

LEARNING CURVES

MEGAN DEEM SHIED AWAY FROM BEACHES AND BIKINIS, BUT EMBRACING THE PRO SURFING LIFE—AS A SPECTATOR—MADE HER WONDER WHY SHE'D BEEN SO AFRAID

Once upon a time, a hot, eligible, gainfully employed Italian man invited me to Miami for the weekend. I turned him down because I didn't want him to see me in a bathing suit. Two years later, I'm still single. The lesson here is twofold: Vacations with attractive foreigners don't present themselves every day, and body hang-ups are a drag.

The sight of me in a bikini, while not a crime against humanity, is something I've never felt comfortable inflicting on the general public. But if not now, when? Nora Ephron writes in *I Feel Bad About My Neck* (Knopf), "Oh, how I regret not having worn a bikini for the entire year I was twenty-six. If anyone young is reading this, go, right this minute, put on a bikini, and don't take it off until you're 34." I turn 33 next month, so my window of opportunity is narrowing to a peephole.

I could have lived with that had I not had a push: an assignment to assimilate with the surfer chicks hanging out on Hawaii's North Shore during last December's Rip Curl Pro Pipeline Masters, the final

stop on the men's pro surfing circuit. Add the possibility of kicking it with alpha-babe Kelly Slater, then ranked No. 1 on the tour, and I simultaneously book my flight and experience a panic attack.

GIRDING FOR BATTLE

My plan has four parts: body, brain, beauty, and bikini. For the first, I head to Manhattan's Peak Performance gym one month predeparture to train with co-owner Jay Wright. He's a surfer and a guy for whom body fat is merely a theoretical problem.

Instead of "hello," Wright says, "You won't see a dramatic physical change in this amount of time." Thankfully, there's one thing I *can* do over the next 30 days that will help me look like I belong on the sand: stand up straight. "Surfers have really good posture, because the higher they lift their chests off the board, the easier it is to paddle," he says. "This contracts the erector muscles in the lower spine and prevents slumping."

Twice weekly, Wright supervises as I perform (endless) sets of crossover push-ups (have to have those paddle-appropriate arms), push a 60-pound sled loaded



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ELLE BEAUTY BODY HEALTH *Bikini Boot Camp*

with 44 pounds of plates around the gym (strong glutes enable you to spring on the board when a wave comes), and balance on a giant Physioball while doing reverse crunches in an attempt to create some abs (duh). At least three other days a week, per Wright's instructions, I run two miles on the treadmill, varying my speed.

But if a flat stomach was all it took to feel beautiful on the beach, then skinny girls wouldn't wear caftans. Confidence distinguishes the world's Kirstie Alleys, ready to strip on *Oprah* (in the era of high-def!). To psych myself up, I go to a psychologist (and eating coach)—Stephen Gullo, PhD—in his tidy Upper East Side office. “Two pieces of clothing are the ultimate symbols of attractiveness: bikinis and jeans,” says Gullo, who also surfs. “To go through life and never wear a bikini is a great psychic deprivation for many women.” He points out what most of us know, but which seems to have more gravitas coming from a man with a doctorate from Columbia University: “Self-perception is often more powerful than reality.” Still, we agree I'd feel even better about myself minus a few pounds.

Gullo believes dropping weight comes from changing one's thinking about

Self sufficient:

Deem tries to act natural while strolling Hawaii's North Shore.



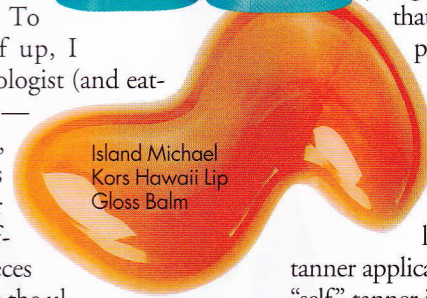
GG Scandinavian Bran Crispbread



Island Michael Kors Hawaii perfume



Shiseido Sun Protection Stick Foundation SPF 35 (in Ochre) is a UV guard of choice among pro surfers due to its thick coverage and lack of white residue.



Island Michael Kors Hawaii Lip Gloss Balm

me, are pressed for time, turn directly to page 195—“A-List Foods: The 10-Day Turbocharge Diet.” Gullo promises you'll lose up to 14 pounds by embracing fiber, low-fat dairy, seafood, eggs, and low-starch green or white vegetables (think broccoli and cauliflower). Three weeks and 15-odd pounds lighter, I can tell you it's not an idle boast. Note: You'll learn to love a 16-calorie piece of particleboard called a GG Scandinavian Bran Crispbread.

After all that time spent on hard labor, it's a relief to focus on those pesky matters of nails, hair, and skin. During the 48 hours before my flight to Honolulu, I devote evenings and lunch hours to getting prepped. Wende Zomnir, the executive creative director of Urban Decay (and, you guessed it, a surfer), tells me that even hard-core surf chicks paint their toenails sheer, iridescent shades (at last, common ground!). My colorist takes my hair from light brown to dark blond, and I dash to my local Equinox spa for a self-tanner application. (Is it still considered “self” tanner if you lie there like a lump while someone else rubs it on?) Equinox aestheticians use Sun Laboratories Sun lotion in Very Dark, which goes on the color of fudge and makes my essentially translucent skin appear as though it's not my first time out of the cave.

I still need the bikini. Michael Kors has a passion for tropical locales, including Hawaii, a place he's visited more than 10 times. He even named his recent fragrance—the orange flower, pineapple, and ginger lily—accented Island Michael Kors Hawaii—after our fiftieth state.

When we get together, he has returned from Thanksgiving in Waikiki ("I'm not ever going to get on a surfboard," he says, "but I love to watch"). "When people buy bathing suits, they get hung up on the size tag," he says. "Just forget about that; take three different sizes in the dressing room and see what fits."

Kors punctures the myth that high-cut bottoms minimize ample thighs. "That works if you have a big thigh that's firm," he says. "For a big thigh that's not firm, that's not a good idea. Not everyone's curvy body is Jennifer Lopez's." Instead, draw attention to your upper half with a halter-neck top. "They show off the shoulder and clavicle," Kors says. "Almost every woman looks good there." Regardless of your shape, forget about that sarong. "If you just tie one around your waist, you might as well wear a T-shirt that says I HATE MY BUTT," he says. "All that fabric has a tendency to make people look bigger. Throw on an easy little dress or a tunic instead."

Kors is no fan of makeup on the beach. ("Eww" is his exact word.) If you must, in addition to waterproof mascara, he okays lip gloss (he created a sheer orange version to go with his new fragrance). "Being in the sun is all about shine and gleam and having a face that's not matte. As soon as you put gloss on, it gives you that sense of fresh-out-of-the-water, healthy, maybe you have something with Kelly Slater," says Kors, reading my mind. "Who knows?" And I'm off to the airport.

CONFIDENCE GAME

As a precursor to my bikini debut, I plan to check out the sunbathers around the

pool at my hotel, the Turtle Bay Resort in Oahu. Pearl Jam is in town for a concert with U2 and staying at the Turtle Bay as well. I decide that the rocker crowd isn't a representative sample of the surf scene and instead head to Pipe, the stretch of beach where the competition is. Gullo tells me that once my feet hit the sand, I have to accept that I've done all I can. "Don't let the little that's imperfect ruin the joy of a good time," he says. If I waste my energy feeling self-conscious, I'll forget that I'm outside on a gorgeous, warm day while my officemates freeze in New York City.

The sand is populated with bikini-clad spectators, all possessing ridiculous bodies—ridiculously thin and unexpectedly fat. No one so much as glances my way. I stroll down the beach and back in my Kors-sanctioned suit. Still nothing. (Later, I learn that the only women who eschew cover-ups when strutting along the shoreline are "pro ho's" whose ultimate goal is to land their picture in *Surfer* magazine and a sponsored rider on their arm. Oops.) In my head, I keep repeating Gullo's advice and concentrate on having fun. And I do. So much so that I return—in my bikini—for the next two days. Later, I meet Slater (while in my street clothes), and he's gracious, friendly, and the color of wenge wood. We discuss skin care.

THE TIME IS NOW

Six months later, I've kept some things (the lighter hair, the lower weight) and ditched others (trainer Jay, I hardly knew ye). I've also gained something new: a genuine interest in checking out the season's latest two-pieces and an ardent desire to plan a tropical vacation. □

Mind Over Matter

CAN YOU LEARN TO LOVE YOUR BODY? IT'S WORTH A TRY

- **Get a massage:** Biweekly 30-minute rubdowns can boost overall body satisfaction, no matter what your shape or size, according to psychologists at the University of Miami School of Medicine's Touch Research Institute.
- **Stop counting calories:** Skipping meals may not make you feel better about your body. A study in *Journal of Counseling Psychology* found that women who eat when they're hungry and stop when they're full are happier with the way they look than those who adhere to strict diets.
- **Quit smoking:** University of Michigan researchers who tracked nearly 600 women observed that nonsmokers like their bodies more than their nicotine-dependent counterparts do.
- **Fish for compliments:** A study of 185 women at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, revealed that a single compliment on character or appearance is enough to improve a woman's body image.—ROOPIKA NAYAR

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