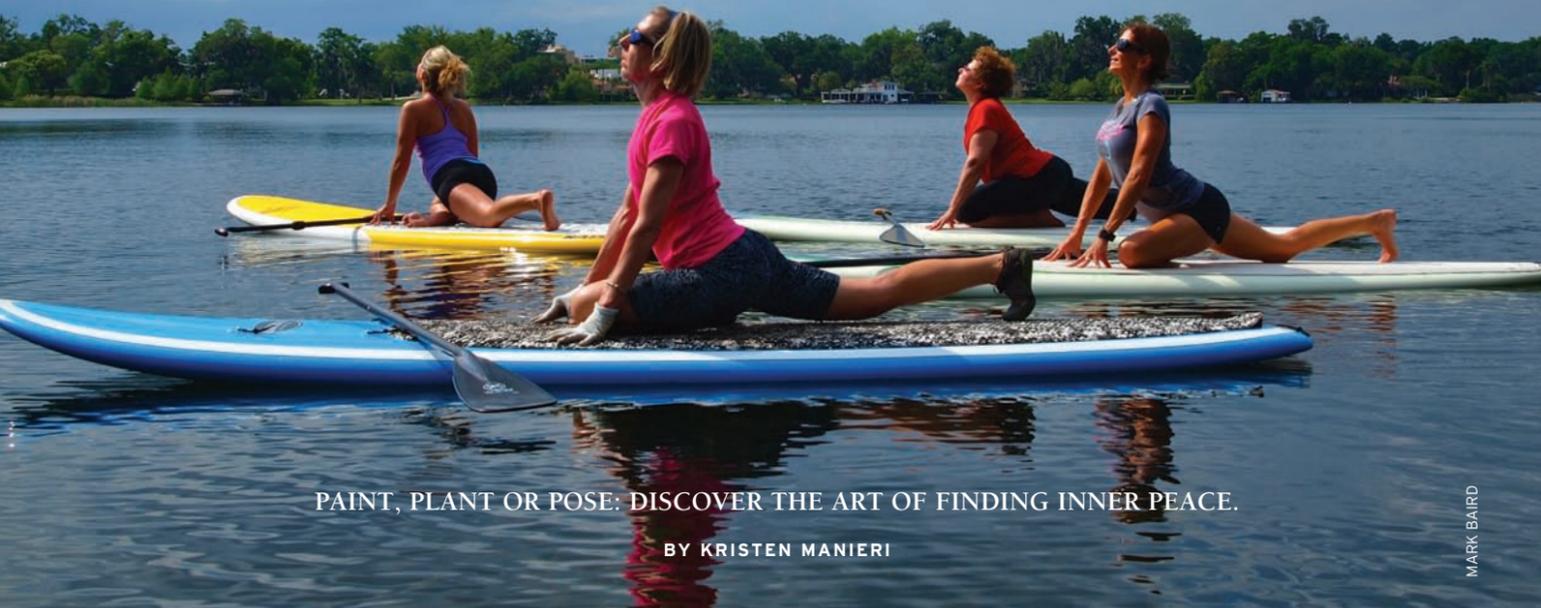


Blissology



PAINT, PLANT OR POSE: DISCOVER THE ART OF FINDING INNER PEACE.

BY KRISTEN MANIERI

MARK BAIRD

SCENIC STUDIO: PADDLEBOARD YOGA SESSIONS are held on local lakes and offer participants a novel way to literally get away from it all. Certified yoga instructor Julie Roach (far right) teaches people how to slow down and get centered at her Yoga on Water (YOW) classes for Paddleboard Orlando.

Defined as the experience of supreme happiness, utter joy or contentment, bliss is a state that few are achieving. The American Psychological Association's latest Stress in America survey reveals a troubled nation, with 76 percent of people citing money as their biggest concern. Chronic stress can lead to serious health problems, such as high blood pressure, obesity, and even heart disease and stroke. The good news is that regularly engaging in any activity that helps you relax can improve both your physical and emotional health. So from artistic endeavors to ancient techniques, here are some easy ways to get back to bliss.

The Artist's Path

Pablo Picasso said, "Art washes away from the soul the dust of everyday life." For many people, creating art offers a therapeutic escape from daily pressures. But you don't have to be a professional to reap that benefit. A variety of creative

activities require little to no talent, but yield big soul-soothing results.

Michelle Petno, owner of **Mozaic Arts** (407.894.7779; www.mozaicarts.com), says, "The best part of mosaic is that you don't have to have any artistic background. People who say they have no talent often turn out to be the best." She would know, being entirely self-taught. After demand for her work and lessons increased, she opened a studio in Ivanhoe Village, where she offers classes for all skill levels.

Beginners start by making a decorative wall piece and then graduate to more intricate works. Petno provides all the tools and materials, plus permission to make mistakes. "You don't have to be perfect in mosaics. The beauty is in the imperfections," she says. "It's a very freeing form of artwork."

Cheri Riechers also knows a thing or two about encouraging beginners. At **Cheri's Art Uncorked** (407.920.0692;

www.cherisartuncorked.com), budding artists are given step-by-step instructions as they create the "piece du jour"—a painting that's pre-sketched onto the canvas. Participants just have to add color to achieve frame-worthy results.

For husband-and-wife team Carolyn Bellino and Peter Spence, glass blowing is the source of true delight. The owners of **Art Glass Orlando** (407.877.8881; www.artglassorlando.com) help students make beautiful pieces using lamp-working and glass-blowing techniques.

Melissa McClain started going to the Winter Garden studio six months ago and now makes it a weekly affair. "I find it extremely therapeutic and relaxing," she says. "When I am lamp working, the only thing I think of is what I'm doing."

Offering a bevy of classes in addition to open studio time, **Super Awesome Cool Pottery** (407.452.2452; www.superawesomcool.org), allows aspiring throwers to try their hand at the potter's wheel.

Owner and instructor Jamie Moorehead welcomes novices, who usually find it to be an incredibly relaxing activity. "People tell me it's very hypnotic," she says. "It's easy to focus and tune everything out."

Crealde School of Art (407.671.1886; www.crealde.org) offers year-round visual arts classes taught by accomplished local artists. For example, you can get a taste for ceramics at an organic cookie jar workshop on July 31. Not sure which medium is right for you? Attend the open house on August 13 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. for a sneak peek at Crealde's fall classes, which start August 22. Meet the instructors, tour the studios and take free hands-on workshops.

More options abound at the **Maitland Art Center** (407.539.2181; www.artandhistory.org), which offers nine-week-long classes for adults in a multitude of modalities, including drawing, stained glass, collage, sculpture and digital photography. Students learn art theory and history, as well as practical techniques.

Bok Tower Gardens (863.676.1408; www.boktowergardens.org) in scenic Lake Wales invites artists of all levels to paint, draw and create in the gardens free of charge during Plein Air Days, August 3 and 17. All artists will receive free admission and kids 12 and under can get a free watercolor kit at the visitor center. From October through March, painter Owen Jolly teaches watercolor classes both indoors and out.

Cultivating Calm

Whether it's a few tomato plants or a backyard oasis, gardening is a great way to unwind. Central Florida's subtropical climate and surplus of sunshine make it an ideal place to get growing.

"Gardening is recreational, therapeutic and green," says Orange County Urban Horticulture Agent Ed Thralls, an instructor at the **Orange County Extension Education Center** (407.254.9200; <http://orange.ifas.ufl.edu>). Here, hopeful horticulturists can learn how to cultivate everything from petite butterfly gardens to sprawling urban farms. Free 90-minute workshops devoted to specific techniques are offered in Winter Garden and Orlando.

Home to more than 50 acres of lush greenery, **Leu Gardens** (407.246.2620; www.leugardens.org) offers nearly 100 classes each year on everything from



ART CAN BE THERAPEUTIC, and at Mozaic Arts in Orlando, even those who claim to have no artistic ability will find themselves making colorful creations in no time.

MOZAIC ARTS

orchid growing to backyard beekeeping, for around \$14 each.

Green seminars also are offered by the **City of Winter Park** (407.599.3399; www.cityofwinterpark.org). Topics include Landscaping for Wildlife and Edible Landscaping, and sessions are free. On July 9, Gardening with Native Plants will be held at the city's Welcome Center from 6 to 8 p.m.

Nearby, the **Albin Polasek Museum and Sculpture Gardens** (407.647.0283; www.polasek.org) features gardening classes on different topics once a month

for just \$10. Participants get their hands dirty as they work alongside staff, volunteers, master gardeners and visiting experts. Every Tuesday and Thursday, free, informal Hands-On Gardening gatherings are held from 9:30 a.m. until noon.

Emily Ruff, director of the **Florida School of Holistic Living** (407.595.3731; www.holisticlivingschool.org) in downtown Orlando says nature-deficit disorder is a real cause of concern for urbanites. "Our personal disconnection from nature and the environment is, in my opinion, a great source of our societal anxiety and



THE HYPNOTIC RHYTHM OF THE POTTER'S WHEEL makes throwing clay a great way to tune out your problems. Crealde School of Art offers pottery and other visual arts classes year round.

RICK LANG

Knittin' Pretty

What do celebs David Arquette and Dakota Fanning have in common? They both love to knit. It's reportedly relaxing—and addictive. Knitters don't dabble, they pursue it with a passion. There's even a knitting Olympics. Who knew?!

"Knitting is one activity that forces you to slow down, be present in the moment, and unwind the knots in your mind," says Anne Jones of the Black Sheep Shop (407.894.0444; www.theblacksheepshop.com). Jones teaches classes for beginners on the first Saturday of every month and also offers private lessons for around \$35 an hour. "This relaxation is further reinforced through knowing that there is going to be some type of reward when you complete your knitting project."

The popularity of knitting clubs prompted Doni Young to open Sip and Knit (407-622-5648; www.sipandknit.com) in Maitland. "Knitting is much like yoga, in that it is very relaxing," says Young. In addition to classes, she holds a free Sip, Sit and Knit session on Fridays from 5 to 8 p.m., when knitters of all skill levels can kick back with their favorite beverages. "This is a great evening for everyone to unwind from the stress of a long week with some knitting with friends and a lots of laughter," she says.

depression," Ruff asserts. The school's Community Garden—where volunteers share the work as well as the harvest—serves as a classroom for extended courses and one-time workshops on everything from organic gardening to sustainable living. No previous experience is necessary.

Stretch Into Serenity

With widely praised benefits, both physical and mental, the ancient practices of yoga, Tai Chi and meditation have been embraced by millions of Americans.

According to *Yoga Journal*, benefits of the popular body-bending activity—which consists of a series of poses combined with deliberate breathing—include increased flexibility and muscle strength, reduced blood pressure and higher serotonin levels. Central Florida is home to dozens of places where you can roll out a mat to relax, but a few innovative offerings are worth a closer look.

Even yogis with no previous experience have become enamored with Paddleboard Orlando's (407.782.5080, www.paddleboardorlando.com) Yoga on the Water classes. "Movement on a floating mat is a bit more challenging and requires complete focus and concentration," explains instructor Julie Roach. "Sandwiched in between Mother Nature's wide open sky above and the water underneath is simply pure bliss."

Several classes are offered each week (weather permitting), usually at Lake Ivanhoe and Lake Virginia, where a Friday



LAUGHTER YOGA INTERNATIONAL

LAUGHTER YOGA uses breathing techniques to initiate endorphin-boosting giggles.

"happy hour" session departs from Dinky Dock in Winter Park at 6 p.m.

Europeans have been visiting natural salt caves for their reputed health benefits for hundreds of years. Today, salt therapy, or halotherapy, is the mainstay at the Salt Room (407.965.3065; www.SaltRoomOrlando.com), where offerings include yoga classes that are held in a room layered with natural rock salt. The air is infused with tiny pharmaceutical-grade salt grains, which are said to decrease symptoms of allergies, asthma and other ailments when inhaled.

If you think that laughter is the best medicine, check out Laughter Yoga

Orlando (407.616.5381; www.laughteryogaorlando.com). Founder Pat Conklin explains that this playful endeavor centers on yogic breathing. She leads two local clubs dedicated to laughter yoga and says it's "a unique, laughter-on-demand technique whereby anyone can laugh for no reason." Laughter exercises and yoga-style breathing stimulate chuckles, which result in a flooding of endorphins Conklin calls a "joy cocktail," saying participants report feeling "less stressed, more relaxed, and lifted in mood."

Try another ancient form of exercise at the Wah Lum Temple (407.275.6177; www.wahlum.com) in east Orlando. In this tranquil, reverent setting, students practice Tai Chi, the traditional Chinese exercise comprised of 108 slow movements. "It's meditation in motion," says Suzy Chan, who has taught Tai Chi for nearly 25 years and touts its innumerable benefits, such as increased flexibility and improved circulation.

You'll be hard-pressed to find a more stunning setting for the practice than the lakefront Albin Polasek Museum and Sculpture Gardens (407.647.0283; www.polasek.org). Launched earlier this year, the museum's Tai Chi classes were an instant hit and will continue through the fall on select Saturday mornings.

In a similar vein, meditation is said to elevate mood and contribute to an overall sense of well-being. Both beginners and experienced meditators will find options at the Vajrapani Kadampa Buddhist Center (407.896.3998; www.meditationinorlando.org), ranging from meditation classes and chanted meditations, to workshops and retreats. On Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings, 90-minute classes include a short lecture, two guided meditations and a question-and-answer session for \$10.

Hour-long group meditation classes are available in Sanford at The Crystal Closet (407.878.2700; www.thecrystalcloset.com) on Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m., and are what owner Rayna Tamarin calls a "great mid-week stress reducer." Bring a yoga mat or pillow, plus a \$5 donation.

No matter how you prefer to unwind, when you try sowing your stress in a new endeavor, you just might reap some peace of mind. **oam**

Kristen Manieri writes lifestyle and travel articles about Orlando and other locales.



ROSEN SHINGLE CREEK

Just Say Spaaah

When all else fails, it's time to see a professional. Tension is no match for the skillful hands of a good masseuse. While few would balk at a basic massage, these day spas are unveiling innovative options designed to take relaxation to a whole other stratosphere.

One such out-of-this-world option is the unique Eco-Rooftop Hammock Experience at the Ritz-Carlton Orlando, Grande Lakes (407.206.2400; www.ritzcarlton.com). This total mind, body and soul event takes place on a private rooftop sanctuary overlooking the spa pool. Guests are delicately folded, fully clothed, into a hand-crocheted hammock and given eye pillows to completely block out light. A therapist administers a blend of traditional massage, shiatsu, and reflexology as you gently sway in a weightless womb of comfort. Sixty minutes later, you'll emerge feeling thoroughly relaxed, balanced and centered.

The Mandara Spa (www.mandara spa.com) inside the Walt Disney World Dolphin Resort and the Loews Portofino Bay Hotel at Universal Orlando®, offers visitors a traditional Balinese experience with the Elemis Exotic Coconut Rub and Milk Ritual Wrap. Therapists polish the skin with a combination of coconut, mungbean, spices and lavender, then drizzle warm momoi oil and milk bath all over the body before administering a full-body massage.

"The combination of spices and special ingredients transforms your

senses to another place," says Lisa Gueorguiev, spa director at the Loews Portofino location. "This wrap treatment is the perfect way to detoxify the body, with the hot-oil massage that follows as a way to relax and gain the most benefit for your body and your mind."

The Spa at Shingle Creek (407.996.9772; www.spaatshinglecreek.com), located at the Rosen hotel of the same name, has a Seasonal Symphony body treatment with ingredients that change depending on the time of year. In summer, a refreshing blend of pear, apple, cucumber and mint lotions and aromas are applied while guests are exfoliated, wrapped and moisturized for 80 idyllic minutes.

A slew of signature options await at The Spa inside The Peabody Orlando (407.352.4000; www.peabodyorlando.com), a 22,000-square-foot slice of heaven that opened last fall. Here, guests can indulge in the Tranquility Body Cocoon, a simple yet intoxicating aromatherapy wrap and moisturizing treatment designed to transport you to the depths of relaxation.

The Spa at Thornton Park (407.649.8889; www.spaorlando.com) has unique hydrotherapy sessions that are designed to completely relax all the muscles in preparation for a deep-tissue massage. Inside the spa's wet room, guests choose a mud, seaweed or saltwater-infused bath, then let the tub's powerful jets massage and lift the body for 20 tranquil minutes.



DEBBIE KOMANSKI

THE ALBIN POLASEK MUSEUM & SCULPTURE GARDENS sits on three acres on Lake Osceola—the perfect locale for its Tai Chi classes, which are offered select Saturday mornings. The museum's hands-on gardening classes and workshops are also popular ways to reduce stress.