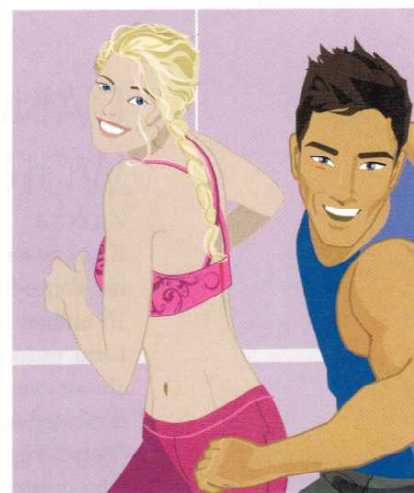


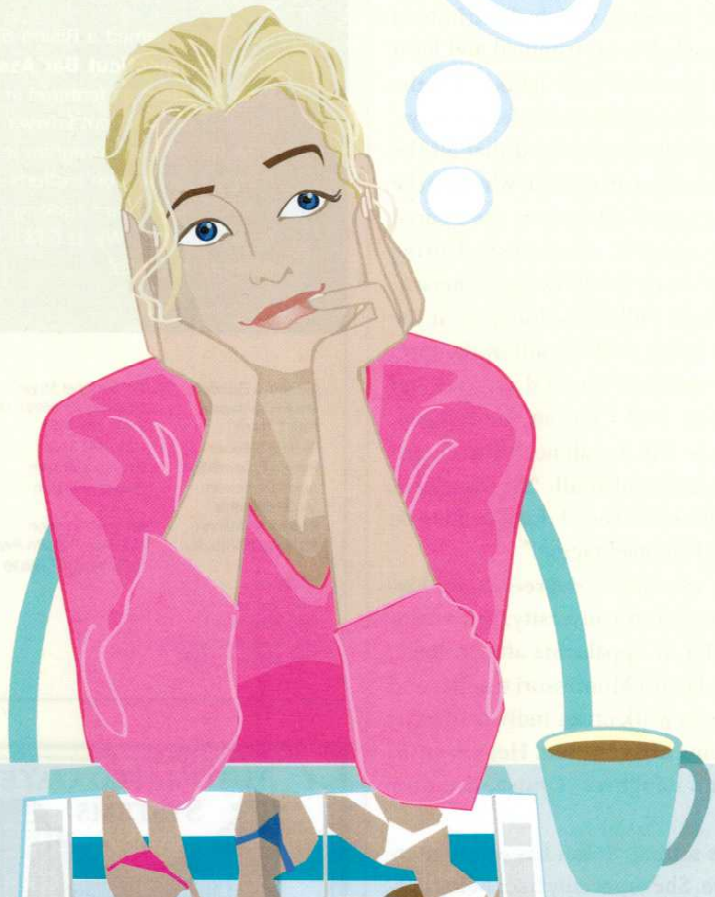
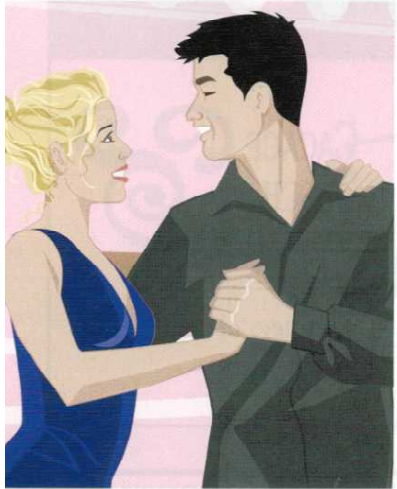
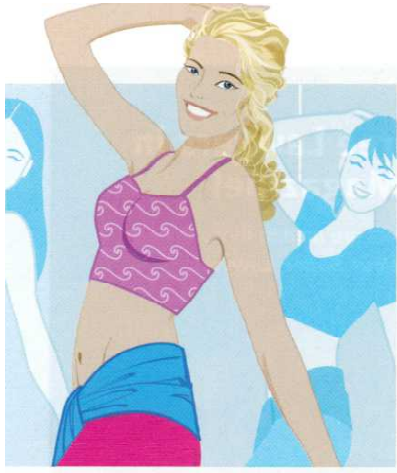
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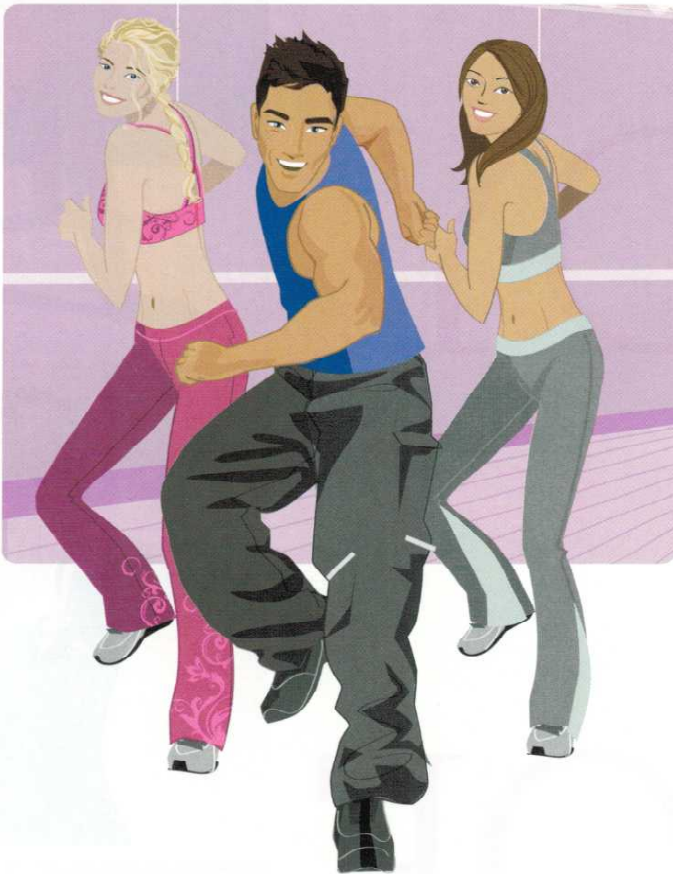
Summoning your inner warrior, roller yoga and biokinetics are just a few of the hot new fitness trends that are taking the “work” out of working out

by **JILL JOHNSON** illustrations by **BUNKY HURTER**

Bathing suit season is upon us. If you've neglected those winter workouts, never fear. At least one of these fitness crazes will **overhaul your body in a mere month**, and many are so fun that you'll hardly notice you're sweating. So ditch the treadmill or stale aerobics class and shake it up! You're sure to find a new exercise addiction and maybe even a new skill to boot. »







DANCE-INSPIRED WORKOUTS

Zumba

If you haven't tried Zumba, get with it! This decade-old dance-fitness phenomenon now has more than 10 million people in over 110 countries sweating to Latin music in their weekly classes. It's offered at almost every club around, not to mention at studios dedicated solely to this high-energy workout. Alberto "Beto" Perez, the Colombian aerobics instructor who created Zumba (when he accidentally forgot his music for a class and improvised with the salsa and merengue tapes in his backpack), teaches at Equinox in Aventura, California. He may turn up here to guest teach at the new Greenwich location.

Zumba.com features the slogan: "Ditch the workout, join the party!" Local Zumba enthusiasts are taking that a step (or thousands of fast, calorie-burning steps) further, by hosting two-hour dance parties. After losing forty-five pounds in less than a year, thanks to a six-day-per-week Zumba habit, Joan Stewart Pratt turned her workout obsession into

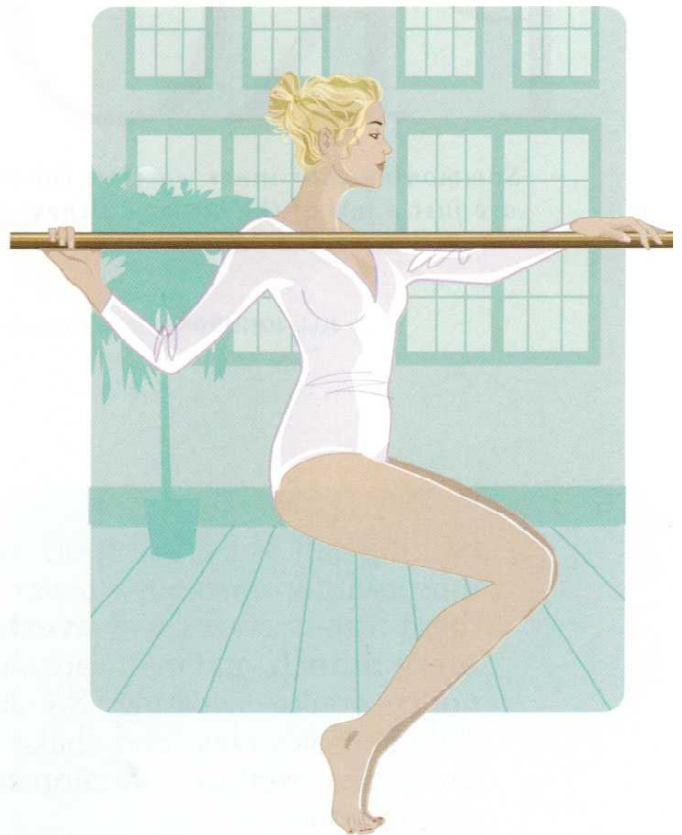
a business. Now her company, Greenwich Fitness Parties, hosts monthly Zumba parties at the Boys and Girls Club, with multiple instructors and a deejay.

Darah Velesbir throws Zumba parties at her studio, where the former Ringling Brothers and Barnum and Bailey Circus performer teaches a class that includes two nine-year-olds and a seventy-two-year-old. "Anyone can do Zumba," says Darah. This applies especially to her Aqua Zumba classes at Sportsplex and the Tully Health Center. Think Aquacize, with the added zip of Latin music and pelvic thrusts—great if you want a no-impact workout. Seek dry ground for more fancy footwork and sweat.

Ballet Barre Classes

Who doesn't want a ballet dancer's body? Fitness clubs are installing barres and adding classes that help you channel your inner—and outer—prima ballerina.

I assessed my instructor's bod at Go Figure in Greenwich: lean, taut, graceful. The toned women in class provided additional proof that the Figure Method works. Owner Cindy Sites, who spent much of her youth at a ballet barre, developed the hour-long classes as an offshoot of the Lotte Berk Method



(which melds strength training, dance and yoga).

"Clients take what they gain from our method and apply it to life—whether picking up kids or bags of groceries, playing tennis or hitting the slopes," says Cindy. I found the Figure Method to be most like a bodysculpting class, with exercises using balls and light weights. The barre work adds a twist (and plié and relevé) and delicious stretches are incorporated in with the strength work.

The Greenwich YMCA offers a similar class called Body Barre, which also draws on the Lotte Berk Method. Barre Technique at Stamford's Sportsplex is a ballet-inspired sculpting class with the majority of the class spent at the barre. The Greenwich YWCA offers Dance Fusion—a low impact class that combines jazz, African, modern and Latin styles. At Equinox in Greenwich, Inside Out strengthens and tones with Pilates and ballet moves at the barre and on the floor. Equinox's Barre Burn is a more intense version, taking exercise from the barre to the center of the room, where balance comes into play.

Ballroom (and Belly) Dancing

Watch *Dancing With the Stars* and you'll notice that the routines are mesmerizing and the dancers are breathless afterward (i.e., they've raised their heart rates). Not surprisingly, people are getting off their couches and learning to ballroom dance themselves.

When Stamford resident Roxanne DeCarlo was selected for a local *Dancing With the Stars*-style competition, she began training twice a week with Greg Kasprzak, her partner in the contest and owner of Dance-Fit in Stamford. "I loved the dancing, and I definitely saw fitness results in my body and endurance. I lost weight and inches," says Roxanne, who mastered the speedy mambo.

Twenty minutes into a salsa lesson at Dance-Fit, my husband and I broke a sweat—just learning the basic steps. Kasprzak commented that the workout gets more intense as you get better—only you may not notice because you are having such a good time. "You are getting core and cardio benefits without even realizing that it's happening," explains Kasprzak, who also teaches a Latin Groove class at New York Sports Club.

The benefits of ballroom dancing go beyond the body. "It's demanding on the mind," says Kasprzak. "You're memorizing patterns and focusing on timing. You're also developing a partnership." Kasprzak started dancing as a teenager in his native Poland after being invited to a wedding. "It teaches you how to exist at a social event. I was very shy then, and



dance gave me such a confidence boost." He adds that being the only guy in a class full of girls was a nice perk as well.

Metropolitan Dance Center in Stamford offers group classes as well as private lessons. Sign up with friends and enjoy a four-week custom class series (six-person minimum).

Maria Fiora's Dance Studio, also in Stamford, features ballroom classes—plus unconventional options like a Belly Dance/Latin Movements class. Belly dancing happens to be my latest passion. The core workout is incredible and the mind is ultra-active. Not to mention that a good shimmy and belly roll makes for a neat party trick. The class I take is farther afield, at Westport Dance Center, but well worth the drive.

A study in the *New England Journal of Medicine* pinpointed dance as lowering the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's in the elderly. For those who danced a few times a week, the risk of dementia decreased by 63 percent. Researchers found that this was not the case with other physical activities that demand less of the mind. In addition, the social aspect reduced stress and depression. »

YOGA AND YOGA-LIKE TRENDS

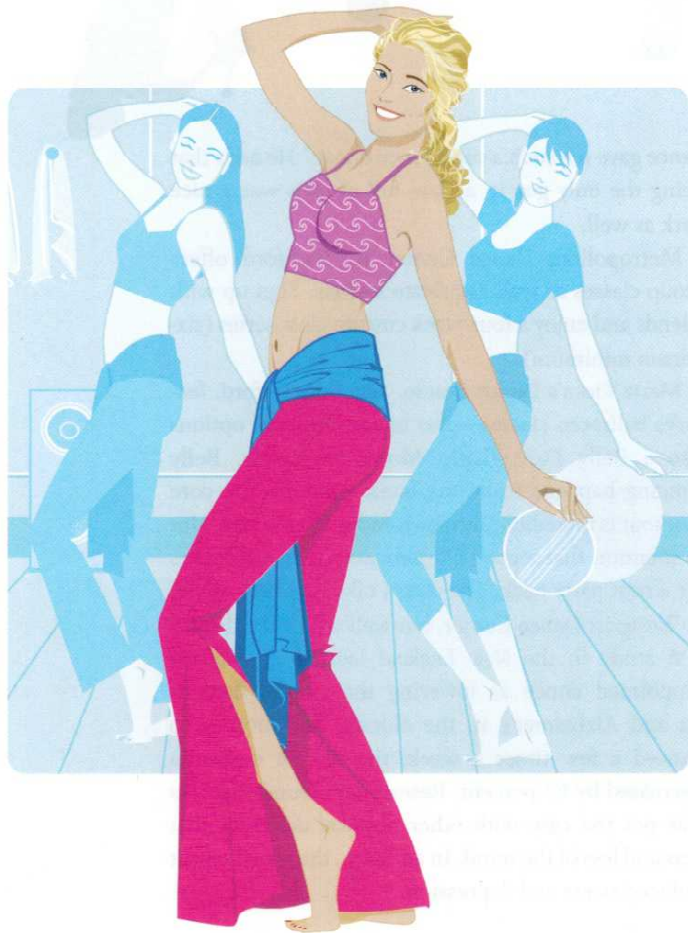
Yoga Hybrids

A current trend in the fitness world is mixing aspects of yoga with different types of exercise. Most of the ballet barre classes above fall into this category.

The Greenwich YWCA offers a variety of yoga classes as well as a seventy-five minute combination yoga-meditation class.

Equinox has two exciting classes with a New Age edge. Inner Warrior is a combination of classical dance, martial arts and yoga. "It moves but is also mindful," says Carol Espel, creative director of Group Fitness at Equinox. "It's beautiful to watch." The instructor who developed Inner Warrior, dancer/choreographer Nadia Zaki, will be leading the class in Greenwich for several months this spring.

IntenSati is a mix of aerobics, martial arts, dance, strength conditioning and yoga, with a vocal component that goes beyond the typical *om*. "The teacher



writes a theme on the mirror at the beginning of class," explains Carol. "It's very personal, so you have to be introspective." Participants say affirmations out loud throughout the class. "Everyone is united in their energy and vocal focus," continues Carol. "The class gets you to look at the reasons behind your workout. It's about your life. It's powerful."

DanceXStudio in Stamford features a class that combines yoga with Bollywood dancing—and, to get technical, Bhangra, Bharatanatyam, Kathak and Garba moves. Huh? Suffice it to say these are Indian folk dances that make for a unique and romantic workout, preceded by a yoga warm-up. "Who can resist being exotic?" asks Jayshree Srikanth, who runs the studio. As a blonde-haired, blue-eyed belly dancer, I know my answer.

Yoga on the Foam Roller

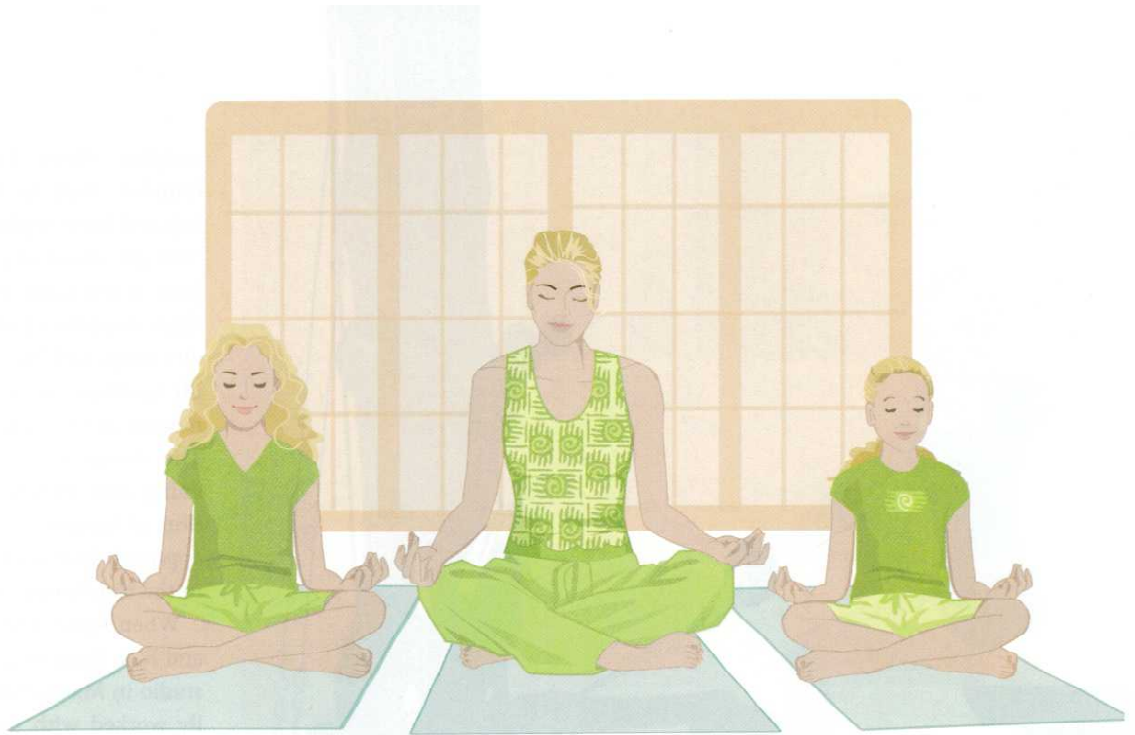
Imagine a class in which you simultaneously get a workout and a massage. It sounded too good to be true, until two minutes into class. By then I was hooked. "Yoga" on the Foam Roller does not involve sun salutations and pretzel-like poses. Using a long foam cylinder propped under various body parts, participants work each zone by rolling back and forth over the firm column and zeroing in on tender areas or "hot spots." The result is the delicious pleasure/pain of a deep-tissue massage combined with lengthening of muscles. Strength and balance play a part as well. I wasn't dripping sweat but the thought, "Wow, this is tough," frequently mingled with the almost constant, "Ahhh, that feels good!"

"I like to say we're treating future injuries," says Penny Hoff, group exercise director at Sportsplex and creator of this unusual class. "We're getting into the tissue and releasing hypertonic muscles." Penny, who discovered the benefits of Foam Roller exercises while recovering from two hip replacements, trained with Sue Hitzmann, of the MELT Method in New York. "I think the fitness world is going in this direction," she says. "Baby boomers want the active lifestyle they've always had, but they are getting issues." From a tennis champion to a writer with a bad back, Penny's students are grateful to be rolling—not just spinning—at the gym.

All in the Family

Another yoga trend is simply making sure no one is left out. There are yoga classes for toddlers, teens, moms-to-be, men...

Kaia Yoga, which has two locations in Greenwich,



offers these classes in addition to the usual Ashtanga to Yin yoga list: Prenatal, Baby & Me, Toddler & Me, and Kids Yoga (not to mention workshops on everything from Lamaze birth prep to breastfeeding).

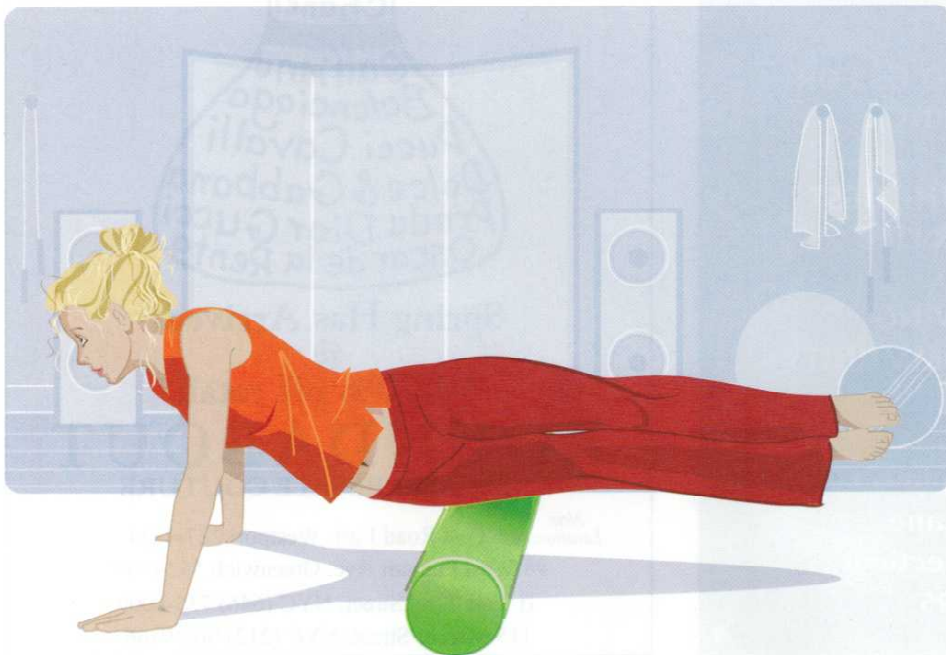
For men who'd rather not downward dog in mixed company, the Greenwich YMCA has added a men's yoga class. Harmony Yoga in Stamford offers a Teen Yoga series—and private instruction in your home, so you can start your own family yoga night. (By the way, both Kaia and Harmony offer childcare at their studios.) Dew Yoga in Stamford has classes for kids, teens and expectant moms.

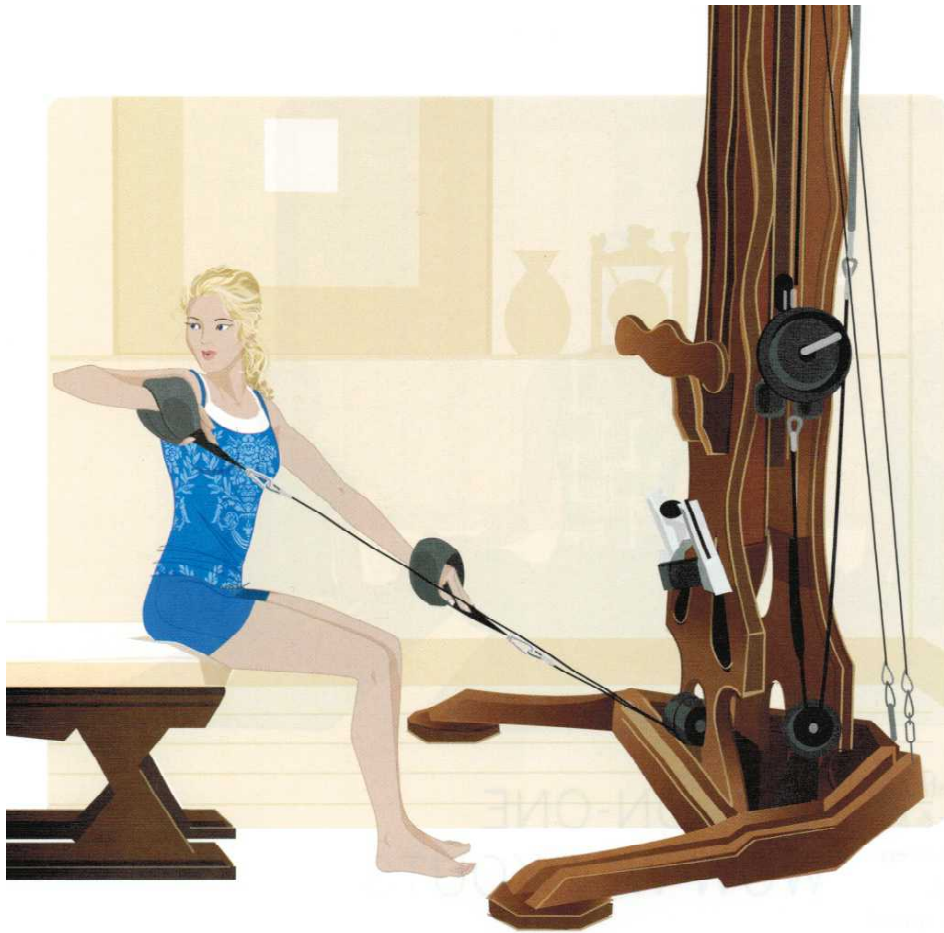
ONE-ON-ONE WOW WORKOUTS

Biokinetics

As I'm not a fan of machines at the gym, I had my doubts about intimidating biokinetics equipment. But I quickly learned that it's easy to fall in love with the handcrafted birch apparatus at Studio Uma.

Unlike iron, the wood absorbs some of the effort, and the pulley system is gentler than clanging gym





weights. Peter Knue, Studio Uma's founder, says he has seen too many hip and knee replacements. His motto: "We use wood equipment so your next joint is not made from titanium." Also, these machines foster free-flowing conditioning, not linear movements; a leg lift involves up and down and circular motion at the same time, for example. The result is simultaneous strengthening and stretching, and the prevention of injuries—a therapeutic exercise approach first used by a Swedish doctor in the nineteenth century.

When Knue, a former classical dancer and R.N. from Germany, opened his first studio in Manhattan in 1992, he primarily worked with dancers. Studio Uma's clientele has gradually shifted to regular people with common problems: weight-related diabetes, heart issues, sore backs. "We design exercises according to a client's lifestyle, background and body



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type,” explains Knue. Jessy, Knue’s wife, is the director of the Greenwich location, which features a private, spa-like setting, not the “chrome, metal, mirror environment” found at fitness clubs.

A Greenwich resident who prefers to remain anonymous exercises three times a week at Studio Uma. “I was a weight lifter, but after a back operation I couldn’t lift weights,” says the former state wrestling champion. “They rebuilt my back in two years with their pulley system. I’m more limber now than I was before the operation.”

Another fan from Greenwich calls Studio Uma a “best-kept secret” (as are its clients; she also wouldn’t share her name). “I started doing biokinetics over a decade ago in New York, after I was in a skiing accident. Peter Knue is a genius. I’m a runner and very athletic, but I never have injuries. I so believe in biokinetics. It’s great for old people.” »



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Dew Yoga

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dewyoga.net

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(203) 863-0070
equinox.com

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gofigurestudio.com

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Greenwichfitnessparties.com

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Stamford
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harmonyyogastudio.com

Kaia Yoga

Greenwich West: 328 Pemberwick
Road at The Mill
Greenwich East: 49 River Road
at the Greenwich Water Club.
Cos Cob
(203) 532-0660
kaia yoga.com

Maria Fiora Dance Studio

201 Summer Street,
Stamford
(203) 353-4363
dancewithmaria.com

Metropolitan Dance Center

2111 Summer Street,
Stamford
(203) 978-0300
metropolitandancecenter.com

New York Sports Club

6 Liberty Way,
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(203) 869-1253
1 Fawcett Place,
Greenwich
(203) 863-9199
nysportsclubs.com

Peak Physique

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(203) 625-9595
peakphysique.biz

Sportsplex

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Stamford
(203) 358-0066
sportsplex-ct.com

Studio Uma

74 Greenwich Avenue,
Greenwich
(203) 629-8500
studioumanyc.com

Tully Health Center

32 Strawberry Hill Court,
Stamford
(203) 276-2000
stamfordhospital.org

Westport Dance Center

15 Ketchum Street,
Westport
(203) 293-4355
westportdancecenter.com

YMCA of Greenwich

50 East Putnam Avenue,
Greenwich
(203) 869-1630
greenwichymca.org

YWCA of Greenwich

259 East Putnam Avenue,
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(203) 869-6501
greenwichymca.org

Zumba With Darah

123 High Ridge Road,
Stamford
(203) 252-8367
zumbawithdarah.com


At forty-one, I think it's great too. Yoga adjustments are mixed in, making biokinetics both a one-on-one wow workout and a yoga hybrid. Try it—the first visit is free.

Boot Camp

Boot Camp, offered by Peak Physique in Greenwich, isn't a class; it's a serious month-plus overhaul. If you have a big event coming up—a wedding, a high school reunion—and want to look and feel your best, Boot Camp is the answer. Some of the participants in this one-on-one nutrition and exercise program have lost as much as twenty pounds.

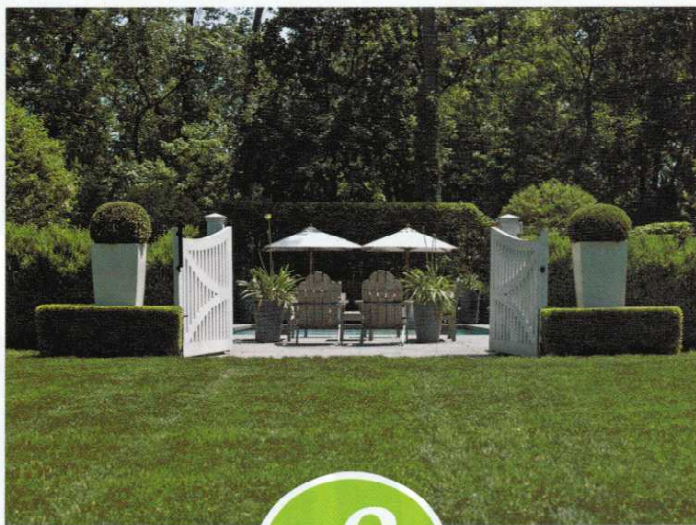
"It's very specialized for each participant," explains owner Dominic Novak. "The first thing we do is get them on a sound nutritional program. It's designed to help them gain energy so they can recover from their workouts. A week or two later, they start the boot camp—five one-hour appointments per week (each ends with thirty minutes of cardio), for four weeks, with a massage midway through."

Kathy Fanning and Rob Tomasetti signed up for Boot Camp when they noticed one of their favorite pastimes, hiking, becoming more taxing as each year passed. "The weight and inches lost we expected. We were amazed at how much our cholesterol and blood pressure improved," notes the Greenwich couple. "It improved our endurance levels and made hiking fun again."

Sara Vavra, a mountaineer from Stamford, did Boot Camp before ascending 22,800-foot Aconcagua in Chile. "The sports specific training helped me summit four hours faster than expected," says Sara. As she prepares to climb the Matterhorn and Mount Everest, Sara continues to train at Peak Physique. "I feel and see results every day. My clothes fit better, running is easier and my pace is considerably faster. My flexibility has improved, and my overall strength and athleticism has increased dramatically." And, in addition to being closer to her lofty goals, Sara says she is more ready than ever for beach season. 

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