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LIZZIE AGUIRRE YOGA WITH SOUL



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Badgley Mischka Collection strapless column gown, \$595; Mignonne Gavigan Madeline beaded statement earrings, \$225, available at Neiman Marcus, 3400 Palm Way, neimanmarcus.com; boots, model's own.



Soul Sister

At her own festivals and retreats, community-building yoga instructor Lizzie Aguirre breaks down barriers through music, movement and manifestation.

BY RACHEL RASCOE | PHOTOS BY RUDY AROCHA
HAIR AND MAKEUP BY LAURA MARTINEZ | STYLED BY NIKI JONES
SHOT ON LOCATION AT MIRAVAL AUSTIN

When local teacher Lizzie Aguirre first posted images of her unconventional yoga event, SoulFull, she was a bit worried people might get scared away. Photos captured students holding hands, locking eyes, feeling each other's breath and sharing hugs.

Despite her concerns, the next class sold out. Since SoulFull's launch in April, the Austin educator's niche empire has expanded into workshops, international retreats and a yoga-and-music festival, Luna Nativa.

"People want connection," Aguirre says with a magnetic, easygoing earnestness. "People want to have a reason to express themselves. It's super beautiful to see, so I'm sticking with it. I'm going to be honest about what the event is, and the people will come who want the therapy, the medicine."

All proceeds from SoulFull, now a nearly bimonthly event series, benefit local nonprofits. Breaking the workout-oriented

structure of a studio class, the 90-minute event includes atypical flows, vendors and accompanying live music.

The interactive class opens with 20 minutes of guided partner meditation. During that time, participants make the promise: "I see you. I hear you. I feel you." It's a defining mantra of Aguirre's work.

"It's very emotionally empowering, and it really breaks down a lot of walls for people," the 23-year-old teacher says. "Sometimes we'll scream at the top of our lungs if we're holding something in. Then it's just constant laughter for like five minutes afterwards."

Past SoulFull classes benefited the Austin Parks Foundation, Flatwater Foundation and the Stop Abuse for Everyone Alliance, or SAFE Alliance. Aguirre's vibrant roster of events has included collaborations with major brands like Bumble and Lululemon.

Body and Soul

Houston-raised Aguirre discovered yoga at a low point during her senior year of high school. Having stopped taking dance lessons a few years prior, the former ballerina faced a mix of anxiety and depression. When a friend's mom suggested yoga, the practice snapped into place as a healing, physically connected outlet for the struggling student.

"I was super messed up as a teenager," Aguirre says. "[Yoga] really felt like a great place for me to go and take care of myself. I think that's why I love it so much, because it's creating a movement and it's choreography."

After relocating to Austin for college, Aguirre underwent her foundational 500-hour training at Wanderlust Yoga. She has since continued her studies in Los Angeles to achieve more than 1,000 hours of yoga expertise.

The native Texan was just 18 when she began teaching. Starting out as a receptionist at Wanderlust, the teenager worked her way up through a variety of small studios to eventually instruct classes throughout the week at Black Swan Yoga, Practice Yoga Austin and Wanderlust.

"I always tell young teachers, 'If someone doesn't like your class, it's fine because there's going to be one person who does,'" she says. "Even if it's the tiniest thing that you did, something will stick with them and change their week. That's what matters, so keep going for it."

Aguirre was deeply influenced by established local instructor Gioconda Parker, who serves as her mentor. Parker's teachings, which Aguirre describes as quirky, communal and "not vanilla," inspired the philosophy of SoulFull.

"It's not commercial or rehearsed," Aguirre explains. "That's what is different about my classes, the vulnerability. It's a safe space to giggle and have fun. It's very, very much an embodying experience."

Never Missing a Beat

The creative instructor's planning for her weekly studio classes starts with the music. Her affirming selections might include soaring symphonies for moments of difficulty and the spacey rhythms of deep house music to settle down. Aguirre is specially trained in the physical effects of a song's beats per minutes on the body. When the soundtrack has lyrics, they have to be meaningful.

She recounts a client brought to tears because of the supportive verse "You know I got you" at a past SoulFull event.

"If a song doesn't move me, it's not in there," the yogi says. "I enjoy curating the music perfectly for the sequence. It peaks with highs and lows, and it creates space when I need to create space. It's a huge part of my studio classes."

Alongside ballet, Aguirre studied opera, classical piano and theater during her musical adolescence. Today, she sometimes winds down her classes with a live song.

Aguirre's renditions of breezy pop tunes by the Beatles may float overhead as students lie flat on their backs in savasana pose.

During high school, along with musical performances with Houston's Theatre Under the Stars, Aguirre wrote and recorded a few original songs. On YouTube, Aguirre's soulful cover of Rihanna's "Stay" boasts more than 11,000 views.

In the video, captured in her bedroom in 2013, she charmingly encourages viewers to vote for her in the high-school talent show.

Aguirre considers early musical exploration a defining step on her path toward the free, open expression that now defines her yoga practice.

"I was writing about breakups and things I was dealing with back then," Aguirre says. "It was very hard to put it out there, but I think that sharing music has helped me be better and more vulnerable as a teacher. Every time I teach, I sit down like, 'Guys, I'm going through all this right now. I want you to learn things that I've learned, and I'll learn from you.'"

Although a musical career is currently on the back burner for Aguirre, she keeps it on her bucket list. In the meantime, she helps manage her brother's emerging Houston-based rhythm-and-blues project, SpaceGodApollo.

Kindred Spirits

Aguirre is a firm believer in the power of manifestation. In fact, she's taught workshops about it.

At the beginning of 2018, the community builder wrote down her goal of starting a yoga-and-music festival sometime in the next 10 years (as well as her goal to land herself on the cover of a magazine). She later met her current partner, Noah De St. Croix Kessler, who works in the music industry and performs as Swayló. Through their combined expertise, Aguirre's long-term goal became an imminent reality. October marked the first-ever Luna Nativa, a 12-hour immersive event held at Brazos Hall in downtown Austin.

"I think music is just as healing as a yoga practice can be," Aguirre says. "To combine the two in a way that syncs up and is not overpowering or less than totally magnifies the experience."

Kessler booked the musical acts, including Ecuadorian artist Nicola Cruz, among other electronically influenced acts. Aguirre assembled a "yoga playground" of visiting teachers, educational wellness workshops and local vendors. The sold-out yoga smorgasbord hosted more than 650 participants, ending in a dance party.

"The feeling during was so amazing, like, I was crying after I taught," Aguirre says. "Just seeing how many people were there with smiling faces meeting each other, it's what I aim to create on a whole different level. Rather than just a workout, it's a cleansing and a healing place."

During the past year, Aguirre further expanded her SoulFull experience into her own custom yoga retreats. Alongside yoga, the small-group adventures include live music, art, local cuisine and exciting activities like surfing.

On visits to Tulum and Oaxaca, Mexico, Aguirre and her students crowded into a sweat lodge for a traditional temazcal ceremony. She references her family's Mexican and Apache heritage as inspiration for the group dives into local culture.

"By the time we were done, it was like [we were] best friends for the rest of our lives," Aguirre asserts. "That experience is very empowering and shows you how much resilience you really have. You step out like, 'Yeah, I can do anything.'"

LIZZIE AGUIRRE'S 45-MINUTE SOULFULL FLOW PLAYLIST

"This is a 45-minute playlist with a few of my top songs of 2018. From beginning to end, each song takes you on a journey to empowerment and bliss. Get on your mat, close your eyes, jam this on loud and see what inspires your movement from the inside out!" - Lizzie Aguirre

"Everything Was Beautiful and Nothing Hurt" by Hallucinogenius
"Delicate ballads and inspiring symphonies help me get connected to my physical and emotional body when first stepping onto my mat. This song helps me connect, ground and find my intention."

"Aqua Blue Honda" by TylerXCordy
"I'm from Houston, so hip-hop and rap music are in my blood. I love to incorporate soft rap in my classes to encourage creativity, individuality and the freedom for self-expression."

"See Myself" by Oscar Oscar
"This song gives me confidence. When I listen to the groovy melody, I feel most myself and free."

"Anemone" by Slenderbodies
"I love breathing in movement to the rhythm of this song. It's fluid, airy and allows for space to connect with your physical and emotional body during the peak of a flow."

"Rainy Days" by Sol Rising
"When a flow starts to pick up pace and we begin to move [as] one breath, one movement, Sol Rising has the soundtrack to empower. I'm so grateful I had the opportunity to teach with him live in Austin."

"Tonic Water (Snocker Cot Remix)" by Moglii
"This is my jam! I rock this one out and really get moving to this song."

"Polarity Waves" by Sublab
"Sublab's intention is to create music that takes you to another world, makes you think, feel and forget!"

"Interlude" by Anaesthesia
"Who doesn't love a solid two-minute trap beat?"

"Fruits" by Beshken
"I work best in challenging physical situations when I have a song that feels motivating and encouraging. Beshken combines his jazz background with dance music, and it is so unique."

"Kuwait" by Mazde
"During a flow, this song would come on when the peak of the physical and mental challenge is moving the room. This song's power can shake a room!"

"Horizon" by Garth Stevenson
"After a powerful flow, I like to leave room and space for introspection and reflection. This song helps me feel like it's OK to feel, that I'm OK exactly the way that I am. It feels like a loving embrace. The healing work of the practice comes to light here."

"Orange Ocean (Loscil Remix)" by Kodomo
"This song needs no caption: the best savasana song, a portal to a new state, a transformational journey within the self."

Page 44: Alo Yoga Slay long-sleeve top, available at Miraval Austin, 13500 FM 2769, miravalaustrin.com; leggings, model's own.

Page 46: Lele Sadoughi crystal lily earrings, \$198, available at Neiman Marcus, 3400 Palm Way, neimanmarcus.com.

Page 48: Alexis Rosemary sequin strapless romper, \$594; Christian Louboutin Suzi Folk leather booties, \$1,195; Sachin & Babi crystal hoop earrings, \$295, available at Neiman Marcus, 3400 Palm Way, neimanmarcus.com.

Page 50: Milly Lauren metallic silk chiffon tie-hem top, \$295; AG Adriano Goldschmied velvet ankle skinny pants, \$198, available at Neiman Marcus, 3400 Palm Way, neimanmarcus.com; Cos wide-collar wool coat, \$350, available at Cos, 11601 Century Oaks Terrace, cosstores.com; boots, model's own.

Page 51: Top and leggings, model's own.



ON LOCATION

MIRAVAL AUSTIN
Miraval Austin combines the celebrated Miraval experience that guests have known and loved for more than 20 years with groundbreaking new spa treatments and wellness programs that pay homage to Austin's culture and the stunning scenery around Lake Travis. Miraval Austin features 117 rooms and suites, a state-of-the-art Life in Balance Spa, Body Mindfulness Center, Cypress Creek Organic Farm and Ranch, Life in Balance Culinary Kitchen, full-service restaurant, smoothie bar, Hill Country Challenge Courses, two infinity pools and outdoor meeting-and-event facilities. miravalaustrin.com

Striking a Balance

It has only been a year since Aguirre paused her studies in graphic design at St. Edward's University to pursue a yoga career full time. She struggled with her family's disapproval of leaving college but says they now support her completely.

"I think when you put all your energy into one thing that you're passionate about, it goes," Aguirre says. "It flows. Of course, there's hard times or lows, but if your heart is in something, it comes. It works."

What was meant to be a semester off has since grown into a following of more than 40,000 yoga enthusiasts on Aguirre's Instagram account. Her striking photos and videos are accompanied by long-form, confessional captions. Aguirre calls it her diary and writes earnestly about love, body positivity and the origin stories behind her yoga events.

In all her output, the entrepreneur strives to avoid strict, often intimidating yogi stereotypes, like only eating vegan food or never consuming alcohol. She'll candidly share with students when she had a bit too much to drink the night before. One of her captions encourages followers to: "Eat your cupcake. Eat your ice cream. Eat your cupcake and your ice cream—together—for breakfast? Who cares!!!! Live!"

"With everything, I just try to encourage balance," Aguirre says. "No judgment for anything. It needs to feel like something that is all-welcoming and all-loving. Let's celebrate ourselves so that we can grow into the things we want to be."

Aguirre admits it took time to gain the confidence and skills to market herself as a yoga teacher. She initially avoided social media, considering it a distraction from her practice.

A California-based mentor explained it to Aguirre as just another outlet for connection and reaching new students.

Now the up-and-comer calls branding one of her favorite topics. A sense of playfulness, positivity and unhindered honesty permeate her events and writings.

"Creating my brand was such a hard thing at first because I didn't know who I was at all," she says. "Through my work, I started feeling more like, OK, I get myself. When I believed in myself and what I was doing, I was able to create a brand."

Amid the expanding world of Instagram influencers, Aguirre currently rejects all paid partnerships with brands. She says the materialism would conflict with her messaging to followers, which is based in authenticity.



Breathing It All In

Aguirre's days typically begin with meditation. She strives to consistently incorporate self-care, whether through a hot bath or hanging out with her dog.

If it's the day before one of her teaching events, Aguirre says she's "like a monk." In isolation, the wellness leader taps into her feelings and thinks deeply about her intended lesson. To begin each class, she likes to share something that's going on in her life.

"I'm young, so every time, I get nervous, like who is going to listen to me?" Aguirre says. "So, I really like to connect to something bigger and relatable. Then I can just show up and be a vessel for light and lessons."

The intention setting, as well as a recent trip to Bali, has the yogi geared up for a big year in 2019. Her immersive SoulFull event will expand onto Austin's iconic Seaholm Lawn across from Lady Bird Lake.

Aguirre is also taking SoulFull on the road. She's teaching the nonprofit-fundraising mini-fest in Houston, Miami, Los Angeles, London and other cities internationally.

"If you make something a reality out into the world, it will come," she says. "But I can't be everything at once—a businesswoman, a marketer, an event coordinator and a teacher. It's hard to juggle, so asking for help is so important."

She's also launching her own yoga-retreat company, online video platform and podcast. In all her efforts, she hopes to continue collaborating with other area teachers. These sizeable plans run side

by side with Aguirre's continued presence in local studio classes and workshops.

Last month via Instagram, Aguirre reflected on her dynamic journey:

"I started teaching yoga when I was 18 alongside my studies, and eventually, things fell into place. Today, I am grateful for every single step of the way from my earth birth to rebirth, the beautiful moments, the challenges and each heartbreak that fueled every performance or creation, music, movement and art. Without it, I wouldn't have ended up where I am now. I give my whole life to these things because they have saved me and can save all of us."

