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Patrick and Mindy Meiering are the minds behind Inhabit, a new retreat center offering classes ranging from meditation and yoga to reiki, gratitude and sacred hula./Photo by Jennaye Derge

‘Bone there, done that’

Zuke’s founder starts second act with Inhabit
by Jen Reeder

There’s a sense of calm in the River Room at Inhabit as co-founders Patrick and Mindy Meiering lay meditation pillows on the hardwood floor. A schnauzer mix snuggles into one

like a canine princess, while an older English pointer basks in the sunlight streaming through the floor to ceiling windows. Outside, the Animas River flows past pink-blossomed trees.

Nearby on North Main, employees and their dogs are jam-packed into Zuke’s, which Patrick founded 20 years ago after being inspired to create healthy energy treats for dogs while hiking Elbert Creek Trail with his chocolate Lab, Zuke. Patrick grew the natural pet treat company from early days spent hand-grinding meat and vitamin supplements in his garage into a successful brand with over 90 different products. In the last six years alone, Zuke’s has sold more than 29.7 million pounds of treats.

“My title used to be ‘Head Bone Maker’ – a lot of the employees would call me ‘Bone Head.’ Now that it’s 20 years later, it’s ‘Bone There, Done That,’” Meiering says with a laugh before quickly adding, “That doesn’t mean there’s still not a lot to do.”

But while Patrick maintains an advisory role at Zuke’s, which was bought by Nestle-Purina last year, he’s now starting a second act with Inhabit. He and Mindy, a former medical social worker-turned-life coach, opened the doors to Inhabit last year. The retreat center offers classes ranging from meditation and yoga to reiki, gratitude and sacred hula.

Mindy was transitioning into coaching and leading retreats for women, and Patrick was slowing down at Zuke’s, when she told him her idea for Inhabit one night over dinner.

“I think the definition of ‘Inhabit’ is to dwell within, or to reside. How do we dwell within these qualities that we teach and that we want to embody: happiness, peace, compassion, gratitude?” Mindy asked. “It was perfect timing for us to come together and do this.”

Patrick’s response was enthusiastic, to say the least.

“I was like, ‘This is worldwide!’ It almost feels like a whole new paradigm of the way in which people can really learn, really grow, really transform – it involves inhabiting happiness and joy, it involves really embodying it. That’s when I got it,” Patrick says. “Seven billion people need this.”

Mindy beams at him. “He always has big, big ideas and vision, which I’m totally on board with.”

The first Inhabit location was naturally chosen in Durango. They looked at the enormous space in the Riverside Professional Building near the library and contemplated renting while spending a weekend hiking in Utah with their dogs Trek and Ellie. (“You want to make a good decision in life? Go for a hike,” as Patrick says). They had a grand opening in October 2014, and now have 45 local teachers involved in varying capacities, as well as visiting teachers. Supporting “healers” in the community is important to the Inhabit vision, Mindy says.

“We have such phenomenal teachers right here in Durango,” she says. “Durango’s just an incredible community.”

Just as connecting with a dog decreases stress in humans, so does connecting face to face in meaningful ways with other people – instead of online, Patrick says.

“A lot of it is what happens when we all meet together in this room, or we all meet out on the lawn and we’re doing yoga together or a drumming circle and there’s kids and there’s dogs and there’s people around and we’re not at a rock concert and partying, or we’re not at a sports event and we’re not having to cheer for any team, but we’re all here and we’re sort of learning and growing together,” Patrick says. “It’s sort of inhabiting life in a different way.”

The next Inhabit Center will be on the Big Island of Hawaii, near the site where the Meierings got engaged in 2009 (after meeting at a Durango coffee shop in 2008). The couple purchased 144 acres of land near Kapa’au that was threatened by commercial developers.

“We were like, ‘This is not a place to be putting McMansions, it’s a place to be doing what Inhabit does,’” Patrick says. “It’s in wild Hawaii – the shorelines and the cliffs and the monk seals and the whales – it’s off-the-charts cool. It’s powerful.”

A land blessing ceremony this February kicked off a three-year process to get Inhabit Hawaii ready to open. Their vision for the center is to offer visitors from around the world a chance to gather for residential retreats, as well as to offer a meeting place for community groups. As with Inhabit Durango, nature will play a key role in “teaching” at the Hawaii location, Patrick says.

And that’s just the start.

“We want to do other centers across the world – it’s really about us finding sacred sites that are in nature, and basically creating a nature preserve and dropping a retreat center in the midst of it,” he says. “There will be these little sacred islands on the planet is the way I see it.”

Clearly, both Patrick and Mindy are passionate about their second act. Mindy says though it takes courage, patience and persistence, it’s “absolutely possible to follow your dreams.”

“We’re here on this planet for such a short time. I’ve seen so many people that have stayed in jobs or things that they’re doing that just feel like a dead end, or that weren’t really bringing them happiness,” she says. “I think that our work life can really be meaningful and rich and bring happiness to our lives if we can let go of the ‘shoulds’ and the ‘ought tos.’”

Patrick says he’s excited to shift his focus from “four-legged babies” to “two-legged babies,” though of course he still loves animals.

“I want to help pets – I’ve done pretty well with that – and I want to help humans now, too,” he says. “For me, it’s the same type of spark that was there when Zuke’s was getting going and what was within it. The same type of energy and spark is going on in Inhabit. There are beautiful possibilities of what we’re envisioning here.”

Visit Inhabit Durango in the Riverside Professional Building at 1970 E. 3rd Ave., or <http://inhabit.org>.



Patrick and Mindy Meiering hang out with one of their dogs, Ellie. Patrick, who created the Zuke’s brand, is now starting a second act at Inhabit alongside his wife, Mindy./Photo by Jennaye Derge

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