

DEPARTURES

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PERSONAL BEST

HOW TO LOOK GOOD, FEEL GREAT, STAY FIT • EDITED BY DEBORAH FRANK

Christopher Vlaun charges up the beach workout experience at The St. Regis Bal Harbour.

special edition

Innovations in how we exercise, where we work out, what we eat and when we sleep have taken wellness to the next level at home, in the gym, dining out and on the go.

THE FUTURE OF FITNESS

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THE NEW MUSCLE BEACH

The St. Regis Bal Harbour is at the forefront of a health-conscious trend.



From TRX training to yoga to hauling ropes, Chris and Tracie Vlaun turn the beach into the ultimate workout studio.



It's 8 A.M. the first day of February, and the Miami weather couldn't be more perfect: clear skies, 69 degrees and low humidity. An ideal

forecast for not breaking a sweat—unless you're working out with Chris and Tracie Wright Vlaun at The St. Regis Bal Harbour. "Come hydrated, dressed in workout attire, slathered with suntan lotion and ready to kick off your sandals and have a blast!" wrote Chris in an e-mail a week before we were to meet for 90 minutes of personal training. The husband-and-wife team has developed an exercise platform like no other, and it's part of a newly launched wellness program at the resort.

"People always associate personal training with 'I'll meet you in the gym at 8:15.' We bring them out to the beach, and they look at it like it's the most foreign thing," says Chris.

"But they're pleasantly surprised," adds Tracie. "They wonder what we're going to do."

"And 99 percent of the time," says Chris, "they don't want to go back inside."



Fifteen years ago, high-end hotels didn't have spas. Now it's hard to find one that doesn't, says Marco Selva, general manager of The St. Regis Bal Harbour. "And gyms were closets with a couple of machines. Today it's a must to have state-of-the-art equipment; it's as important as anything else, as a nice bar or good restaurant," he says. "It used to be that guests would just lie around the pool and not work out, saying they're on vacation. Now it's part of the experience. The trend is people looking for wellness and fitness programs."

And many hotels are offering them, from bespoke wellness retreats like the one at Park Hyatt Aviara Resort, just north of San Diego, to beach volleyball tournaments at the Fairmont Miramar in Santa Monica. And almost all offer yoga on the beach at sunrise or sunset. But

none have V Art of Wellness and its founders, Chris and Tracie, crafting unique fitness routines with a holistic approach that includes muscle rejuvenation at St. Regis's Remède Spa and nutritional culinary options at the Jean-Georges Vongerichten-inspired restaurant.

"The chef came up with healthy alternatives geared toward wholeness and organic products," says Selva, "offering menu choices like grass-fed beef that Chris and Tracie endorse and detox juices in the morning at the pool bar."

When The St. Regis Bal Harbour was opening, in January 2012, Selva was introduced to the Vlauns by a mutual acquaintance. "He tried us out and said, 'Let's do this!'" says Chris. "I've trained athletes, recording artists, restaurateurs, hoteliers, and the collective feedback is that no one is doing this."

And what, exactly, is "this"? "You can get a better workout on the

beach for specific reasons. You expend 30 percent more energy working out on the sand," explains Chris, "but here's the difference: Nobody has tapped into the psychological mind-body connection that that has."

"We want that 'Aha!' feeling afterward," adds Tracie, "not just 'Okay, I worked out' and move on."



The sensation they are trying to achieve becomes apparent in one session, like the Befit Method Bootcamp class. It starts with a dynamic warm-up: a lot of moves, a lot of things happening at once. Most indoor workouts have you on a treadmill for the warm-up, which Chris considers unidirectional. "This is multidirectional and lasts about 15 minutes in a 60-minute beach workout," he explains. "Then we move on to the circuit block, which we do in rounds, like in a boxing class. And we modify it depending on the size of the class and the guests who are attending, so it tailors to all fitness levels. Each station has a litany of exercises, so you can hop over, push up, do a one-arm plank, dips with a kick—the variations are numerous. At the end of the workout is what I call conscious movement, when you've wound yourself up and now it's time to unwind a bit."

This is where Tracie comes in with her combination of yoga, Pilates and aerobics in a trademarked program she calls Aeroga. "A lot of guests want yoga or Pilates only because that's all they know," she says. "So I tailor it to the person and give him more yoga or more Pilates, but I'll flip it and put him in a downward dog so he can stretch, and he'll say, 'I've never stretched. I've done Pilates, but I've never stretched.' Or 'I run, but I never did core work in Pilates.'"

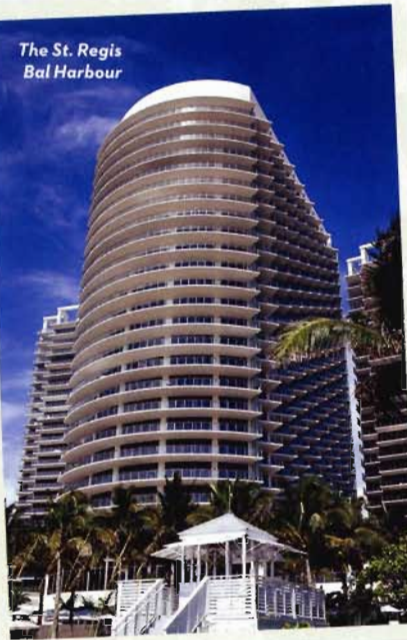
After an intense hour of circuit training, the focus on breathing and stretching clears the chatter in your mind, according to Chris. "It allows you to have clarity, to set your intentions and your message for the day. It's a reboot, a recharge for the soul. I had one client who, during that moment of clarity, said he'd just realized



fit fact

Chris believes the best way to work out is barefoot on the beach. He says studies have shown that lightning hits the ground approximately 20 flashes per second, which equals 1,728,000 flashes to the ground a day, to maintain an electrical balance between the earth's surface and the atmosphere. "In turn," he says, "when we work out barefoot on the sand, we get charged up as well!"

The St. Regis
Bal Harbour



“It used to be that
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his next big deal. When I saw him again, he told me the idea worked.”

For the Vlauns, it's all about getting back to your primal sense. “There's actually an electrical charge that grounds you,” says Chris. “As soon as you hit the beach and kick off your shoes, you make a connection in the sand. You're channeling energy from the ground up. The ‘V’ stands for ‘vibration’ in the art of wellness. Raising your body's vibrational energy—it's a nice double entendre with our last name, Vlaun.”

For The St. Regis, which is not an ashram or a destination health resort, it's about balance and allowing guests to still have a glass of wine at dinner. “Have that grass-fed steak and that beer,” says Chris, “but in moderation. It's not a vacation otherwise.” —D.F.

To experience the Wellness Program at The St. Regis Bal Harbour, go to stregisbalharbour.com or call 305-993-3300. Personal training sessions with the Vlauns start at \$180; learn more at v-artofwellness.com.