

Where Stillness Leads

A WOMEN'S RETREAT AT JOURNEY ON RANCH OFFERS EQUINE WISDOM, MINDFULNESS AND THE NATURAL BEAUTY OF PASO ROBLES FOR GUESTS IN SEARCH OF DEEPER CONNECTION.

Written by Diane E. Barber | Photographed by Journey On Ranch & Lori Sortino

Retreats have changed lives and shaped some of the world's greatest minds throughout history. In ancient times, Siddhartha Gautama (the Buddha) meditated under a sacred fig tree in India for 49 days in his quest to achieve *bodhi*, or spiritual awakening. Saint Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals and ecology, spent long periods in prayer in the Italian wilderness during the medieval era. American writer and philosopher Henry David Thoreau lived alone for two years in a woodland cabin during the 1800s, immersed in contemplation and self-reliance—an experience that inspired his famous book *Walden*.

Though separated by centuries and vastly different walks of life, all found meaning through a profound connection with nature, simplicity, solitude and living with conscious purpose. It is not surprising that centuries later, people are still drawn to the quietude of retreats as a respite from the noise and turbulence of today's world.

Earlier this year, Warwick and Robyn Schiller opened their arms—and the gates to their 42-acre Journey On Ranch in Paso Robles—for a weekend women's retreat called A Path to Sacred Ground. Warwick, a world-renowned horse trainer and clinician who hails from Australia, and his wife, Robyn, a California native, accomplished equestrian and wellness coach, share a lifelong passion for horses, nature and practicing mindfulness.

"Our ranch is a sanctuary for personal growth, equine-assisted learning, and gatherings centered around horses and human consciousness," shares Robyn.

Ten like-hearted women from around the country put their day-to-day lives on hold to participate. Prior

to arrival, they were invited to reflect on their reasons for attending and set an intention for the weekend. Daily "goddess affirmations" were also suggested, including "I am a beautiful and powerful expression of divine feminine energy," "I trust my intuition and inner knowing" and "I honor myself in all stages."

With rolling hills, grand oak trees, raptors dancing in the sky and distant vineyards creating a picturesque backdrop, everyone gathered on the stately veranda of the Schillers' home the first day. While Warwick was in the wings, minding the ranch and serving as "master of hospitality," Robyn took the reins to lead the retreat with her co-space holders, Dr. Heidi Hook, a naturopath and functional medicine expert, and Nicol Natale, a reiki master, yoga instructor and meditation guide.

Following introductions and a welcome meditation, a discussion about the grounding energy of the body's root chakra set the tone for the introspective weekend ahead. Dinner followed, the first of many outdoor "high-vibe" home-cooked meals prepared with local fare.

Candlelit yoga in the ranch's Wellness Center, a converted rustic barn, concluded the day before guests departed for nearby Airbnbs, including Lilac Farm, owned by Terranea Resort's former community relations director Gaye Vancans and her husband, Neil.

Saturday morning, Dr. Heidi led a Science of Safety workshop exploring personal energy vibration, nutrition, and the effects of stress, hormones, blood sugar and inflammation on the body. Her wisdom and spirited devotion to helping women uncover the causes of imbalance and find a path toward optimal health—re-calibrating mind, body and spirit—were captivating.

Afterward, the group practiced mindful movement





during an oak forest bath ritual, strolling through the property in silence and connecting more deeply with nature. The day closed with an intimate share-circle conversation and dinner on the veranda.

Sunday brought another full day of nurturance, learning and reflection in rhythm with the ranch and newfound friends. Morning yoga was followed by painting hand-selected rocks to add to the Wellness Center labyrinth before a hike to the arena. There, everyone convened in a seated circle around massage tables for the heart-opening experience of meditation and reiki with horses. The horses quietly approached and rested beside participants as they received healing sessions with Dr. Heidi or Nicol, intended to help restore energy balance.

“The intuitive presence of horses and their sensitivity and calm naturally facilitate regulation, trust and deep healing,” says Robyn.

The three-day soulful journey concluded that afternoon under the guidance of Nicol, whose passion for the dynamic nature of feminine expression and authenticity is at the heart of her work. She led an eye-gazing ceremony and inner-child healing workshop to deepen presence and self-love, then a closing circle beneath the trees.

Rejuvenated, grounded and inspired, everyone embraced and shared good wishes and promises to stay connected. As the group departed, a solitary oak tree high on the crest of a distant hill, seeming to keep watch over the ranch, stood as a silent farewell.

A myriad of retreats are offered around the globe—spiritual, educational, healing, physically rejuvenating, adventurous and more. Despite their differences, they share a common thread: the quest for self-realization and personal growth. And, on a deeper level, perhaps the search for spirituality’s holy grail—the elusive truth known as the meaning of life. ■

