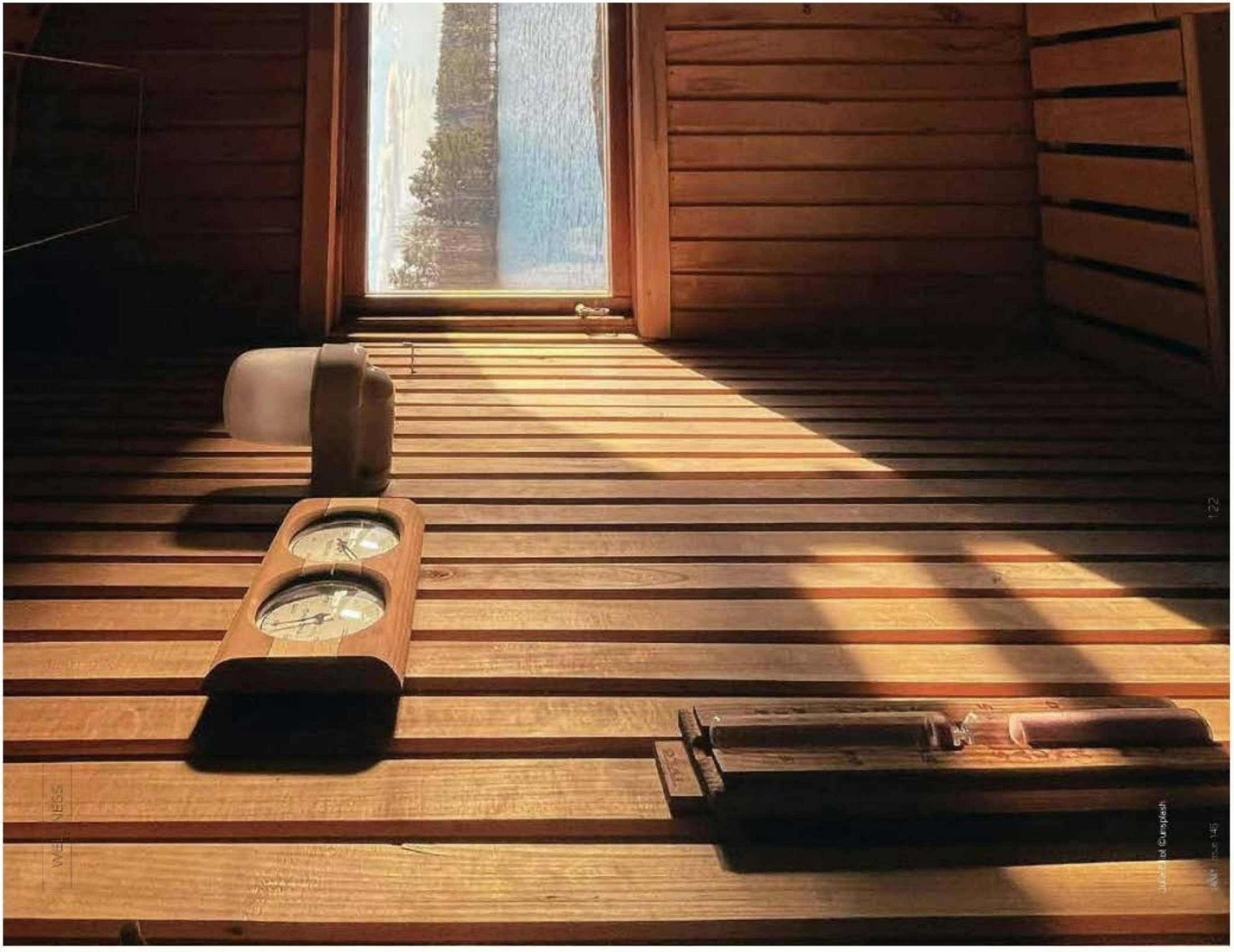

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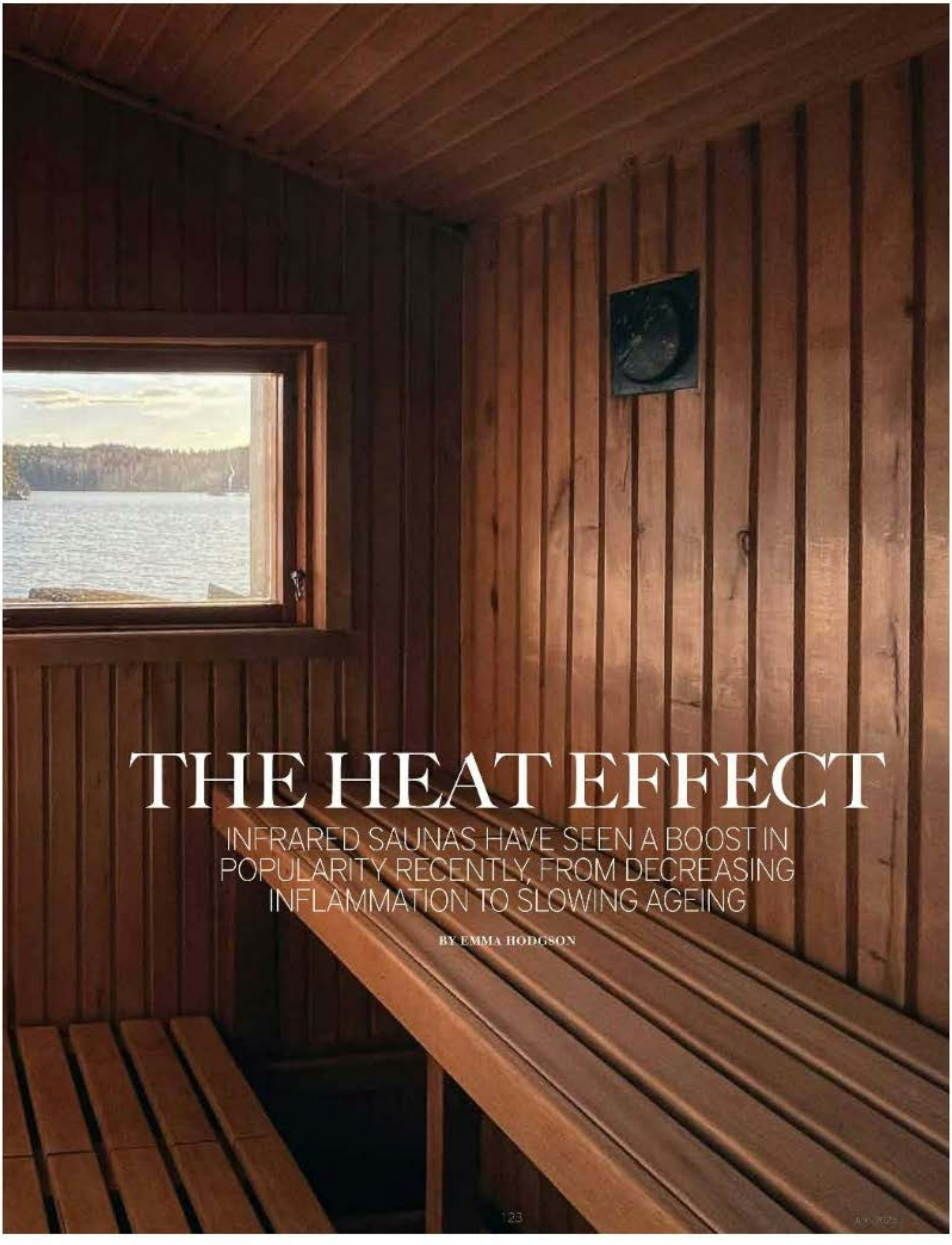

THE HEAT EFFECT

INFRARED SAUNAS HAVE SEEN A BOOST IN POPULARITY RECENTLY, FROM DECREASING INFLAMMATION TO SLOWING AGEING

BY EMMA HODGSON

In recent years, the wellness sector has witnessed a billion-dollar boom and is predicted to hit nine trillion globally by 2028. From cutting-edge biohacking therapies to reimagined ancient wellness rituals, health and longevity seekers are now more savvy than ever when it comes to the latest technology and treatments. One particular growing area is the expansion of infrared sauna technology. Once considered a niche novelty, infrared saunas are now a key aspect of elite health retreats, luxury hotels, and bespoke wellness plans. Here, we delve into the new technology and look at what separates it from traditional Finnish saunas.

While traditional saunas have long been embraced in Nordic cultures for their cardiovascular and relaxation benefits, infrared saunas are enjoying a fresh wave of interest, driven by technological innovation, biohacking culture, and the pursuit of deeper therapeutic results.

"People are increasingly interested in wellness technologies that are both effective and gentle," explains Dr Giuseppe Bellucci, an expert in metabolism and longevity at Baldan, Italy's leading name in beauty and wellness. "Infrared saunas offer a way to experience intense benefits at lower temperatures, which many find more tolerable and relaxing."

Conall Hoey, Sports Physiotherapist at Avida Longevity, echoes the sentiment: "Some people find infrared heat more comfortable, saying it penetrates tissues more effectively at milder conditions," the team notes. This balance between efficacy and comfort has made infrared saunas a preferred choice for health-conscious individuals looking to support their bodies without the harsh intensity of traditional heat therapies.

At first glance, infrared saunas may look similar to their conventional cousins – wood-panelled cabins with a warm glow. But their technology operates on a very different wavelength.

"Infrared saunas use infrared rays, heat waves that warm the body directly without significantly heating the air," says Dr Bellucci. Traditional saunas, by contrast, rely on convection, heating the air around you to temperatures as high as 100°C. Infrared saunas typically operate at a more moderate 40–60°C.

This difference in heat transfer is key. Rather than heating the room, infrared wavelengths penetrate beneath the skin's surface, up to 3 to 4 cm, delivering warmth directly to muscles, joints, and connective tissue. The result is a more targeted, deeply therapeutic experience. "Although the sweating may seem less intense, it is deeper and more detoxifying," Dr Bellucci adds.

From left to right: Atlie Ma, Andrea Davis, CRYSTALWEED Cannabis, IglucraftMusic ©Unsplash, JosephAll Music ©Unsplash

Hoey agrees: "Infrared wavelengths can penetrate slightly beneath the skin's surface, delivering warmth directly into muscles and tissues. This targeted heating is why many users report sweating more quickly or profusely, even though the ambient temperature is relatively low."

Beyond comfort and convenience, what are the real benefits of using infrared saunas? According to the experts, the list is long and growing.

"Regular use can support both physical and mental well-being," says Dr Bellucci. "We've seen improvements in cardiovascular health, immune function, sleep quality, and even skin appearance." Other benefits he highlights include: Reduction in muscle and joint pain, stimulation of the immune system, body detoxification, natural stimulation of collagen and elastin and enhanced relaxation and stress reduction.

Meanwhile, Hoey points out that while most large-scale studies have historically focused on traditional saunas, emerging research and anecdotal evidence suggest comparable benefits from infrared therapy, especially for pain relief and cardiovascular support. "The physiological effects resemble moderate exercise, such as increased heart rate, vasodilation, and improved blood flow," the Longevity Director explains.

Unlike one-off spa indulgences, infrared sauna therapy rewards consistency. "Start with 10–15 minutes per session and gradually increase to 30–45 minutes, depending on individual tolerance," Dr Bellucci advises. The general recommendation? Two to four sessions per week, with adjustments based on therapeutic goals.

Preparation and recovery are also crucial. Experts recommend staying hydrated, avoiding heavy meals before use, and wearing minimal clothing to allow the infrared light to act directly on the skin. Post-session, rehydration and gentle rest help the body absorb the benefits.

Hoey explains, "A quick shower before entering removes lotions or oils, allowing infrared light to reach the skin more effectively. Afterward, cool down gradually and rehydrate with water or electrolyte drinks."

Infrared saunas today are far from simplistic wooden boxes. Recent innovations have elevated them into high-tech wellness havens. Full-spectrum emitters – combining near, mid, and far-infrared wavelengths – target different tissues and biological functions. Near-infrared, for example, is associated with cellular regeneration and surface-level skin health, while far-infrared penetrates more deeply for muscle and joint recovery.

Infrared saunas are particularly powerful when paired with complementary treatments. Stretching, massage, lymphatic drainage, and relaxation rituals like yoga or meditation can amplify the sauna's effects.

According to Demircan, combining Red Light Therapy (also known as photobiomodulation) with infrared sessions is becoming increasingly popular. While infrared raises core temperature, red and near-infrared light directly targets cellular regeneration and inflammation. "Early research suggests it may boost collagen production, aid in muscle recovery, and reduce inflammation," she notes.

"In our view," concludes Dr Bellucci, "infrared saunas are not just a lifestyle choice – they're a tool for enhancing life itself." As research continues and technology advances, these gentle yet powerful heat therapies may redefine our approach to self-care.