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OUR CHAPTER

NEWS + EVENTS

AWARDS

EMPLOYMENT

PUBLICATIONS

[Terrain Summer 2010](#)

[Terrain Spring 2010](#)

[Terrain Fall 09](#)

LINKS

CONTACT

HOME



ASLA

search

THE SCIENCE OF HEALING

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On May 24, at the Urban Zen Center located at 705 Greenwich Street in the village, Esther Steinberg, MD, a tenured research scientist with the National Institutes of Health and author of *Healing Spaces: The Science of Place and Well-Being*, introduced a screening of *The Science of Healing*, a film about her health journey, which was followed by an expert panel discussion featuring Sternberg and Yang Yang, a QiGong teacher, Joy Hirsch, a neuroscientific researcher, Woodson Merrell, MD, a leading integrative medical doctor, and Landscape Architect, David Kamp, FASLA, of Dirtworks, PC.

Produced by Resolution Pictures, "The Science of Healing" follows Dr. Esther Sternberg's story of her illness and recovery, which inspired her research into the role that the brain and emotions play in a person's health.

As the film revealed, the differences between Sternberg and the many others who have veered off the conventional medical highway to discover their own unique paths to healing are two-fold. First, Sternberg's discovery of the healing role of lifestyle, nutrition, and stress management came accidentally: Invited shortly after the onset of her illness to stay in a friend's cottage on the Greek island of Crete, Sternberg found herself surrounded by the beauties of nature, soothed by the stress-free island lifestyle, and enjoying the healthful Mediterranean diet (rich in salads and olive oil). In this setting, her symptoms spontaneously improved, which the film beautifully depicts.



Left to Right: Dr. Yang Yang, Tai-chi expert with Panel Members: Dr. Joy Hirsch, Director of the Program for Imaging & Cognitive Sciences at Columbia University Medical Center; Dr. Woodson Merrell, Chairman Dept. of Integrative Medicine Beth Israel Medical Center; and David Kamp, FASLA, LF



Next, as a highly regarded physician, Sternberg had the access to follow up-by engaging in dialogue with her fellow scientists and researchers, about the phenomena she had experienced. As the film depicts, some scientific researchers have at long last become more willing to look into some of the underlying mechanisms for health experiences, like Sternberg's. Both her journey and her follow-up scientific exploration are portrayed in the film, which will undoubtedly speak to viewers who feel more comfortable accessing the health benefits of simple integrative health practices, only after their biochemical mechanisms have been validated through extensive study by scientists.

To track that proof, Sternberg leaves the beautiful Greek island where she recovered to trek through a series of labs where researchers with high tech devices strive to capture the data that can confirm subjective experiences like her's to outside onlookers. One scene in the film follows Sternberg into one lab, where to measure brain wave activity, Sternberg dons a funny looking headdress that scientists use to develop measures that prove conclusively that seeing a beautiful natural scene is an uplifting experience because it can now be measured through brain wave activity. As the film reveals, additional findings are that patients whose hospital window overlooks a natural setting recover more rapidly than those who look out on a blank wall.

Perhaps one day, understanding nature's health benefits might encourage initiatives like planting urban gardens so that children in lower income communities can more readily enjoy the same health benefits of nature that Sternberg so fortunately experienced in Greece-but for now, it's important to first devote the time and money necessary to develop technology that validates nature's gifts to those who are unable to regard them as self-evident.

As this film illustrates, the movement towards gardens being designed for hospital and healthcare facilities is getting a scientific validation as to the essential role they can play in recovering from serious illness. It is a major step that a Landscape Architect such as David Kamp, who has made tremendous efforts in this area, was included in a panel of scientists and healthcare activists.