

NEW YOGA STUDIO IN STUYVESANT HEIGHTS

By **Inquisigal/Rosie McCobb** | April 25, 2008

Yoga practitioners, health and wellness enthusiasts, and those curious to learn more about the benefits of yoga can finally skip the trek to Ft. Greene and stroll on over to Sweethome Yoga, a new yoga studio located at 357 Decatur Street, between Stuyvesant and Malcolm X Avenues. The studio, which is housed in the expansive ground floor of a rehabilitated brownstone, opened this past January, and is run by Bedford Stuyvesant resident Caroline Benezet. Ms. Benezet, who is a native of France, has been practicing yoga for over eight years, and was certified as a yoga instructor at the Golden Bridge Yoga center in Manhattan. Loosely translated, the word yoga means "union," which can mean different things to different people. In Ms. Benezet's case, providing would-be yoga students with a feeling of unity includes offering classes that combine traditional yoga postures with breathing exercises and meditation practices, as well as sponsoring workshops on nutrition and pre- and post-natal yoga.

There are several types of yoga classes available at Sweethome for beginners, more experienced yoga practitioners, and even kids. Vinyasa yoga, one of the types of yoga taught at Sweethome, originated in India and is defined by the fact that the yoga postures are always done as a series (sometimes referred to as a "flow"), in the same order. Incorporated into the "flow" are breathing exercises, which - combined with the postures - serve to heat up the body, and increase circulation so that toxins can be released. This type of yoga might be of special interest to those who wish to improve their range of motion and flexibility, as the practice will gently stretch stiff tendons and help build up the strength of hard tissue. Kundalini yoga, which Ms. Benezet explains is a "yoga of awareness, with a lot of meditation, chanting, and breathing exercises" is also offered at Sweethome. Kundalini is meant to create a union between the mind and body, which occurs when practitioners go through a series of physical movements that include controlled, deep breathing, as well as chanting and guided meditation. All combined, this practice contributes to stimulating one's energy, mental

clarity, and creative potential. And finally, the yoga for kids classes focus on teaching children yoga in a fun, easy-going way by including storytelling, music, art, and other forms of play. The benefit of kids learning yoga includes increased concentration, better balance and flexibility, and often makes the kids feel relaxed, and more self-assured.

Sweethome Yoga also offers workshops on nutrition, and how one's diet can effect one's body. The nutrition classes also discuss the powers of certain healing foods (did you know that red cabbage juice can be an instant cure for a sour stomach and heartburn?), what kinds of foods are good for each person's individual body type, and introduces participants to certain aspects of homeopathy and nutrition found in Chinese and Ayurvedic medicine. In the future, Ms. Benezet - who is in the last trimester of her first pregnancy, and due to give birth next month - will be teaching classes in pre- and post-natal yoga. Due to her pregnancy, she currently limits her teaching to a meditation class on Saturdays, so the yoga classes and workshops are taught by knowledgeable, certified yoga instructors like Cicely, who some may recognize from her classes at the Bedford Stuyvesant YMCA.

Ms. Benezet feels it's especially important to provide Bed Stuy residents with a yoga center that will not only allow seasoned practitioners to continue their practice and grow, but introduce the practice of yoga to people who might be skeptical about what yoga is all about. "This is not a gym," explains Ms. Benezet, "I want to introduce people to the practice of yoga, and what it's all about, so people will understand it's also a spiritual practice." Another one of Benezet's goals is to provide a welcoming, community space: "There aren't enough places in the community for people to meet," Ms. Benezet reflected as she slowly sipped on a piping hot glass of green tea. "Not only do I want to bring yoga to the community, but I also want to give people a space where they can have tea, chat, and hang out after class."

The main studio at Sweethome Yoga is a clean, sunny space, and is minimally decorated; it features soft white walls, hardwood floors, and lightly scented candles. Behind the studio is the after-class meeting area, which includes a Japanese-inspired kitchen stocked with a selection of herbal teas, a comfortable lounge area, and, during the warm months, visitors to

Sweethome will be able to sip their tea and chat with other yoga students in the back yard. Most classes last about an hour and a half, so after the final shivasana (relaxation period at the end of practice) students might appreciate the opportunity to come out of the deep relaxation of their practice in the privacy of Sweethome's shady, serene back yard before going back to the often noisy and fast-paced reality of the Brooklyn streets.

For those interested in learning more about yoga practice, Sweethome is offering a beginners workshop. It will be starting on **Saturday, April 26**, and will feature introductory lessons in yoga postures and philosophy. Yoga mats and blocks will be provided. The cost will be \$90, and will cover four classes of 90 minutes each, with detailed instruction at a slow, comfortable pace. Other yoga students can get updated class schedules and information by visiting Sweethome's webpage at <http://www.sweethomeyoga.com/>. Those interested in signing up for classes or workshops can contact Caroline Benezet at sweethomeyoga@gmail.com, or by phone at 347-529-0133. Students may also sign up in person by arriving 20 minutes before the start of each class or workshop, but please be advised that due to class-size limitations, it's best to register in advance. Sweethome accepts payment in cash only. Namaste!!