

"INTAKE"





Written and photographed by Scout Hebinck

NESTLED INTOA corner of a popular Abbot Kinney restaurant sits Ayurveda practitioner Megan Darwin. Not necessarily what you might envision an eastern healer to resemble, Darwin is a blond-haired, hazel-eyed California girl, born and raised in Los Angeles. As I settle in across from her, I take in her petite frame and palpable, energetic spirit. She seems enthusiastic about chatting with me and when I begin to inquire about her relationship with Ayurveda and how she came to study and practice this ancient system of medicine, her face lights up with enthusiasm and a giant smile emerges.

“Ten years ago, I bought a book called ‘Living Yoga,’ written by Christy Turlington, and inside was a small chapter titled ‘What is Ayurveda?’ I read that chapter and literally had a strong emotional reaction, like everything about the way things worked just made sense. It was more like a remembering than anything else. I knew my path then and there and haven’t looked back since.”

Ayurveda literally translates to “the science of life.” Originating in India, Ayurveda dates back over 5,000 years and walks hand in hand with yoga. Darwin has been practicing Ayurvedic medicine since she graduated from The California College of Ayurveda (the longest running Ayurvedic school in the West) in 2006. After her internship, she was offered a one-year apprenticeship at Blue Sage Ayurveda, a private Sanctuary in Northern California, where she became the primary on-site practitioner and managed the spa for five years. Here she led clients through the traditional cleansing and detoxification process called Pancha Karma, in addition to assisting teaching workshops to new students of the Ayurvedic College.

Coming from a background in allopathic medicine (western medicine), I also have a strong personal interest in traditional eastern medicine, yoga, meditation, herbal remedies, etc. I truly believe in the benefits and efficacy of living an Ayurvedic lifestyle, but I wanted to hear firsthand from a practitioner of such a discipline how she educates her clients and the general public on such a seemingly mysterious paradigm. After reflecting a moment she says, “Ayurveda may have begun thousands of years ago, but it is as alive and applicable today as it was back then. It is a living and breathing science, and we probably need this wisdom more now than ever, because there are so many opportunities to choose synthetic chemical products over holistic remedies.”

As we continue to discuss the intricacies of Ayurveda, I begin to notice an emerging theme around how what we choose to intake in our daily lives affects our long-term health.

“These daily choices are so important,” she explains. “They have such a great impact on our physical bodies, emotional states and sense of fulfillment.” She continues, “Each day we make innumerable choices that either support or challenge our body’s natural ability to digest, absorb, assimilate and eliminate efficiently. This is essentially what establishes long-term health...or not.”

We delve further into the topic of intake and what that means from an Ayurvedic perspective. Everything that we take in through each of our five senses has a unique effect upon our physiology and psychology. Ayurveda identifies sight, smell, sound, taste and touch as our five senses of perception. The vibration of the music we listen to, the scenes we witness through our eyes (think mainstream media or a sunrise), the foods we eat, the products we put onto our skin, all of



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these things impact us. When we feed our sensory organs properly, they thank us by lending an overall feeling of well being and balance. Naturally, “right living” can be a challenge, and we all succumb to our temptations and vices on occasion.

And that’s where cleansing comes in. Megan believes that detoxification of the body is essential to experiencing balance in daily life and ultimately, longevity. Years upon years of making choices that obstruct the digestive tract and organs abilities to do their jobs efficiently creates an accumulation of “ama” or toxins. She quotes her herbal guru, Dr. Schulze, saying, “Healing is all about intake and elimination – get it in, get it out.” Megan emphasizes the importance of cleansing the body on a regular basis as the best preventative method against the most common diseases that afflict our society today. She has seen firsthand the incredible healing that an Ayurvedic detox has on the body as well as the mind. She has brought her knowledge and experience back to L.A. and is incorporating other methods of healing into her private practice as well.

She is the founder of Integrative Ayurveda and the creator of ‘The Juicy Yogi Detox’ program, which is based upon the principals of Pancha Karma, with slight modifications for urban dwellers. It is a five-day detox with a week of preparation beforehand. Each day her clients receive an Ayurvedic massage, Shirodhara (a treatment for stress, anxiety and insomnia), herbal steam, a diet of home cooked Kitchari (Ayurvedic superfood), and a balanced cleansing juice formulation. She also tracks her client’s progress with daily tongue and pulse analysis.

I decided to experience her Ayurvedic massage (Abhyanga) for myself and made an appointment with her at her Venice location. Prior to my massage with Megan, I was experiencing general soreness, fatigue, food cravings, inability to focus clearly and feeling a tad emotional. During the bodywork session, I began to feel an overall sense of rejuvenation and release. After my 90 minutes, I rose from the table feeling refreshed and with a clear mind that I hadn’t experienced in weeks. I wasn’t surprised, since I perused her websites and read through the plethora of raving testimonials from her very satisfied clients. I have had many massages on several different continents and nothing compares to the unique style of this massage and the healing touch of this gifted practitioner. This is my first step with Ayurveda, and there will certainly be many more to follow.

Perhaps Hippocrates was on to something when he said, “Foolish the doctor who despises the knowledge acquired by the ancients.”