

CARLOS GOMEZ LIVES THE LIFE OF A YOGI, ONE OF PATIENCE, TOLERANCE AND DISCIPLINE.

The Vine Less Traveled

BY MICHELE MCMURRY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN GEIL

He also misses the ocean, the nose of a fine wine and his Mexico City grandmother's paella.

Happiness is about balance, Gomez says, transitioning seamlessly from surf talk to *Asampranjata*, what yoga practice defines as the highest super-conscious state.

The sommelier-turned-yoga instructor, well-versed in oenology and the 26 Hatha postures developed by Bikram Choudhury (which Gomez rolls off in English, French and Spanish), shares with TASTE his path to the 60-day challenge that changed his life.

RUTA DE VINO

Carlos Gomez de Orozco Garcia Lascurain was born in Mexico City and moved to Acapulco when he was 8. His father pursued a passion for cooking in Acapulco during the '60s before earning a master's degree in engineering from Stanford University. "People just weren't chefs then," Gomez says. His dad, he says, adopted a "flow chart" approach to cuisine, studying the principles of spices and flavor

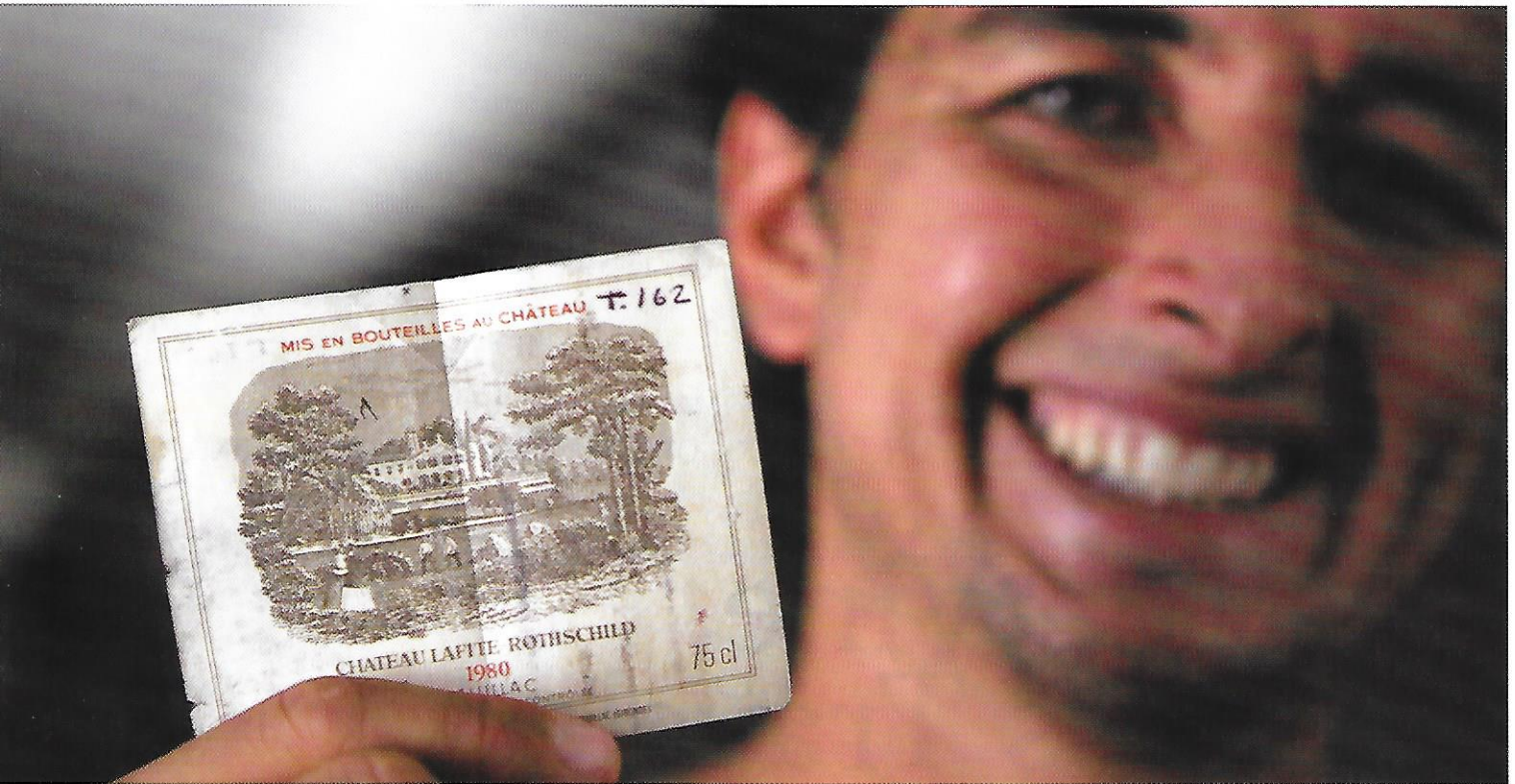
combinations to come up with his own recipes.

Gomez' mother, a student of applied mathematics and systems engineering, shared the enthusiasm for wine and food. "Mealtime was a two- to three-hour event," Gomez says with his contagious smile. "I love food; I definitely got that from him. My mom loves to have a good time, and I got that from her."

Gomez' love of wine came early on as well, during a one-year sojourn in Paris with an aunt who worked at the Mexican embassy. Enjoying wine as the French do at almost every meal introduced him to the concept of marrying wine with cuisine. In the late '90s, he studied oceanography at Universidad Autonoma de Baja California in the town of Ensenada, a then-emerging area for boutique wineries. After his first year of college, he befriended Paula Pijoan, daughter of vintner Pau Pijoan.

"He (Pau) taught me about making wine, harvesting, crushing and barreling," Gomez says. "They became

Salud!



my adoptive family while in college.”

At that time, Pijoan was at the forefront of the Escuela de Oficios movement that spawned interest in viticulture across Baja’s Valle de Guadalupe. Wines produced at Viñas Pijoan embrace the area’s hot and breezy terroir, and cater mostly to a sophisticated niche in Mexico City. “The vines are old enough now to where they’re making really good wines,” Gomez says. “They are the pride of Mexican wines; not many are exported.”

Challenged post-college with earning a living in oceanic research, Gomez returned to Acapulco, where he applied for a job at the Fairmont Princess Hotel. “I spoke several languages, so they hired me to run their cellar.” It had gone unmanaged for two years, he says.

The ’70s-glam hotel, where Howard Hughes spent his final years, offered a collection of auction-worthy labels.

“They had amazing wines,” Gomez says. “They were just there, and no one knew their worth.” His tastings included a 1980 (his birth year) Château Lafite-Rothschild. “I liked that I had those wines to work with.” He carries the label for luck.

The Fairmont also sent Gomez on winery visits guided by Mexican “rock star” sommelier Pedro Poncelis, who taught him a great deal about grapes and vines, wine making and pairing. A career in wine seemed meant to be.

RUTA DE KARMA

In 2008, Yoga College of India founder Bikram Choudhury hosted a yoga seminar at the hotel. “He bought a couple of good California cabs,” Gomez recalls. He also suggested that Gomez attend one of his courses.

“I had the idea that yoga was new age and boring,” Gomez says. “But it challenged me. After the first or second week, I could not believe what I noticed in me and people around me.”

Choudhury encouraged Gomez to complete teacher training, introducing him to world-renowned instructor Lisa Ingle, co-director along with Stevan Falk of Bikram Yoga San Antonio. “It’s not that I chose San Antonio,” Gomez says, “but rather Bikram wanted me to have the best teacher, and Lisa took me under her wing and mentored me.” Gomez met Ingle while completing a portion of his certification in Acapulco. He finished his training here and then joined the Bikram Yoga San Antonio staff.

Gomez, who faced possible knee surgery a few years ago due to a surfing injury, says he’s in his best shape now. “After two months of yoga, it was as good as new.” Asthma and intestinal problems? “Gone.”

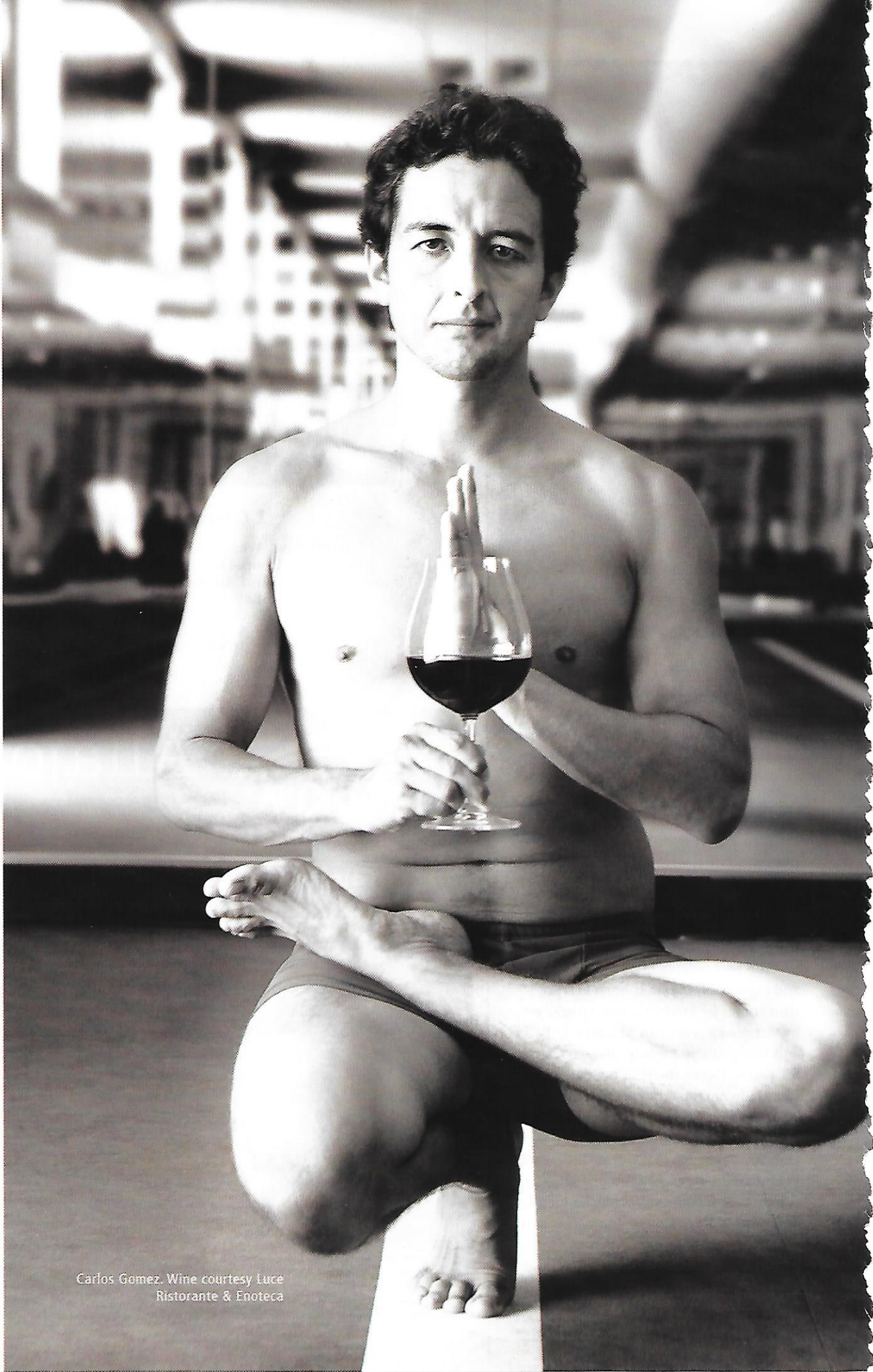
Plus, things just don’t bother him so much. “It builds a lot of mental discipline and focus, as well as tolerance and patience.”

Yoga, he says, continually detoxifies the body, for example *Pavanamuktasana* (Wind-Removing Pose), which massages the ascending and descending colons.

So, that glass of pinot noir fits with the program. “Everything goes as long as you keep it in moderation,” he says. In fact, he claims that wine and beer contain enzymes to help with digestion and that dark chocolate and red wine contain antioxidants that improve circulation.

“I truly believe it’s about balance. If it makes you happy, that’s important. With yoga, you naturally make better choices.”

Not to mention his surfing has improved.



Carlos Gomez. Wine courtesy Luce
Ristorante & Enoteca