

HEALTH & BEAUTY

Pace Yourself

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PHOTOGRAPHS BY MALI AZIMA





Training day. The Pace Club founder Michael Ferguson (left) wants his 5,000-square-foot boutique fitness club to serve as an urban refuge, where clients tone their bodies, tune their minds and elevate their lifestyle.

A well-groomed young man in a crisp suit and tie greets me at The Pace Club in a thick, Danish accent. He then leads me through the swanky new sports club to the ladies room where my uniform, a gray logo-adorned T-shirt, awaits. We reconvene in his office. Seated behind a glass desk and a pair of black, square Dolce & Gabbana frames, he begins his questions. Do I sleep in the same bed as my husband? Do I stop at Starbucks more than once a week? Do I top drinks with whipped cream? Then he records my height and weight.

I then change into a swimsuit and head to Pace's diagnostics room, more specifically an egg-shaped capsule that calculates body-mass index (BMI). I feel nothing, save awkwardness, locked inside this pressurized, fat-measuring fuselage, with Pace's director, Michael Jensen, and his strict Scandinavian focus waiting with a tape measure and camera: If I did not have body-image problems before arriving, it's quite possible I might upon leaving.

Pace is more than an exclusive fitness club; it's a carefully curated business. Staff uniforms are Ralph Lauren Black Label. Everything inside the second-story, 5,000-square-foot space, including the concrete floor, metal lockers and chic seats, has been whitewashed to elicit the crystal-clear image of the healthy us twisted inside all our bad habits. Equipped with the sort of high-tech gear previously found only in professional sports-training facilities, the club offers individually tailored workouts

crafted by fitness, medical and nutrition experts. It's equal parts bodybuilding and consciousness expansion, with a healthy dose of style.

"Our number-one goal is to build behaviors," owner Michael Ferguson says. "We focus as much on the 23 hours spent outside the gym as the one hour spent here. A client's snapshot of their lifestyle is almost always totally different from the real

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picture when we take an honest look at habits."

As a young entrepreneur, the 32-year-old Ferguson, a former collegiate rower, traded workouts and a healthy diet for long hours at a desk and fast food. His business grew, as did his waistline. "I gained 80 pounds and tried everything from a personal trainer to fad diets to lose it, but there was no comprehensive strategy to reverse the self-sabotaging behaviors that landed me there in the first place," Ferguson quips. The experience inspired The Pace Club's approach. "The program is designed to reap benefits long after leaving the facility," he adds. "All of the extras are so that people look forward to coming."

For instance, one trainee wants to view Prada's 2008 Ready-to-Wear collection while on the treadmill, and another might want flowers alongside the pre-session warm organic bamboo-fiber towels.

Yet the more illusory, audacious promises of membership listed on Pace's website seem contradictory to this higher mind-body ethos. To wit: With a slimmer frame you will attract others and have great power to influence them. Being trim is your ticket to stardom, or at the very least, star treatment. "When the world is your stage," the website reads, "be prepared to be treated like the most coveted celebrity."

Appeals to our vanity notwithstanding, this Randian notion and its application to our culture can be a little off-putting—a small shrine to *Atlas Shrugged* is front and center at the club; the book is available for purchase on its website.

That there appears to be a hungry, if not built-in, audience for this play on our insecurities offers an opportunity to take a look in the mirror. Maybe using our image obsession as a path to good health is as good a route as any. ○