

Breathe yoga opens home decor shop

By DIANA LOUISE CARTER

Breathe at home doesn't feel like you're in a colonial-era village in Upstate New York.

It feels a little like you've taken a detour to India. Perhaps by way of China. Or maybe with a detour to Tuscany. "Beyond gorgeous!" sighed a woman who entered the breathe at home store one morning last week. The man who came in with her offered, "If I had a place in Greenwich Village, this is what I'd do."

Breathe at home, the home and décor offshoot of breathe yoga, opened at 23 S. Main St. in Pittsford last November after an extensive renovation of the building that used to house the former Hicks and McCarthy restaurant. But renovation needs were so extensive — replacing the roof, removing floorboards down to the earth below — that a portion of the retail space wasn't ready then. The back portion of the store opened Sept. 26.

Owner Cyndi Weis, who dreamed up the concept of a yoga studio that includes a retail space and a juice bar serving healthful meals, is bubbling over trying to describe her company's newest growth spurt. Breathe at home has existed for several years, but only became a brick-and-mortar retail shop since Thanksgiving 2018.

Indeed, breathe at home's line of goods is hard to describe in a brief sentence. You might find a \$12,000, five-foot statue of the Hindu elephant deity Ganesh; or cookbooks, including one devoted to uses of coconut; crystals of many sizes; pretty plates and table linens; delicately scented candles; pillows made with natural fibers; foot-long matches to light incense; bundles of sage or aromatic palo santo wood; tiny wooden spoons for serving condiments; bottled infusions of sparkling herbal tea; massive tables imported from India; and ornate carved wooden arches.

Patrons of breathe yoga will recognize the aesthetic, if not all the actual goods. The home business started in 2012 as a way to provide the same kind of furnishings for breath yoga franchises that existed in original Weis-owned stores. Decor consultations for customers outside the franchised stores were also available, but not well known.

Weis said customers at breathe yoga often tell her, "This is my happy place." She feels they're describing the lifting of tension and the feeling of relaxation they experience during their visits.

She's carried the happy place feeling to breathe at home. Walking in breathe at home's back door from the parking lot, customers pass a statue of Buddha and a fountain splashing on smooth rocks, setting the mood even before they enter the store and inhale mingled scents of grapefruit, pine, cinnamon and cardamom.

Inside, customers can sense they've arrived for an experience, not just a place to buy meditation candles.

Similarly, Weis said if yoga and meditation were the only things customers sought from breathe yoga, they could more easily roll out their mats on their own living room floors. The yoga business offers more than 200 classes a week in yoga and meditation, but patrons don't practice those at all; they come for turmeric lattes, mushroom-based drinks, homemade cashew milk and, yes, coffee. The yoga practitioners also come for the atmosphere, the camaraderie, to pick up a gluten-free meal for takeout and maybe buy a candle to light later and relive the feeling of relaxation they felt while meditating.

"People can see that feeling doesn't just need to be at breathe yoga," Weis said. Breathe at home shows the feeling and relaxation aids can be replicated in homes, offices and dorm rooms.

"Gone are the days when meditation and yoga are new-agey," Weis said, "Every person realizes they need to have those tools to combat insomnia, digestive disorders, migraines..."

Educated as a dietician and mental health counselor, Weis started breathe yoga in 2002 with her first establishment in Pittsford village. The yoga business was a way to use the skill she'd practiced since age 12 and keep herself busy after her daughters went off to college.

Both the business and the owner have evolved quite a bit since then. Weis was named the Small Business Person of the Year in 2016 by the Small Business Council of Rochester. Her daughters, Abby Rhodes and Carly Weis, have joined the business, as has her husband, Larry Weis, after retiring as a sales director for a metal company.

Today there are six breathe yoga establishments in the Rochester area and one in suburban Syracuse; Weis owns the Pittsford store, next door to breathe at home, and another breathe yoga on East Avenue in Rochester. Pittsford is the headquarters for her much expanded business, including a bakery and commissary kitchen to supply treats and meals to other stores in the chain. Much like Wegmans, the Pittsford breathe yoga is where Weis tests out new meal



Photo provided
Cyndi Weis, owner of breathe yoga, welcomes guests at the grand opening of her breathe at home store.

offerings and concepts.

Weis employs 66 people; 150 work at all the breathe stores in Rochester.

Breathe at home came into being after Weis started working on replicating her yoga business by way of franchises. The first breathe stores were decorated in relaxing, placid tones. But while attending a franchising conference in California, Weis dropped into an Indian import store and fell in love with a red table, the start of her old-world aesthetic.

She paid more to ship the table home than it cost to buy, and soon developed a relationship with the store owner. After a series of purchases, Weis said the owner offered to show her how to buy similar wares directly from a supplier in India. Thus began a connection with a third-generation dealer of antiques in India. It's a connection that promises to continue evolving, much like the rest of breathe enterprises.

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