

FLOAT away

Bellevue Club member Scott Swerland invests in the benefits of sensory deprivation float tanks

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SCOTT SWERLAND IS A NATURAL ENTREPRENEUR.

“I had a business with employees when I was 12. I incorporated my first business when I was 15 years old,” says Swerland, adding that his high school business eventually developed into a full-scale automotive and boat detailing company on Mercer Island, where he was raised. Currently, he is the CEO of Seattle Suntan, a company with over 90 locations in western Washington that he says saw a combined 3.2 million visitors last year.

He credits the success of Seattle Suntan and many of his past entrepreneurial pursuits to his obsession with what he calls the “wow factor.” Putting more than \$850,000 (a previously unheard of investment for a single tanning salon) into the build-out of the first salon in 2004 and decorating it with high-end fixtures and design details, Swerland, 45, began crafting a business model and standard for his products.

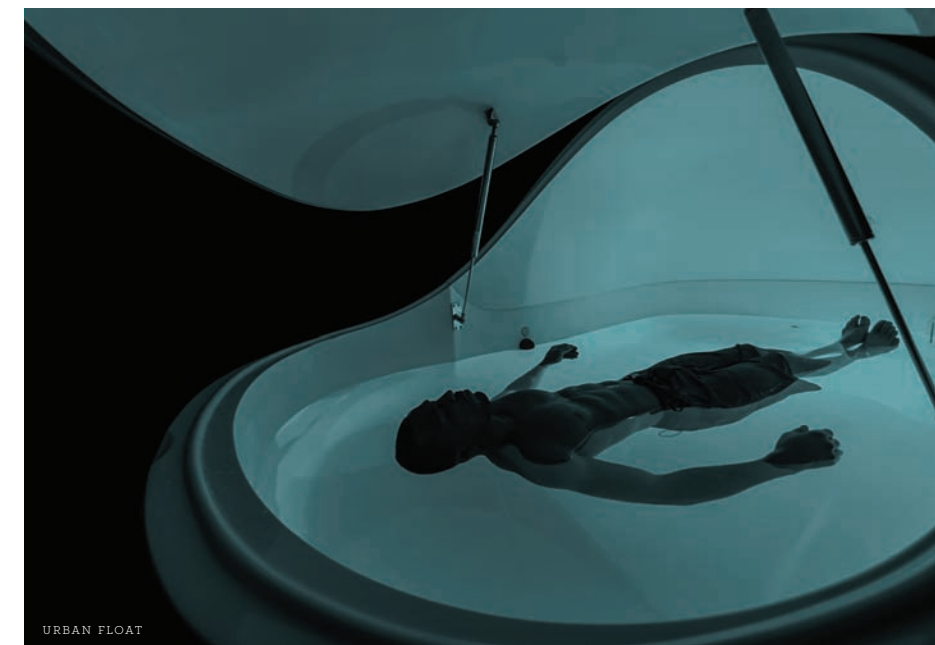
“I wanted to create an environment and model I could use wherever I go. Two years later we opened a second store, then a third, maybe another in 2008. In 2009, we went from five stores to 18. In 2010, we did another 10 stores, and it grew to 90,” he says.

Seattle Suntan is still the main focus for Swerland, but, equipped with a solid business model and a penchant for luxury services, he recently invested in an industry that is quickly gaining speed in the health and wellness arena: sensory deprivation floating.

Floating is a relatively new service in which clients lay in a shallow pool of water with an extremely high salinity (think 1,200 pounds of magnesium sulfate—Epsom salt—in 230 gallons of water). This high salinity creates a feeling of weightlessness, which is thought to ease stress on the nervous system and aid with chronic pain, among other health issues. Couple that with other sensory deprivation features, such as complete darkness and sound control, and the environment is meant to encourage clients to enter a deep level of relaxation. All of this is accomplished using individual, medical-grade pods with rigorous filtration systems.



SCOTT SWERLAND, BC MEMBER,
CEO OF SEATTLE SUNTAN AND
INVESTOR IN URBAN FLOAT



URBAN FLOAT



“PEOPLE ARE TRYING TO DE-STRESS. IN A LIFE WHERE WE ARE ALL HIGHLY CONNECTED, PEOPLE ARE JUST TRYING TO UNPLUG AND RELAX.”



JOE BEAUDRY

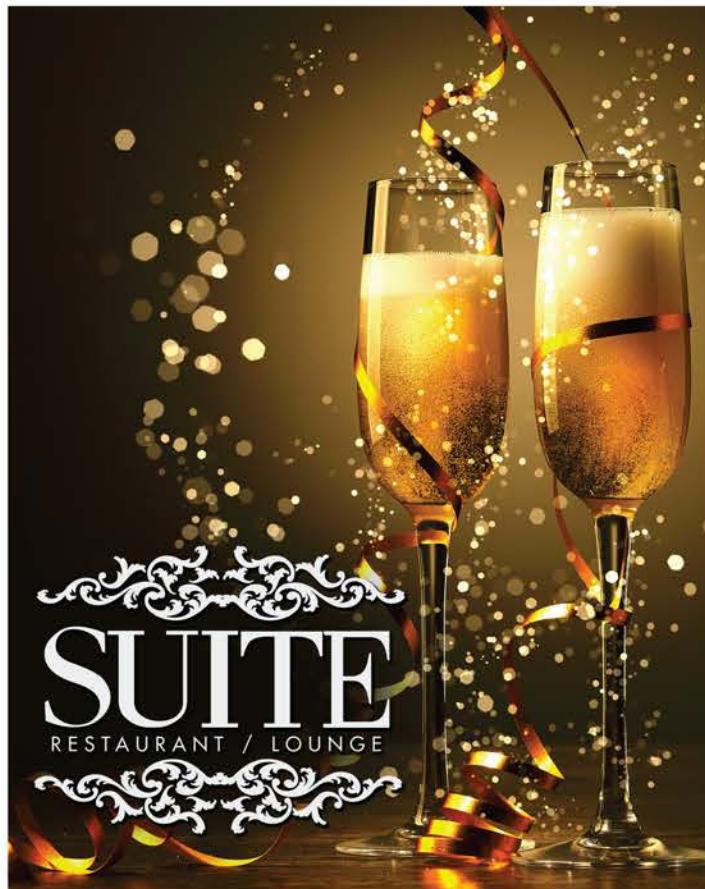


Joe Beaudry is Swerland’s business partner in Urban Float, and their company currently has locations in Fremont, Kirkland, Renton and plans for more facilities. All the locations are built with Swerland’s signature luxurious aesthetics, but Beaudry is the expert on the science of floating. He sits on the first national regulation and safety committee for the floating industry and explains it this way: “People are trying to de-stress. In a life where we are all highly connected, people are just trying to unplug and relax. That’s the mental piece. The other piece is physical,” Beaudry says. “A lot of people have chronic aches and pains and floating helps relieve them of that.”

Neither Swerland nor Beaudry can discuss exactly who is using their float tanks, but they can reveal their clientele ranges from professional athletes playing for the Seahawks, Sounders and Mariners to a concert pianist who says he is better able to compose music while in the sensory deprivation tank. The pair has also received success stories from yoga teachers, high-powered CEOs, Olympic athletes and Jimmy Johns’ delivery drivers, all benefitting in their own ways. They also cite cases of easing health complications such as epilepsy and ADHD.



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“We have some guys who float twice a day. We’ve got a guy who owns a pretty big business. He comes in first thing in the morning and after work. He says it changed his life,” Swerland says.

“People with chronic pain, they’re off the meds. We’ve had people burst out crying because it made such a big difference. That’s the coolest thing; we’re allowing people to renew, refresh and revive in this crazy world. ... Yeah, it’s rewarding when someone comes in and says, ‘I’ve been getting cortisone shots for 10 years, and I couldn’t move my frozen shoulder. I floated with you two months, and I can move my shoulder.’”

But how exactly does sensory deprivation manage to ease maladies, both physical and mental?

“It’s a shortcut to deep meditation,” Beaudry says. “A shortcut to theta brainwaves.” Theta brainwaves, he says, are what most people experience right before falling asleep, and research suggests lingering in this state of mind can be conducive to relaxation and meditation. Visualization, problem solving and increased creative thinking are all supported during this kind of brain activity.

“You start to get better at floating the more you do it,” Beaudry says. “You push yourself; push your brain to be more creative, to be better at problem solving.”

Swerland and Beaudry, who both float regularly, are now busy educating people about the system. And one of their top tips is to give it more than one shot. “It’s a compounding effect,” Swerland says.

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