

NAPLES

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SHANNON AND
BEN FLEISCHER
At home in Naples
talking yoga, babies,
and business

THE WELLNESS ISSUE

BALANCED SUCCESS

*Local CEOs
ahead of the
work from
anywhere trend*

THE HOME EDIT

*Mood-boosting
room redos*

FROM THE EDITOR

Here Comes the Sun

In July 2014, we packed up our three kids in our SUV and moved from the Nutmeg State to the Sunshine State. While our furniture was en route in a moving truck, we rode for several hours and hundreds of miles. When we finally pulled into our new driveway, I could hardly believe that my husband, Michael, and I owned a house with palm trees and birds of paradise in the yard. We'd done it. We'd made a break from the rat race so intertwined with living and working in the New York metro area. It was a wonderful move. Our family lifestyle flourishes here with memorable sunset beachside barbecues, fishing trips in the Keys, and epic tennis and golf matches.

The downside of our big relo is that we are far away from our family and longtime friends. This past year, it's been especially hard to be such a distance from our parents, combined seven siblings, and 16 nieces and nephews. I haven't seen my mom and dad since November 2019, though we now talk on the phone at least twice a week. We have plans to see them on Long Island, New York, in July and I can't wait.

During our quarantine, I distracted myself from the grim news by taking long daily walks with my youngest daughter. We befriended other walking regulars, waving hello across the street. When my three kids were limited to homeschooling, they took much needed beach breaks to restore their spirits. Michael and I did a few sunrise sessions at the beach with our dog, which snapped me into a grateful mode that felt spiritual and reaffirming during a time of complete uncertainty.

I also read more books, tried new healthy recipes, and made a list of household projects that needed tackling. Something about crossing them off was satisfying. Weed and mulch garden beds—done. Power wash lanai and driveway—done. We turned our attention to messes inside our home. Understandably, not everyone is cut out for dealing with their own clutter. That's why there are professional organizers like the three local resources we interviewed beginning on page 90, just in time for spring cleaning. This story is part of the sub theme of this issue: reinvention. And so is our interview with the unstoppable Shelly Stayer, who talks about motivating to make a difference in the community on page 31.

Because many folks are feeling cooped up at home in colder climates, they're moving to Florida at a rate of nearly 1,000 people a day. Working from home is a long-term reality for many, so why not set up a laptop by the pool in paradise? Michael and I can't believe we were several years ahead of the move-to-Florida trend.

As part of the main theme of this issue—wellness—we feature two cool couples who, years ago, embraced the work-life balance that Naples offers. Pete Maldonado and his wife, Stephanie, met in Naples then moved to Chicago to start their marital journey. After Pete launched Chomps (now a thriving \$50 million healthy snacks business), he wanted to return to the Paradise Coast, where they now live with their two young kids. Another smart CEO is our cover guy, Ben Fleischer, who runs Pyure, an organic stevia company. He and his wife, Shannon, just welcomed baby boy Maxwell to their nest, and Naples time is even sweeter than they'd imagined (check out their story on page 72).

Here's to lessons learned over the past year. Have a good April.

Christina Cush

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REMY CUSH



WE MADE EASTER MORE FUN LAST YEAR BY TRIPLING THE NUMBER OF EGGS TO COLOR, WHICH OUR DAUGHTERS, REMY AND PIPER, WERE HAPPY ABOUT.



WE DID A TON OF QUARANTINE COOKING. HERE'S MICHAEL MAKING GNOCCHI WITH OUR SON, THOMAS, AND OUR DOG, TILLEY, HOPING FOR SOME FLANK STEAK.



INSIDER

NAPLES NOTES

THE SLEEP WHISPERER

One of Naples' newer residents, Mary Pat Wallace, is the founder of **The Luxury Bed Collection**. With locations in Chicago, Dallas, and now Naples, Wallace is parlaying her background in design and manufacturing into running a business dedicated to craftsmanship and finding clients their perfect custom mattress.

Wallace was one of those kids who'd lock her door and rearrange her entire room. When she was in high school, she hopped on a train from her suburban hometown to work for a designer in Chicago's Merchandise Mart. After graduating from college with an economics degree, she went to design school and landed a job in an Italian showroom. "That's where I learned a lot about manufacturing—kitchens, baths, lighting, upholstery, you name it," she says.

Once she returned stateside, she impressed Holly Hunt, a respected Chicago-based designer. "I traveled with her and got to see the best of the best quality and finishes—companies with serious family legacies," recalls Wallace.

Ready to branch out on her own after six years of Hunt's tutelage, Wallace had a "rep group in Chicago for 10 years and sold that business because my kids were little." That's when a friend showed her a mammoth Hästens mattress catalogue. "It was thrown on our breakfast table during vacation. I was fascinated by the 389 pages about materials, the family, the heritage."



MARY PAT WALLACE (TOP RIGHT) BEGAN SELLING MATTRESSES IN 2005 AND RUNS THE LUXURY BED COLLECTION.

Before she knew it, she was booking another trip—this time to Sweden to look at those mattresses for herself. "For me, a lack of sleep is worse than a bad hangover," she explains. "When you don't sleep well and you have to perform the next day, it's a disaster."

She turned her intrigue into a passion and opened the first Hästens store in North America in Dallas in January 2005. A second store followed in Winnetka, Illinois, in 2006. In 2009, in order to diversify and survive the financial crisis, she added more top-tier mattress manufacturers and complementary products and rebranded



her stores as Chicago Luxury Beds.

Now, after more than 15 years in the business, Wallace considers herself a sleep educator. She knows this past year was a challenge for many people, and some used it as a wake-up call to focus on their health and wellness, including getting a good night's rest. (*theluxurybedcollection.com*)—Christina Cush

COMMUNITY

A New Era for Naples Art

This year heralds a fresh start for the nonprofit **Naples Art** with the appointment of Frank Verpoorten as executive director and chief curator. Verpoorten brings a renewed vision for the organization that has been integral to the local arts and cultural community since 1954.

Many Neapolitans know Verpoorten from his previous role as director and chief curator of The Baker Museum at Artis-Naples. He is credited with advancing the extent and focus of its permanent collection during his six-and-a-half-year tenure, as well as bolstering sponsorships, gifts of art, endowment support, and underwriting.

Originally from Belgium, Verpoorten came to Naples with 20 years of curatorial and artistic leadership experience. His wife, Rachel, is a visual artist and teacher who has taught art classes to children and adults with intellectual and develop-

mental disabilities.

Inspired by his wife, Verpoorten will focus on educational enrichment and art instruction. "I value art education as much as I do art," he says. "Art does not solve problems but makes us aware of their existence. Arts education, on the other hand, does solve problems. It is linked to many things that we want for our children: academic achievement, social and emotional development, civic engagement, and equitable opportunity."

Verpoorten is also committed to excellence in exhibition programming. Both of these goals can connect, he notes, if Naples Art establishes an artist-in-residence program or visiting artist series. Those works can go on display, and those artists can offer high-caliber instruction to locals.

"I see a clear path forward for our organi-

zation," he says. "We don't need to radically rethink or adjust our mission, but we have critical needs. We need to ensure our programs are widely accessible, that they are more reflective of the diversity of our community. We have to modernize our image and become more vibrant and dynamic." (*naplesart.org*)—Cathy Chestnut



ESCAPE

TRAVEL JOURNAL

Extended HONEYMOON

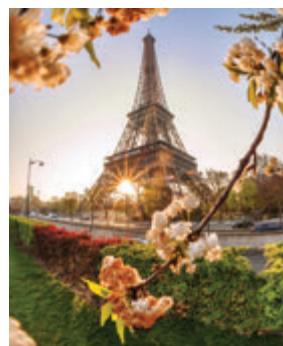
Ernie and Laura Wu met at a mixer for health and medical professionals at Tavern on the Bay in 2015. They married in May 2019 at The Seagate Beach Club and honeymooned in Tahiti. Ernie, an Ohio State graduate, has been a pathologist at Naples Pathology Associates for 18 years. Laura, who studied at the medical massage institute at the University of Maryland, is the owner of Bella Diva Fitness, where she provides fitness training and nutritional coaching. She also volunteers at Wellfit Girls as a coach and a mentor. Ernie shares her love of fitness and recently participated in a bodybuilding competition. In addition to biking and walking around Naples together, they savor family time with Ernie's children, Charles, age 15, and Hannah, age 13. Their favorite way to relax as a couple or as a family is on a vacation. "We get to shut off our busy brains, relax, and learn about other cultures, people, and food," says Laura. Though COVID-19 forced the Wus to cancel their trip to Greece, Egypt, and India, they took the kids to Majestic Dude Ranch in Durango, Colorado, last summer in order "to get away and be in the open air," says Laura. Greece is still on their radar for summer 2021, but time will tell. —Christina Cush



LAURA AND ERNIE WU IN ABU DHABI



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: POSITANO; ERNIE AND LAURA'S ENGAGEMENT IN POSITANO; PARIS; KAISEKI CUISINE; ERNIE AND LAURA WITH HANNAH AND CHARLES IN PERU.



NI: Did you escape without the kids during the pandemic?

Laura Wu: Ernie and I went to Napa for Thanksgiving week. There were restrictions on everything, but it was still amazing.

Do you ease up on your diet and workouts when you travel?

Absolutely! Ernie more so than myself. If I can fit it in, I'll do a quick 20-30 minutes or powerwalk a few times. I feel better when I get my blood flowing. Most of our vacations are pretty active anyway. Food—let's just say Ernie will be a food critic who travels the world one day. Wherever we travel, he likes to fully dive in to what that town is known for, and he will just splurge. I still eat mostly healthy and steal a few bites of his. Oh, and nightly drinks, of course.

Where have you been that you hope to revisit?

Gosh, we've been to so many places together—Paris, Japan, Taiwan, Dubai, Jordan, Russia, Finland, Sweden, Tahiti, Moorea, Bora Bora, Spain, New York, Alaska, Nashville, Asheville, Peru, Costa Rica, and the Galapagos. But we have been to Italy twice. The second time we went, Ernie proposed in Positano. I could go every year. We were supposed to take my parents this March as a birthday gift, but we will wait until spring 2022.

What's your favorite city to explore?

Venice or Paris. Shopping the spice market

in Dubai was pretty cool, too. Also, we loved Stockholm and the Vasa Museum [home to the Vasa ship].

Describe your favorite places to eat when you're abroad.

Gordon Ramsay's restaurant in London—OMG everything on the menu there! In Japan, we did a 30-course kaiseki meal at a ryokan. In Florence, we had a Parmesan wheel bowl at our table to coat our pasta and fresh truffles over a Florentine steak.

Have you had a favorite hotel?

Our bungalow in Bora Bora was surrounded by the clearest water and had a glass bottom main room.

Has there been a standout spa experience?

On every trip we usually visit a fun and exotic spa. I can't say this was the best, but being soaked in mud tubs in Calistoga on a Napa trip was by far the funkiest and most interesting.

Are there any travel tips and must-packs?

We rely on Rick Steves for info, and I need to bring a fan for white noise. My toiletry bag weighs about 8 pounds—and that's without makeup—so I take that bag in my carry-on, a big, classic Louis Vuitton. I buy a liter of water to take on the plane once we get inside the airport. And I always pack one of my Lululemon scarves in case I get cold on the flight.

FAVORITE THINGS



SHARON DELAURA WITH HER PARTNER, GARY

CHARLIE McDONALD

Sharon DeLaura has been making Naples more beautiful one face at a time throughout her 14-year career as an aesthetician. Currently a partner at The Laser Lounge Spa, she's well-known for her personalized facials. Originally a Jersey girl, she's also lived in Crystal Lake and Chicago, Illinois, and found her way to Naples 15 years ago. Naples is now home to her dad, Bill—whom her brother and sister in California and Washington often come to visit—and some of her childhood best friends. As someone who loves what she does, DeLaura says the evolving nature of her industry keeps it fun. “There are so many advanced nonsurgical, anti-aging methods and new ones being developed every day,” she notes. “I love learning and I love people.” She also makes a difference by supporting the Golisano Children’s Museum, PACE Center for Girls, Friends of Foster Children Forever, Path2Freedom, and the Humane Society. Though they’ve been keeping things more mellow due to the pandemic, DeLaura, her partner, Gary, and their 6-year-old Havapoo, Magnus, often head outside together to enjoy the mild weather. Here are DeLaura’s favorite local hot spots to...



OSTERIA TULIA

1

1. **Cheers to girls' night:** Capital Grille, Osteria Tulia, or The Continental
2. **Treat herself to flowers:** Driftwood Garden Center & Florist or Trader Joe's
3. **Have a date night:** Bleu Provence and Mediterraneo
4. **Get pampered:** For massage, we have someone who comes to our home. For hair, Rose at Billy's Salon Gallery. For nails, Creative Nail Spa in Vanderbilt Galleria.
5. **Watch the sun set:** Hideaway Beach on Marco
6. **Sip a business coffee:** Kunjani Craft Coffee & Gallery
7. **Grab lunch:** True Foods, The French, or Juicelation

Eat with her family: The French and Ocean Prime



2



4



6

8. **Get takeout:** True Foods or Sushi Thai
9. **Buy groceries or produce:** Whole Foods, Food & Thought, and Seed to Table
10. **Wear a cute outfit:** I love to wear a cute outfit wherever I go. —Christina Cush

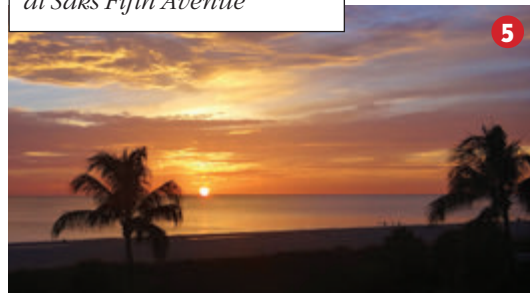


BLEU PROVENCE

3

AUDREY SNOW

Shop for a gift: Jo Malone at Saks Fifth Avenue



5



THE FRENCH

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