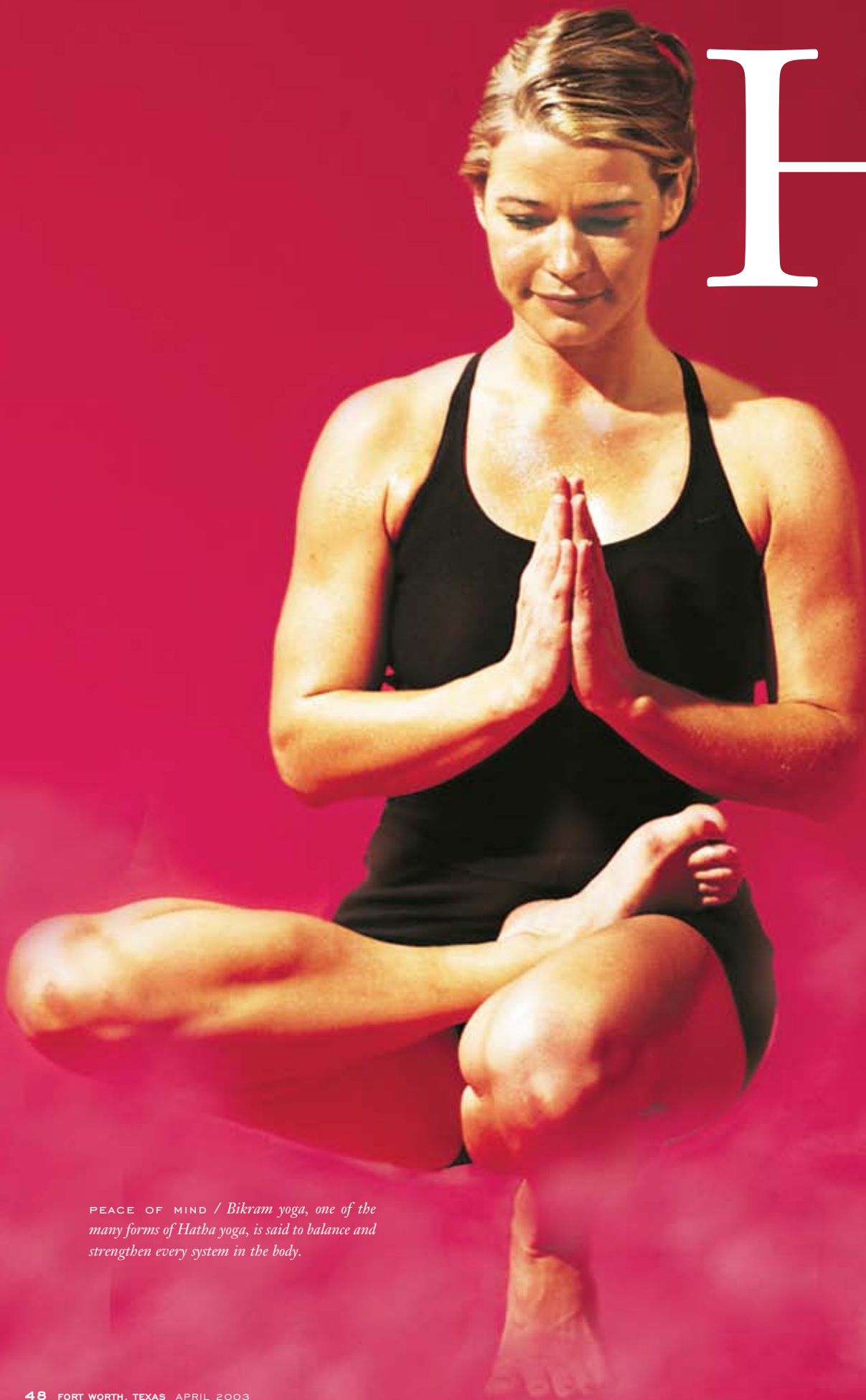


He



PEACE OF MIND / *Bikram yoga, one of the many forms of Hatha yoga, is said to balance and strengthen every system in the body.*

ated bliss

{ *How Fort Worth is finding
peace in a puddle of sweat* }

While the pursuit of a buff body might be a primary motivation for some, many of today's yoga practitioners seem to be finding a whole lot more at Bikram Yoga Fort Worth. Referred to as "hot yoga" by those in the know, **BIKRAM YOGA** is achieving astounding results. Cholesterol counts are dropping, frozen joints are loosening and seemingly everyone has a story to tell—and they will do so with fervor.

Yoga itself is not news, having been around for more than 5,000 years. Its healing and rejuvenating effects are well understood—even among our analytical Western medical minds, our experts and our double-blind studies. What *is* news is how a heat wave started by Bikram Choudhury in 1970 in Los Angeles has this year ignited an unprecedented interest and participation right here in Fort Worth.

Since directors Greg Sanders and Kristyn Vollmer opened the doors of Bikram Yoga Fort Worth, College of India on June 26, enrollment has grown to nearly 800 students—strictly

by word of mouth. People of all shapes, sizes, ages, social circles, professions and fitness levels from all parts of Fort Worth and surrounding areas are unrolling their mats in record numbers for this hot, grueling workout.

Bikram Yoga is a searing 90-minute workout of 26 traditional Hatha Yoga postures, each building toward and preparing the body for the next, done in a room where the temperature is set in excess of 100 degrees. In addition to all the traditional benefits of yoga, Bikram Yoga is said to balance and strengthen every system in the body, while providing total body

STORY BY MELINDA KAITCER

detoxification, boosted immune systems, improved range of motion and increased metabolism.

In what Bikram himself terms “going through hell to get to heaven,” the after-effects of these workouts are long lasting and exponential. Immediate effects are reported to be exhilaration, deep calm, an increase in range of motion, stronger, straighter posture, deeper breathing and sharpened mental clarity. Long-term benefits are reported to be reduced susceptibility to injury and illness, relief from chronic pain and many nagging medical conditions and their symptoms, an overall sense of well-being and increased health and vitality. “Suffer for 90 minutes every day and live pain-free for 90 years,” is another favorite Bikram mantra.

Articles in *Time Magazine*, *New York Times*, *Philadelphia Enquirer*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *USA Today*, *Miami Herald* and many others have featured Bikram Yoga, its devotees and, mostly, its results. “I think the reason people like it so much is because it works,” Sanders said. “It restores mental and physical health.”

Vollmer said another reason for Bikram Yoga’s popularity is its adaptability. “This yoga is for almost everyone,” she said. “No matter where you are physically, you can start right there and progress at your own rate. The more frequently you practice, the quicker you’ll achieve the maximum benefits.”

Sara Boyd can attest to achieving the maximum benefits from this workout. “This yoga has changed my life,” said Boyd, 53. “It has given me my life back.”

Boyd had been an avid runner, triathlete and tennis player until a knee injury and subse-

quent surgery left her with scar tissue that prevented her from bending or straightening her leg or walking without pain. After two months of Bikram Yoga, she is walking pain free. But perhaps even more dramatic than that, Boyd’s physician had prescribed Lipitor, a cholesterol-lowering medication to combat her 261-and-rising cholesterol and 184 LDL count. Quietly, Boyd elected to try Bikram Yoga instead. Just two months later, follow-up lab reports revealed that her cholesterol had dropped to 208, with an LDL of 135. “‘Keep taking the Lipitor. You’re doing great,’ the doctor told me,” Boyd said, smiling. “I told him I didn’t ever take the medication—just hot yoga. He said, ‘Well, just keep doing *whatever* you’re doing because it is working!’”

Of course it’s working, Bikram Choudhury would probably say. That’s what it was so carefully designed to do. In fact, Bikram used many of these postures to heal his own severe knee injury when a weightlifting accident left him unable to walk. With the help of his guru, Bishnu Ghosh, the story goes, Bikram created the 26 postures that restored his health. After his full recovery, Bikram realized what value this series could have for just about anyone who

“I think the reason people like it so much is because it works. It restores mental and physical health.”

—Greg Sanders, Bikram Yoga
Fort Worth, College of India

PURPOSE OF POSES / *A series of standing poses focus on bending, to increase flexibility of the spine, and balancing, which builds focus and concentration.*



tried it — especially those in the Western world with its plethora of stress-related diseases. Working with Western physicians and researchers, Bikram perfected this comprehensive system and made it suitable for all ages and fitness levels.

Yes, Bikram Yoga is difficult. Some of its postures seem to have no regard for gravity. And yes, it *is* hot in there. But difficulty and heat notwithstanding, the rejuvenating effects of this workout are well worth the discomfort, enthusiasts say. “At first it seems that this yoga is 100 percent physical,” Vollmer said, “but as you learn to control your mind and your breathing you begin to realize the difficulty is 95 percent mental. You discover that whatever you focus on becomes your reality.” What continued Bikram Yoga practice teaches, Vollmer said, is how to be in control of both mind and body, even in uncomfortable or stressful situations. “Everything in this yoga class parallels the outside world and the stressful situations we encounter in our everyday lives,” she said. “It is because of the heat and the difficulty of this practice that you are able to take the peace you gain at the end into the other 22 hours of your day.”

The series begins with a breathing exercise designed to wake up the body’s energy centers and stimulate the sympathetic nervous system. This increases the lung capacity and warms up and prepares the body for the workout. Next is a series of standing poses that focus on bending to increase flexibility of the spine and balancing which build focus and concentration—serving the same function as meditation, Bikram said.

Students with special problems or limitations are urged to find their edge and stay there, skipping move-

YOU'RE NOT WHAT YOU THINK

Two years ago, Pam Smith was a 40-year-old mother of seven who had almost no energy because of the excess weight she gained from her pregnancies.

On a whim, she joined a Bikram yoga class and began to feel better almost immediately. In six months she had shed 40 pounds. “But the most amazing thing,” she said, “is how my body structure changed. My neck is longer and I’m standing one-and-a-half inches taller. My skin improved and even my eyes are clearer and greener.”

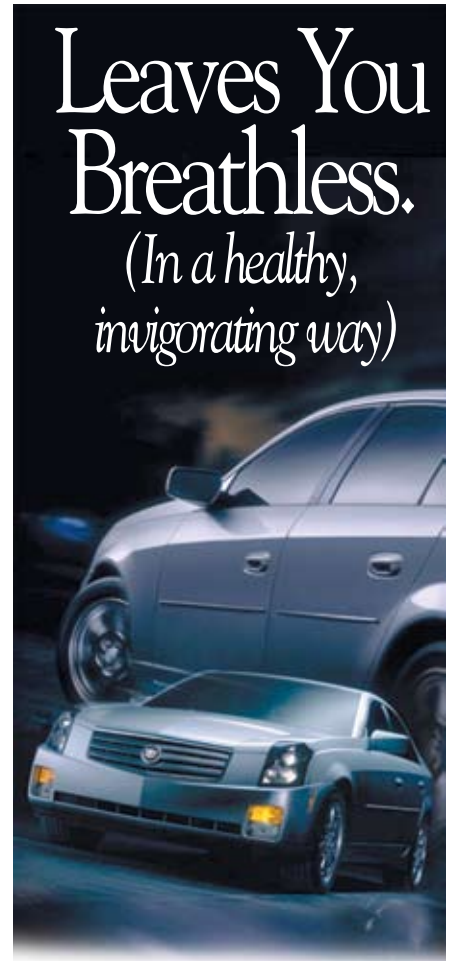
Smith said that through yoga she became more aware of what the body needs. “I had not been eating enough because I was trying to lose weight and in the process had shut my metabolism completely down. I had to learn to eat to fuel my body for the yoga, and I had to learn to drink enough water to stay hydrated.”

After completing a rigorous five-week instructor-training program in Los Angeles, Smith has served as guest instructor at nearly every Bikram school in the Metroplex, including frequent appearances at Bikram Yoga Fort Worth.

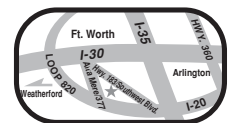
“What I want people to understand about this yoga,” Smith said, “is that you are not just what and who your mind says you are. You are so much more.”

ments that would endanger them. “You can mess with the gods,” Greg Sanders often says, repeating a favorite Bikram saying, “but never mess with your knees. The gods will forgive you, but your knees will not.” Following the standing series is a special two-minute resting posture, or savasana, which Bikram said allows for complete body relaxation and blood flow. Next comes the floor series in which poses are interspersed with shorter savasanas and straight-legged sit-ups. These floor poses include a spine-strengthening series targeting upper, middle and lower spine, followed by several more deep stretches designed to rejuvenate and bring energy back into the body. A final spinal twist in both directions followed by the last breathing exercise is said to literally wring and blow the toxins out of the body. After a final, lengthy-as-need-be savasana, the workout is complete.

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While other Hatha Yoga traditions also employ some of these same poses, Bikram said the uniqueness of his system is the sequence of the poses and how each builds upon the last and prepares for the next. And then there's the heat. Nothing can prepare new practitioners for the blast of heat that strikes their faces when they enter the workout room for the first time. The heat allows the body to safely stretch and bend deeper and easier without injury, and the profuse sweating detoxifies the body, boosts the immune system, speeds up the metabolism, burns fat more efficiently, stimulates the cardiovascular system and promotes deep relaxation. A relaxation so pure and so complete that, as Vollmer often says at the end of class, "nothing can steal your peace."

In the locker rooms, the lobby area and outside in the parking lot of Bikram Yoga Fort Worth, this peace is evident as the camaraderie flows along with the sweat and rapidly draining bottles of water. Men compare sports injuries; wives and mothers compare stories of how their families now insist they make time for yoga. "My husband says I am a much better person when I get home from yoga," one woman said. "My kids watch the clock and tell me when it's time for me to go to class," another said. Easy, natural laughter follows. It is the laughter of people



TURN UP THE HEAT / Working out in 100-degree temperatures allows the body to stretch and move more deeply into the postures, reducing physical resistance.

TYPES OF YOGA

Bikram Yoga is one of the many styles of Hatha Yoga, a discipline that incorporates asanas, pranayama (regulated breathing) and meditation (dharana and dhyana) into a complete system to achieve improved well-being, health and fitness. Some of the most common variations of Hatha yoga, as practiced in the Western world:

Ananda: Gentle postures designed to move the energy up to the brain and prepare the body for meditation. Classes also focus on proper body alignment and controlled breathing.

Ashtanga (or Astanga): A quite rigorous and athletically challenging series of sequential poses that focus on strength, flexibility and building heat.

Bikram: Focuses on 26 poses repeated in the same order. Bikram yoga studios are heated to around 100 degrees, so be prepared to sweat.

Integral: Combines postures, breathing exercises, selfless service, meditation, chanting, prayer and self-inquiry.

ISHTA: ISHTA (Integral Science of Hatha and Tantric Arts) focuses on opening energy channels throughout the body with postures, visualizations and meditation.

Iyengar: Unlike the practices listed above, Iyengar practitioners hold each pose for a longer amount of time. This type of yoga is renowned for its attention to body alignment. Props such as straps, blankets and wooden blocks are commonly used.

Jivamukti-style: This type of yoga has roots in Ashtanga. Chanting and breathing exercises are also incorporated in Jivamukti classes.

Kali Ray Tri: A series of flowing, dance-like movements. The practice also incorporates pranayama (breathing exercises) and meditation.

Kripalu: This gentle, introspective practice urges practitioners to hold poses to explore and release emotional and spiritual blockages. Goal-oriented striving is discouraged and precise alignment is not as important as in some other traditions.

Kundalini: Concentrates on awakening the energy at the base of the spine and drawing it upward. In addition to postures, a typical class will also include chanting, meditation and breathing exercises.

Power: Ashtanga modified for Americans.

Restorative: This practice aims at restoring energy (by focusing on breathing) to those who may be stressed, elderly or ill. Restorative yoga uses walls and props to assist placing the body in different positions.

Sivananda: Combines postures, breathing, dietary restrictions, chanting, scriptural study and meditation.

Svaroopa: New students find this a very approachable style, often beginning in chair poses that are comfortable. Promotes healing and transformation.

Tantra: Involves expanding oneself to the fullest in order to feel liberated from limits and boundaries.

Urban: An eclectic mix of flowing postures synchronized with music designed to help the urban dweller center himself and receive the benefits of yoga.

Viniyoga: A gentle, healing practice that is tailored to each person's body type and needs as they grow and change.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING ...

"I had been walking 24 miles a week and doing weight training with a personal trainer three times a week for three months. I have never worked so hard to look—and feel—so bad. I gained 7 pounds, created short, tight muscles and my body, especially my lower back, was aching and felt unstable and out of alignment. I started Bikram Yoga and in one-and-a-half months I dropped the 7 pounds and eliminated all my lower back problems. My body no longer hurts and I feel calm, focused and in tune with my body." — Lisa, 37

"After two months of going almost every day, I definitely noticed the physical changes. I play a lot of golf, and I wanted to increase my strength and flexibility and it has done that, along with just overall conditioning and improved balance. I think this yoga has

also built greater focus when things are going crazy around me." — Russ, 51

"It is the most energizing thing I have ever done—and the most powerful. Bikram Yoga has impacted every part of my life. There is so much discipline and sense of accomplishment involved; it makes you realize how capable you are of handling all kinds of stress." — Becky, 55

"I am a physical therapist, and every time I go to Bikram Yoga I find something applicable to my patients. I read somewhere that yoga is the original physical therapy, and I am finding that just about every patient I come into contact with can benefit from the yoga principles I am learning." — Dana, 48

YOGA, ANYONE?

Some organizations around the Fort Worth area that offer yoga classes:

Arlington Yoga
3533 Marathon St.
Arlington 817.274.2021

Body Mind Spirit Center
5521 Bellaire Dr. S., #114
Fort Worth 817.738.7284

**Bikram Yoga Fort Worth,
College of India**
921 Foch
Fort Worth 817.335.9642

Inursha Fitness
525 Bailey Ave.
Fort Worth 817.332.7554

Natural Dynamics
481. W. Harwood Rd.
Bedford 817.268. 6276

Phoenix Rising Internal Arts
213 W. Wall St.
Grapevine 817.481.9400

Soul Fitness
901 Montgomery St.
Fort Worth 817.738.7685

Unity Church of Fort Worth
5051 Trail Lake Dr.
Fort Worth 817.423.2965

Wellness Center
2481 Forest Park Blvd.
Fort Worth 817.926.9642

Yoga & More
4819 Fall Creek Highway
Granbury 817.326.3065

Yoga Denton
318 D East Oak Street
Denton 940.387.5638