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NEWSLETTER · IN CONVERSATION WITH SAM USHER

Dance, film, and a sauna on the beach

Sam Usher — dancer turned filmmaker turned founder of Steam Works — on reinvention, the ritual of hot and cold, and building community on a South Devon beach.

Sam Usher has reinvented himself more than most: from the National Youth Theatre and Ballet Rambert to twelve years dancing in Brussels, then a camera picked up on a detour to Devon that became a fifteen-year production company, and — after lockdown forced yet another reinvention — Steam Works, a community-led sauna on the beach where he and I first met. His through-line isn't a discipline; it's a willingness to start again.



There was nothing revolutionary about it — I just copied a friend, on a beach.

— Sam Usher, on Pharma Prescribed

The ritual of hot and cold

Sam is refreshingly unpretentious about the appeal of contrast bathing — sauna and cold water, the combination he happened to love. He's careful not to overclaim: one regular, a doctor, told him inflammation underlies much of Western illness and that heat acts as an anti-inflammatory, but Sam relays it

as anecdote, not gospel — 'I'm not a doctor in any way.' What's well established is the Scandinavian habit of it: a consistent two or three times a week, as everyday ritual rather than occasional novelty.

Reset and connection

The part he's surest of isn't physiological, it's social. Steam Works is designed around connection, ritual and reset — the sauna as a place people gather and slow down, not a wellness product. Having spent a career on adrenaline, from the stage to live sport, he's built something whose entire point is the opposite: coming down, together.

On reinvention

For a data-and-protocols audience, Sam's real lesson is about second and third acts. Dance taught him to communicate without words; film taught him to find the person behind the performance; the sauna is the latest form of the same instinct. Careers, like cold water, reward the willingness to plunge in.



Listen to the full episode

Sam Usher on Pharma Prescribed — at pharmaprescribed.com and wherever you get your podcasts.

Sam Usher is a former dancer and filmmaker and the founder of Steam Works, a community-led sauna experience in South Devon.