

In the Oven

Bikram Yoga – it's sweaty, it's trendy, it's controversial – and best of all, it's come to Truckee

I was hearing the buzz all around me. An intriguing glint sparkled mysteriously in the eyes of all who spoke of it. They raved about its purifying effects and grinned knowingly when I asked how they handled the heat. After rolling it around in the recesses of my mind for two years, I knew it was time to go for it.

Bikram yoga consists of 26 poses, or asanas, that come straight from the roots of ancient discipline of Hatha yoga.

Outside of that similarity, it differs from traditional yoga in some major ways. The most important and intimidating difference is that the room is heated to approximately 105 degrees with about 50 percent relative humidity. You bring a towel to place on top of your yoga mat to absorb the sweat that drips from every available pore. At the end of the 90-minute class you can wring your towel and watch your perspiration flood out.

To be honest, I was afraid to try it for the first time in Truckee, fearing that friends and acquaintances in the class would witness me at my most awkward moments and possibly mistake me for a freshly misted tomato. So while in Berkeley, I took a class at a trendy studio called The Funky Door. Though lacking an especially funky-looking door, the interior was filled with eclectic modern artifacts like hand-shaped chairs in shiny primary colors. The walls of the giant practice room were lined with yoga caricatures and cartoons of the Bikram asanas. The instructor wore a headset microphone and students were packed into the vast room like sardines, and not smelling much better.

I remind myself why I love Truckee and carry on. The heat seeps into me quickly, and in a forward bend, I note this is the first time I've seen my shins sweat. I feel the burn as I try to keep my hands straight above my head for three minutes, and get acutely nauseous when I attempt camels pose (this is normal and improves with time, I am later told). When class ended, I felt invigorated. I was finally in the know and I was ready for Truckee.

Having enjoyed swift success with their Tahoe City studio, opened in March 2002, sisters Shaelah Morris and Dawn Jennings opened a second studio in

Truckee a year later. The studio, which started offering classes in March 2003, is located in Truckee's Pioneer Commerce center. Unlike the Funky Door, their studio has a quieter, simpler, and more meditative feel—no microphones, gaudy art, or hype.

"When I arrived for my first class there, I was welcomed warmly by the instructor and soothed by the faint scent of incense and dry heat. In attitude and atmosphere, the Truckee studio was the diametric opposite of the stinky Berkeley sweatbox."



In the Open

By Susan Schnier

Shaelah, 26, is a massage therapist and a professional big mountain skier who moved to Tahoe three years ago from Aspen. Her sister Dawn is an ex-dot-comer who moved from Portland to handle the business side of the operation. With its popularity soaring all over the world, Shaelah saw a need for Bikram in North Tahoe and she

jumped on it.

Why does it have to be so hot? According to Shaelah, the heat warms the body so it can stretch effectively and safely. "It's like taking a piece of metal and heating it, it becomes easier to bend and mold," she explains. Because of these malleable circumstances, the students' progression is amazingly fast and they can often see and feel results within days or weeks of beginning to practice. "The intensity of the progression is what sets it apart from other types of yoga," says Shaelah. After teaching in Tahoe for a year and a half, she has seen some of her students take on a whole new presence, standing taller, with more confidence and losing extra weight. She also feels that the heat provides the opportunity to resculpt the body and creates a sense of perseverance and determination that is effective for healing. "The heat also brings out our weaknesses and makes us confront and work through them," Shaelah says.

The official name of the discipline is Bikram's Beginning Hatha Yoga, and "beginning" is key, explains Shaelah, since it's for everyone, no matter how sick, old, or weak. Bikram yoga also tends to attract more men to its classes than other forms of yoga.

"Bikram Yoga has been great for my physical health. Skiing makes really tight bodies. Bikram helps me really get in there and get to those traumatized areas



quickly to heal and become more flexible and fluid," said professional freeskier Kent Kreidler. "The biggest change for me has been dramatic increase in the strength and flexibility of my lower back."

Professional ski racer and 1983 World Cup champion, Tamara McKinney, and Julia Mancuso, the youngest member of the U.S. Ski Team are Bikram regulars. "Shaelah has done a great job in bringing calmness to the studio. I leave Bikram feeling like everything is going to be okay. It's a great combination of workout and stretch with all kinds of physical and mental benefits," says Tamara. According

to Shaelah, in addition to dedicated athletes, Bikram also appeals to 65-year-olds that are 50 pounds overweight and trying to change their lives. "Where else can those people get the same benefit, in the same room, doing the same practice?" Shaelah asks.

Because of its intensity, some critics and fans describe Bikram as a hybrid between yoga and aerobics. The class is necessarily fast-paced because the instructor must fit all 26 poses into 90 minutes. But critics complain that Bikram has taken the spiritual, meditative qualities that define yoga and turned the discipline into fast-food serving of stretching and cardio. But Shaelah doesn't completely agree. "If you're not spiritual, you can just come for the workout. It can be anything you make it. But we have tried to keep our studios simple, peaceful and zen-like, we're not going for the commercial edge of aerobicized yoga." It does, however, address some uniquely American problems, like concentration, focus, obesity, and scoliosis, which may explain its popularity here. "Some instructors have missed the point, but we try to hire people that are compassionate and thoughtful," says Shaelah, "I just laugh at the controversy because yoga is all about personal feelings and your relationship with yourself. A lot of the critics are so closed-minded, they have never even tried Bikram."

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Spring and Flowering Bulbs

In parts of the world where summers are hot and dry, or winters temporarily make growth impossible, Mother Nature and evolution have produced a plant form that thrives. The term "bulb" has a distinct structural definition separate from corms, tubers, rhizomes and tuberous roots but these all share characteristics of buds and a fleshy storage organ underground. They are all loosely called "bulbs". Bulbs behave in

By Eric Larusson
Special to Moonshine Ink

some ways like seeds. Each is a storehouse of nutrients and moisture that can carry the plant through the harshest conditions in a 'sleeping' state until environmental conditions favor growth. Our native bulbs include species of Lily, *Brodea*, *Allium*, *Camassia*, *Calochortus* and *Fritillaria* among others.

Bulbs will look great just about anywhere you plant them, around a tree or mailbox, in a rock garden or even in an informal lawn. Look at the pictures in all the magazines this time of year or on the sales bins for planting ideas while you are making your bulb selections.

Generally speaking, most bulbs will thrive in loose, organic soil. Drainage is the essential. Kellogg's Amend is perfect compost for improving native soil and plenty should be mixed in. Add a fertilizer high in Phosphorous (the second number on a fertilizer label). Phosphorous builds strong roots and promotes large flowers. Bone meal and Soft Rock Phosphate are natural fertilizers for bulbs. A few bulbs are attractive to rodents. Tulips for example, should be sprayed with a repellent like Ropel, and planted surrounded by sharp gravel or in a cage of wire.

Plant bulbs en masse. Bulbs look arresting when planted in large plots. Dig one wide, 8-inch deep hole, add compost and fertilizer, and several bulbs rather than plant each bulb individually. As a

general rule, space bulbs twice as far apart as they are wide. Consider blooming time (March - July), height (1 inch to 4 feet), bloom size (1 to 10 inches) and color (every color of the rainbow to match with your other flowering shrubs and perennials). It's great to plant smaller bulbs in a shallow layer above deeper larger bulbs for a greater effect in the same hole.

Bulbs in a lawn give your garden an early playful appearance of a wild meadow. They bloom and fade long before you'll ever need to mow. *Crocus*, *Scilla* and *Chionodoxa* are all excellent candidates for lawn bulbs. Plant in wide drifts of like colors.

Woodland plantings use bulbs that 'naturalize' (adapt and spread) in open shade. Bulbs add a cheerful display before many woodland perennials will be in bloom. Rock-garden and "Woodland" type *Narcissus*, Ice Follies Daffodil, *Anemone*, *Chionodoxa*, *Crocus* and *Scilla* planted along with Ostrich and lady fern, coral bells, bleeding heart, Forget-me-nots, Sweet woodruff and *Hosta* make a beautiful woodland planting.

Planting in pots and barrels outdoors can be a little tricky. Make sure you provide for ample drainage. In a large wine barrel, plant bulbs as you would in the garden and keep the barrel out of the sun for the winter to avoid thawing/freezing cycles that will kill the bulbs; the larger the container the better your chance for success. In smaller wooden pots it seems to work well to bury the entire container under a foot or more of pine needles in a shady spot. Clay pots usually disintegrate in our winters.

Indoor Bulb Forcing

Many of the hardy outdoor bulb varieties can be 'forced,' with chilling, to bloom indoors. The bigger the bulb the better: more flowers per stem and more stems per bulb. You'll get many more blooms for your money.

Daffodils, Dutch Iris, Hyacinth,

Tulips: Plant 6 or more bulbs per 6-inch pot using well draining soil. Plant the tops of the bulbs a half-inch below the soil line. Store bulbs in a cold area (garage, basement) at a constant temperature of 38 to 48 degrees Fahrenheit for 12-15 weeks. Keep moist. When leaves are about 2-inches out of the soil, the pot is ready to be brought into a sunny place in the house. Keep moist until the flowers are blooming.

Crocus, *Muscari*, *Scilla*, *Iris reticulata*: Plant bulbs so they are nearly touching, using well draining soil. Plant top of bulbs just below the soil line. Store bulbs in a cool, dark area (back room, attached garage, cold closet) at a temperature between 40 to 48 degrees Fahrenheit for 6 weeks. Keep moist. When buds are about 2-inches out of the soil the pot is ready to be brought into a cool, sunny place in the house. Keep moist until the flowers are blooming.

In a Vase or on Rocks: Place bulbs in mouth of vase or just into gravel. Add water to a level just below and not touching the bulb. Set the vase in a cool dark place (less than 55 degrees Fahrenheit) for 6 to 8 weeks. Check regularly and maintain the water level. When sprouts are as long as the bulb move the vase to a warmer bright spot (less than 65 degrees Fahrenheit), avoiding direct sunlight. Hyacinths may be grown in the same manner but may require more time in the cold, dark place.

Autumn Crocus and *Colchicum* are hardy bulbs that bloom in the fall. They have leaves in the spring, store up nutrients and make buds then go dormant for the summer. In the fall they send up only flowers and will bloom whether planted or sitting on the counter. If planted indoors it is nice to grow a little grass in the pot to compliment the beautiful pink flowers.

There are many bulbs that bloom well inside the house without forcing. *Amaryllis* and paperwhite bulbs will bloom profusely without any chilling.

Planting times vary with location. In Truckee, the general rule is that the higher you are the sooner you plant: early and middle September on the summit,



Narcissus

October in Glenshire. Bulbs may be planted as late as January if you can reach the soil. Bearded iris, and autumn blooming crocus may be planted as early as possible.

A winter cover of loose mulch, is helpful to bulbs in areas where the winter cover of snow is not reliable or constant through the winter. This is not to prevent frost or freezing, but to reduce alternate freezing and thawing that can ruin many plants.

Remember that after the flowers fade, the bulb is developing buds and storing up nutrients for next year's flowers. It is important to feed, water and encourage the bulbs to retain their green leaves for as long as possible. Remember this when cutting flowers to bring indoors. Taking a few flowers from a bunch of Daffodils is of little consequence since there are many leaves but tulips with the leaves and flowers on the same stem may not return if the leaves are cut down.

Cut dead flowers from as high on the stem as possible to retain the green stem and keep the plants from making seed.

Fertilization each fall by scratching bone meal into the soil greatly increases bulb performance.

Eric Larusson a co-owner of the Villager Nursery holds Bachelor degrees in Molecular Biology and Agriculture with major studies in Botany and Horticulture and has been experimenting with gardening in cold climates for more than 30 years.

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But Bikram Choudhury, an eccentric character, has sparked much of the controversy himself. A former weightlifter and national yoga champion from Calcutta, India, Bikram has been studying yoga since the age of four and teaching his method in Beverly Hills for 28 years. The 53-year-old teacher collects Rolexes and Rolls Royces and has recently obtained a copyright for his Asana sequence. As a result of this copyright,

only certified BikramYoga™ teachers can represent themselves as Bikram instructors, gain certification credentials, and teach Bikram yoga. If an instructor or studio does not abide by these rules, Bikram is entitled to receive statutory damages in the amount of \$150,000 per infringement, up to \$450,000.

So is this yoga just a bastardization of tradition, a new-age Americanization of the authentic history?

Tamara McKinney says, "It's just like with religion, everyone thinks his form is the most authentic, but many sports branch off to find a new path. This might not be a great one for everybody. If you want to go up on the mountain alone, that's fine too."

The bottom line is you'll have to try it to find out if it works for you. So if you can spare the time from your day, it's worth a trip to Shaelah and Dawn's stu-

dio to see what all the hype is about. All of the instructors at the studios have trained with Bikram and are certified with over 500 hours of class time. Shaelah believes, "It's the perfect complement to a mountain lifestyle, whether you're trying to recover from an injury, counter the jarring effects of skiing and mountain biking, or simply feel more awake throughout your day."