bliss Studio in Sechelt, is an instant reprieve from a hectic day. The freshly-painted moss green walls are a warm embrace, while the soft glow of a tranquil corner lamp draws your gaze to the main attraction: the massage mat on the floor.

I am there for a Thai yoga massage, my first ever, and I am more than ready. I enjoy yoga, I like massage, and I'd love to go to Thailand, so this must be for me. Plus, Humen's warm persona instantly puts me at ease.

Although well known as a personal fitness trainer and mobile massage practitioner through her business Fitfly (fitfly.com), Humen is now evolving to make several forms of massage her main focus at her new studio.

"My intention is to not only give a great massage but to offer peace and nurturing and make people feel comfortable," Humen noted.

Thai yoga massage, a form of body therapy traced back 2,500 years, is said to combine the best of both yoga and massage. By stretching and massaging the body and its pressure points (similar to acupuncture energy lines), the massage practitioner treats the client, who is an active participant.

Practitioner and client move in tandem in a relaxing flowing manner. In addition to the benefits of stretching the body, this form of massage is aimed at releasing stress, easing discomfort and promoting overall relaxation. Athletes and those with chronic sports injuries may particularly benefit from the targeted stretching.

Another bonus, at least for anyone self-conscious,

is that Thai yoga massage is performed fully clothed (wearing loose clothing is desirable). Sessions usually take between 75 to 90 minutes and cost \$75 and up.

Humen has trained to practice the lotus palm method of massage. According to her website, the lotus is a symbol of loving kindness and compassion (metta) and so she offers massage within the spirit of compassionate touch. Also trained in Swedish massage, Humen's integrated approach blends strengths of both the Eastern and Western approach with attention paid to the skeletal, circulatory, muscular and nervous system.

We begin the massage seated, with me in front of Humen. She starts with my shoulders and immediately identifies a major problem: I am as tight as a turtle. Humen adjusts the magnitude of her touch until my body starts to respond favourably, relaxing and releasing tight muscles.

Throughout the massage, there's nothing really asked of me other than to be loose and allow Humen to manipulate my limbs. To do so, she uses her whole body, but mostly her hands, elbows and even her feet, to knead and stretch me into my state of bliss.

Although Humen says that I'm fairly flexible, when we get to my hamstrings, I figure she'll take it back. I have tried nearly every stretch imaginable, but my hamstrings usually won't give an inch.

But with Humen's body as guide and support, suddenly, I'm into the poses and movements gently, with the hamstrings miraculously releasing. While the whole session was incredibly valuable and relaxing, the hamstring portion of the Thai yoga massage was nothing short of a body-work breakthrough.



CHRISTINA SYMONS PHOTO

Massage practitioner Michelle Humen at her new Bliss Studio in Sechelt.