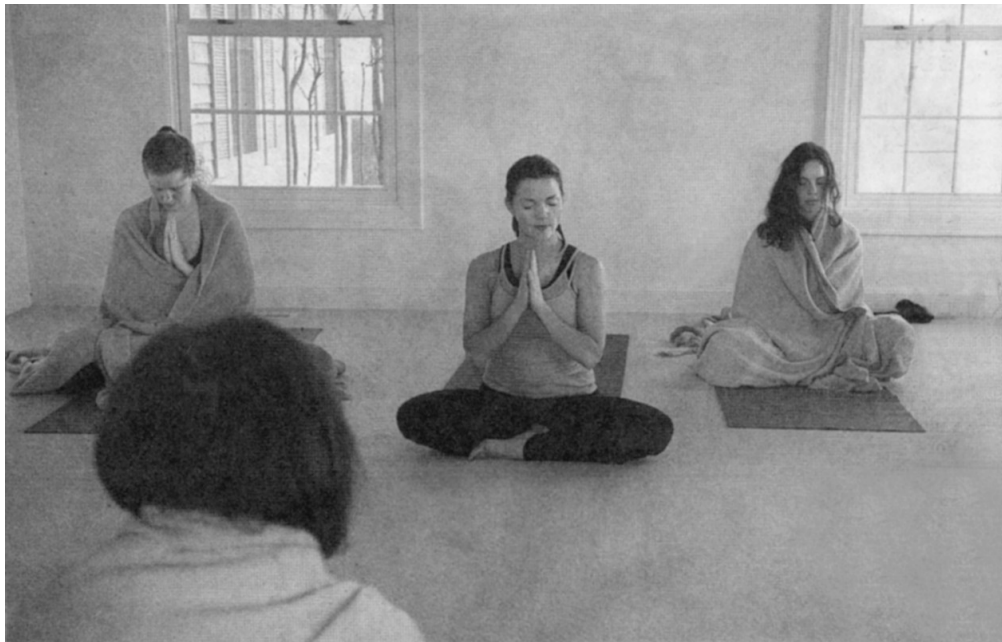


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Long Island

Getting Away From It All at Someone Else's House



Maxine Hicks for The New York Times

Mary McGuire-Wien, center, at home in her yoga retreat with Kelly Douglas, left, and Eryn Michaud.

By MARCELLE S. FISCHLER

MARY MCGUIRE-WIEN couldn't wait until her home in Remsenberg became an empty nest. Ms. McGuire-Wien, a mother of two had been teaching yoga and Pilates for about 10 years. Her husband would take ski trips with friends and come back feeling restored. She wanted a retreat of her own.

She wanted to go away alone, she said, to hang out with other women seeking a little refuge, so "you are alone but you are not alone," Ms. McGuire-Wien recalled.

"It was very hard to find", she said. She ended up at the Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health, a wellness, holistic and spiritual retreat in Lenox, Mass. Her goal was to fast for a week on a raw-juice diet, lose weight and "come back all gorgeous," she said.

Shedding a few pounds ended up being the "least of all the gifts I received from it," she said. "It was the act of just resting and the stripping away of all the content that was extra in your life." She said she felt like a new person.

While Ms. McGuire-Wien treasured the notion of returning to Kripalu and finding other places where she could escape the demands of daily living, scheduling was difficult. She vowed to create a women's retreat to call her own once her children are grown.

"Life is like a battle out there sometimes," Ms. McGuire-Wien said. "You want to go in and just gather your forces and have the support of women around you to powwow with, honestly, openly and safely."

Two years ago, with her daughter, Harrie, working as a model in Manhattan and her son, Charles, teaching English in Washington, Ms. McGuire-Wien turned her empty nest into the American Yogini, possibly the only home-based women's yoga retreat center in the metropolitan area. During retreats, her husband, Barry Wien who is a funeral director, stays in their Manhattan apartment.

Last summer women from 21 countries came to stay in the sprawling house on three acres with a pool, a tennis court and a kayak-stocked dock on Moriches Bay, to starve and stretch for awhile.

Breakfast is sparse: a teaspoon of grainlike millet or quinoa and a cup of potassium broth, just enough, if desired, to make a five-day raw-juice fast tolerable.

"You are just hanging out with the girls, resting and restoring yourself so that we can take care of our lovers, husbands, children, dogs, people that tend to tug on the lives of a woman," Ms. McGuire-Wien said.

Raw -juice fasts are held at least twice monthly; vegetarian retreats are also offered. Juice fasting is not deprivation, Ms. McGuire-Wien said, but a way of cleaning out the body as well as stripping the mind of doubts, indecision and confusion.

The day begins with "social silence". No one wears makeup or jewelry. Except for a movie with an uplifting message" played on the DVD in the evening, the television stays off. Cellphones are off limits.

Mornings, Ms McGuire-Wien leads a 90-minute yoga session

"If you get on a yoga mat and relieve some of the tension in your body, you'll find that your life will flow more easily as well," she said.

Eryn Michaud, a yoga teacher from Sun Valley, Idaho, stretched on a mat in the living room. While other programs were like boot camps, she said, Ms. McGuire-Wien's retreat included cleansing, healing and pampering. Massages and ozone steams are available. During a recent retreat, Ms. McGuire-Wien drove the women to Sag Harbor for optional colonic hydrotherapy and a tour of celebrity homes in East Hampton.

"When you are fasting you have to take care of yourself, you have to nurture yourself or you are not able to heal," Ms. Michaud said. "Just the home environment itself you feel very supported and taken care of."

Ms. Michaud paid \$900 to stay for five days in the most deluxe of Ms. McGuire-Wien's guest rooms, a private room with a canopy bed and a private bath. A shared room with a shared bath is \$625; a private room with a shared bath runs \$725.

During yoga, Ms. McGuire-Wien urged her guests to inhale and "feel the expansion," and to stretch beyond their limits.

"Our minds become our bodies, our bodies become ourselves, consciously or unconsciously," she said in a soothing voice. At the end of the class, as the women curled up in the fetal position, she covered them with blankets.

Afterward in the sun room, Regan Wilders, a computer programmer from Manhattan, said she went to the retreat to "get away from everything and take a break," especially from cooking dinner for her husband.

"I have really been able to just relax and enjoy myself," said Ms. Wilders, who had never done yoga before. "I have better clarity now."

Ms. Wilders was thrilled that talk about food was off-limits.

Kelly Douglas, an executive assistant from Washington, sipped a frothy green concoction that was made from lime, ginger and apples but looked like pond scum. It was the first of two raw juices of the day.

Ms. Douglas, who usually practices yoga weekly, wanted to cut out coffee and other bad food habits and "get my body ready," she said, before she and her husband try to start a family.

She said the women kept their own space but shared experiences.

The lure of a women's retreat was strong. "You are free to be yourself when you are around other women," Ms. McGuire-Wien said. "If the guys are around, there are always little agendas."

-By Marcelle S. Fischler, The New York Times