The closest most trailer users get to a steam treatment is when they make the sink water too hot to wash the dishes. So the steam room Jenni Jo McLaughlin has built into her Airstream Basecamp is pretty unusual, to say the least. But the innovation is perhaps not as foggy as it sounds: McLaughlin is a massage therapist working out of Portland, Oregon, and the Basecamp is her spa-on-the-go.

The steam room, integrated into the trailer’s bathroom, seems all the less exotic when you learn that a fair percentage of McLaughlin’s clientele are musicians. “I wanted it specifically for singers and performers, to help with clearing of the lungs and deep breathing prior to or after performances,” she says. “It’s such a healing component of the experience.”

A skilled bodyworker, McLaughlin is trained and certified in multiple therapeutic disciplines, including Lomi Lomi Hawaiian massage, Swedish relaxation massage, heat-therapy intuitive stretching, range-of-motion facilitation, Ashiatsu DeepFoot therapy, aromatherapy, and the Yamuna body rolling method. She explains: “I have years of experience both receiving and giving massage—I feel like I’ve taken the best of what I’ve learned and avoided the worst of what I’ve experienced into a unique and transcending experience.”

Clients complete a health intake, and I also visually assess how they literally walk in the world prior to our sessions. This allows me to decide how to best approach their therapeutic needs and what might be the most beneficial to them and their bodywork goals.”

Beginning her practice in 2003 after leaving corporate America, McLaughlin pondered what kind of clients would provide her the uplift and inspiration that her therapies gave them. “Who do I like to be around? Who makes me happy and lifted?” she asked herself. Thinking about her love for live music, she wondered, “Who massages the musicians? Why not me?”

Since then, she has developed a client base in the music world, even doing a summer tour with Faith Hill and Tim McGraw as their personal bodyworker. McLaughlin has a studio in North Portland where she teaches and hosts workshops on therapeutic massage and holistic bodywork, but she long dreamed of a mobile unit that would let her hit the road and offer her services in conditions of her own design. A longtime Airstream lover, she owned a couple trailers at the time—but felt that restoration of either to her specifications would be too expensive and time-consuming. Enter the Basecamp.

“I could not get the Airstream Dream out of my brain,” McLaughlin says. “I would take field trips to the dealership and sit in different sizes, trying to narrow down what would really, really work. Then I walked into the Basecamp and I just knew that I could get this style in operation. The flow of the design allowed me to truly visualize how it would happen.”

Of course, visualization and operation are processes with some distance between. However, Ultimate Airstreams in Portland was up to the task. The four-month remodel in early 2019 included reconfiguring the seating to build the massage table (which can also convert to a dining table), rebuilding the kitchen panel to house the towel warmer, and, of course, creating the steam room—controlled by a portable steam unit plugged outside the Basecamp—and installing its teak bench.

“OPPOSITE: Jenni Jo McLaughlin stands in the doorway of The Peace Pod, her mobile-massage Basecamp. ABOVE: The Basecamp’s bathroom-to-spa conversion includes a flip-down teak seat that makes the steam room all the more soothing. The Peace Pod’s customized massage table doubles as a chase lounge. The table is also easily adjusted for dining and playing cards. PHOTO: ULTIMATE AIRSTREAMS

McLaughlin finds it a relaxing and inviting environment. “The Basecamp is streamlined, minimal, and has a wonderful flow to it,” she says. “The panoramic front windows are incredible. And the fact that you can see out but you can’t see in was a big sell for me, seeing that I work with high-caliber clientele at times. I love the
Healing people, she says, was part of her emotional core long before she became a professional. “It used to live with my grandma, who suffered a lifetime with rheumatoid arthritis. I gave her massages nightly over the course of six months. She began to sleep better and longer. Her demeanor softened. Her chronic pain and discomfort lessened just a bit—and that, to me, made it all worthwhile. And that’s when a seed was planted.

“Healthy touch, with positive intentions, can change and soften not only muscles, but spirits as well.”

The Peace Pod is available for hire by musicians, venues, record labels, management companies, local businesses, and private clients. As for that steam room, it’s not just her clients that get the good stuff. “Heck yes, I use it for myself! Talk about glamping!” says McLaughlin.

As the ancient proverb says: “Physician, heal thyself.”

McLaughlin is pleased with the results so far, though she says there’s a learning curve to designing and operating a mobile spa. Hauling around generators when outside power isn’t available is a hassle—she’d love to get the Basecamp converted to be off-grid. She’s still learning how to easily back the trailer up, and wouldn’t mind an easier way to attach the trailer to her Jeep than a hand crank. But she’s sold on the concept and the reality.

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