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Yoga turns up the heat

By EDWARD D. MURPHY, Staff Writer
Portland Press Herald / Maine Sunday Telegram

Friday, October 13, 2006

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Staff photo by Jill Brady

Alice Riccardi positions Carol Gray Kennedy during an Hour of Power class at Portland Power Yoga on Thursday.

Yoga is usually considered a "cool" form of exercise that promotes muscle tone, flexibility and peace of mind.

Charles Terhune and Alice Riccardi decided it needed a little more heat.

The couple runs Portland Power Yoga, a studio on Marginal Way where they teach power vinyasa yoga, a more up-tempo yoga that combines the traditional style with a more rapid changing of the poses that are used. And they turn up the heat.

Way up.

They generally set the thermostat between 90 and 95 degrees and increase the humidity in the belief that muscles respond better to heat than to cold -- a concept Mainers are likely to embrace, especially in January and February.

"There is no way you can reshape muscle tissue without heat," Riccardi said, adding that it's particularly important for power yoga, where there's so much emphasis on flexibility and ease of movement.

Neither Terhune nor Riccardi had a background in yoga when Riccardi found the power yoga approach seven years ago.

"I wanted my body back" after she gave birth to a daughter, Riccardi said. She tried Pilates and running, but neither was particularly satisfying.

Then she tried power yoga at Baptiste Power Vinyasa Yoga Institute in Cambridge, Mass. The approach, she said, appealed to her in that it offered a little more spirited workout than traditional yoga, but also helped her outlook and lifted her spirit.

"It's traditional yoga poses, connected more to a flow," Riccardi, 48, said. "You move from one pose to another, but more rapidly than in traditional yoga."

Riccardi prevailed on Terhune, who had also been looking for an exercise routine, to try it once.

"I took one class and I was hooked," he said.

The pair soon moved out of the ranks of students and clients, training to become assistants and then teachers. Terhune also moved into management at the Cambridge studio.

Then, while in Maine to attend the funeral of a family friend, Terhune suggested that the couple move to Maine and strike out on their own. Although both grew up in Massachusetts, Terhune had a family connection to Maine: His grandfather was Howard Reiche, after whom the Reiche School in Portland's West End is named.



Staff photo by Jill Brady

Stephanie Dickens of Portland feels the heat in class. Portland Power Yoga keeps its studio at 90 to 95 degrees.

PORTLAND POWER YOGA

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Reiche, after whom the Reiche School in Portland's West End is named.

They began looking for a studio space, a process that took nine months. They found a spot on Marginal Way. Converting the space from offices took three months, and Portland Power Yoga

opened in early February.

Riccardi said one of the major differences between power yoga and the traditional kind is that there's not as much emphasis on technique in power yoga.

"We don't look for perfection," she said. "Instead of (clients) feeling like they always have to perfect something, here's an opportunity to get a sense of what's going on and make sure you're doing it in a way that you won't hurt yourself -- and then let it go."

As clients get more classes under their belts, she said, they are able to refine their technique, but the goal is to get them into the program quickly, without slowing things down to explain the poses in great depth, at least initially.

Riccardi likens it to some methods of teaching an instrument to students in which playing a tune is stressed over the approach of learning notes and practicing scales.

She said power yoga classes move through 35 to 40 poses in a 90-minute class, double the number of positions that a participant in a traditional yoga class might adopt.

Jennifer Cooper, co-director of The Yoga Center on Preble Street in Portland, said power yoga is a sign of yoga's growing popularity by allowing different approaches to emerge.

"It's popular now because a lot of people got exposed to yoga at a gym and think of yoga as a fitness program," Cooper said. "It's kind of the rage for younger clientele."

Cooper said adherents of power yoga see it as a way to burn off the stress of the day, while traditional yoga is a way to relieve the stress in a calmer way -- "as a way to, yes, get exercise and strength and also relax," she said.

The goal of yoga through either approach, she said, is to meditate. If that's achieved through the upbeat approach of power yoga or the calmer techniques of traditional yoga, the goal is the same while the methods vary.

"All yoga is good," Cooper said. "There are lots of different tastes, but it's all for the same purpose."

As far as the business purposes are concerned, Riccardi and Terhune said Portland Power Yoga is exceeding their business plan's projections and is moving toward a break-even point.

They were surprised to find that August -- a month when Mainers might be looking for a cool spot rather than a very warm workout -- was their busiest month so far. That may show the value of taking a different approach, even for something as old as yoga, which is believed to have been around for at least 5,000 years.

As Terhune puts it, Portland Power Yoga is "the yoga studio for people who don't do yoga."

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