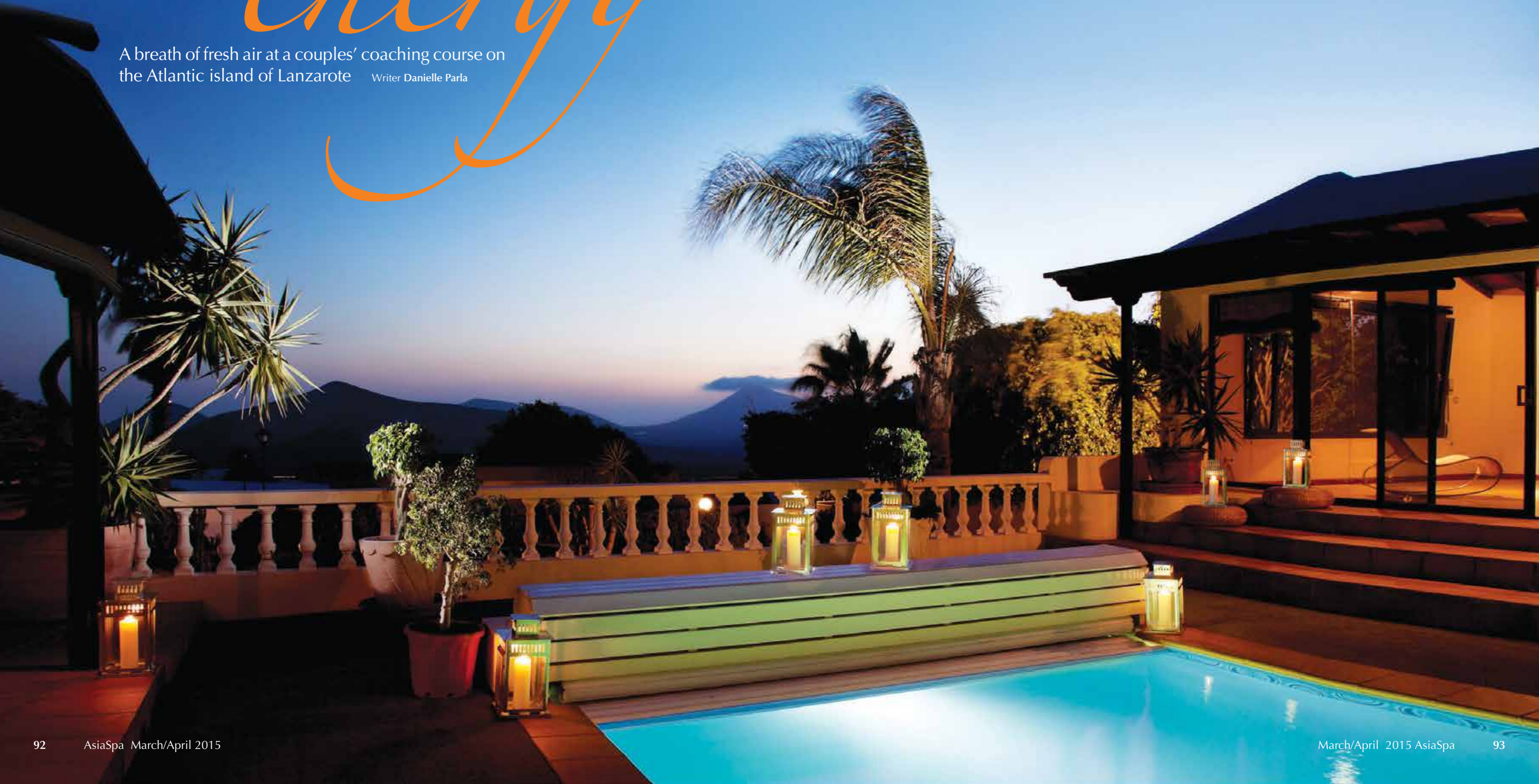


BONDING *energy*

A breath of fresh air at a couples' coaching course on the Atlantic island of Lanzarote

Writer Danielle Parla





OPENING PAGE: The retreat's pool at sunset. THIS PAGE: Take a soak in the private Jacuzzi at The Loft. OPPOSITE PAGE: The retreat is located on the small Atlantic island of Lanzarote; the lounge area is spacious



night concludes with a private soak in the Jacuzzi under the full moon.

DAY 1

We wake to a typical Lanzarote winter day; sunny and 18 degrees, and gather in the kitchen for our energising breakfast smoothies. We are happy that the meals on the retreat are healthy, satisfying and vegetarian to ensure that the deep emotional processing is supported from the inside out.

After a brief meeting, my husband and I part ways as he receives the first of his daily massages, and I join Dolan for my first Transformational Breath session. As a yoga teacher, I am deeply aware of breathing techniques, both in theory and practice. However, nothing could have prepared me for the power of the session I received. Lying on a large floor mattress surrounded by pillows, I lie back and start the TB practice with Dolan's guidance and support. Breathing with a connected belly breath through an open mouth, tears begin to flow and vocal tones that would make Pavarotti proud. With no concept of time, my body feels electric, like I have plugged into an energy source. My knees tremble as

the energy flows up my legs and the palms of my hands and the crown of my head feel as though light energy is radiating from them. My breath becomes freer and easier. Even when the session is over, it feels like hands are gently pressing against the front of my shoulders to keep this expansive and utterly peaceful connection with myself and source open. As my husband has his breath session with Dolan, I am taken under the thoughtful care of their massage therapist Martin, who gives a gentle and relaxing massage to bring ease to my body and mind.

With broad smiles and big appetites, my husband and I sit down to a lunch of courgette and lemon soup, spanakopita, and hummus on a patio that is as sunny as our mood. We share our experiences as we eat and retire to the poolside loungers. During my afternoon relationship session with Lancaster, she respectfully enquires about my history to give her an understanding of the dynamics of my family and how they play out in my relationship with my husband. I feel heard and supported during the session and look forward to what the week will bring.

Together at dinner, we are spoilt with delicious Greek cuisine before retiring to

Arriving in the Canary Islands, the volcanic landscape of Lanzarote is barren, dramatic and worlds away from our home in Switzerland. We are here for a private Relationship Reconnect retreat with Alan Dolan and Donna Lancaster – two highly sought-after coaches who work in Europe, Asia and the US. Dolan will dedicate the week to work with our breathing, while Lancaster will focus on our relationship, and their combined skills sound perfect for couples in crisis as well as those who wish to strengthen their commitment and love. Celebrating my two-year anniversary with my husband on the retreat, I couldn't wish for anything more than being placed in expert hands of Dolan and Lancaster to ensure our relationship grows from strength to strength.



Passing volcanic fields and the Atlantic coast, we arrive just as the sun sets on a majestic mountain vista and Dolan shows us to the main villa as well as our private villa The Loft, with a congenial 'mi casa es su casa' invitation to our stay. Separated from the main villa by the swimming pool, The Loft is a bright contemporary space embellished with hints from the East. From our elevated location, there is a sense of spaciousness and anticipation as I cast my eyes over the distant white villas and ocean.

Later, we gather to dine on delectable tapas and a gourmet Mexican vegetarian dinner prepared by their talented chefs Rebecca and Tracy. The conversation is natural and relaxed and it is evident that Dolan and Lancaster are passionate about their work and the magic of the island. Our



THIS PAGE: The cosy therapy room allows guests to feel at home. OPPOSITE PAGE: The retreat's private swimming pool

our villa to do a short self-practice breathing session before bed.

DAY 2

Transformation is in the air as we wake to a windy day. We throw back our daily ginger and apple juice shot and drink our smoothie before joining Dolan for a short couples' breath session. I am surprised at how the rhythm of the breath is taking root and I feel shifts in my being and my connection to my husband. Afterwards, Dolan takes us outside and guides us through a standing

visualisation to help us ground and connect to the earth. While I am excited to meet Lancaster, my husband is a bit nervous about our first couples' coaching session. He is quickly put at ease by Lancaster, whose experience as a social worker and relationship coach shines through.

This work builds a ferocious appetite and we are curious to see what gourmet delights will be served for lunch today. We are delivered a rainbow in the form of beetroot, tomato and pomegranate salad, mushroom quiche and rucola salad. At this

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rate I will never want to leave or I will just have to convince their chefs to move to Switzerland.

Later, I have a long breath session with Dolan that focuses on the root chakra – the place where our security and safety resides. The session is powerful and leaves

me feeling renewed, empowered and more whole. I swap places with my husband who is sporting a relaxed grin as he comes down from his massage with Martin. Today's massage focuses on moving energy down into the lower part of the body using the subtle but deep technique of fascial release on the belly and rib area, hips and legs. Tonight we are left to dine alone and like new lovers, we share our experiences from the day with great enthusiasm.

DAY 3

We wake to our third morning laughing that we have not even stepped outside the gates of the villa and yet our full days have

unfolded perfectly without want of anything else. We greet Lancaster and Dolan and go over the day's schedule of breath session, massage and couples' therapy. The shifts I am witnessing in my physical and emotional well-being are extraordinary and I can't wait to begin. During a long breath session I am convinced that I have tapped into the cosmic power station as my body vibrates with light, energy and pure bliss...I feel in awe of the universal intelligence of my body and spirit in their wish to heal.

At the end of the day we have a profound session with Lancaster that shifts and heals many things for my husband. It takes courage to do this work and it is evident that

the rewards are life-changing. It will be my turn tomorrow...

DAY 4

Today is all about observing. Being witness to sensations in the body and emotions as they arise sounds much easier than it is – but thankfully our morning massage and breath sessions guide us to awareness.

Working with Lancaster, I come to appreciate the power of working through the family baggage and see how it influences my relationship with my husband. After his session alone we meet her together to walk me through my own process of releasing grief. Lancaster is a





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Dolan likens the experience to “watching a black-and-white TV and then changing to a high definition technicolour”. This session leaves no question in my mind that Transformational Breath invites health and clarity and opens the door to authentic living.

Today, Lancaster helps us release the story of our ancestors and affirm our future with each other. She masterfully weaves rituals into our sessions and this particular ritual touches my husband very deeply. Dolan and Lancaster leave us alone for the evening to celebrate all that we have learnt, loved and languished. Like kids alone without our parents, we soak in the Jacuzzi tub and lavish over a delectable Indian dinner.

DAY 7

It's our final day in Lanzarote and we are both excited and sad to be leaving. I am touched

by Dolan and Lancaster's wholehearted dedication to shift relationships from good to great, and from crisis to connection. These two exceptional human beings have expertly woven relationship coaching and breath work and far exceeded my expectation of a typical couples' getaway where romance is refreshed in the absence of daily stresses. On the contrary, Relationship Reconnect has illuminated our relationship and gifted us with valuable tools to grow our love, respect and commitment to each other.

I feel the island of Lanzarote has also played a subtle but significant role in supporting us to uncover, process and grow. At first glance the barren volcanic landscape may lack the appeal of the palm covered tropics – but I truly believe that the potent energies of fire, earth, air and water have supported the transformation in ourselves and ultimately, our relationship.

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THIS PAGE: The swimming pool separates the main villa and The Loft. OPPOSITE PAGE: Suites at The Loft are decorated with pieces from Indonesia, Turkey and Spain

gifted relationship coach who is passionate about the role of grief in our lives. She explains how grief is well recognised within the context of bereavement, but that it can also manifest from past relationships, illness and our family life. The subject of her new book, grief contains sadness, anger and fear and it tends to show up as depression and anxiety when we aren't able to experience loss fully.

DAY 5

My final massage with Martin prepares and

sets the tone for the powerful breath session with Dolan. My capacity to experience and stay present to the breath is growing exponentially and I really understand how a session of Transformational Breathing is said to be like two years of psychotherapy. I get up from the session resembling a newborn fawn – a bit unsteady in the legs and with a child-like wonder I take in the vivid colours, sounds and smells of the island. Today, we step out for the first time in six days to have lunch in a little township called Caleta de Famara. The warm and

windy day is invigorating as we stroll along the long sandy beach flanked by colossal cliffs that form the highest points of the island. As we watch surfers chase waves we acknowledge a sincere and renewed energy in our relationship.

We return to the villa for a long and transformative session with Lancaster to look at something called transference in psychology and how the patterns of our family influence our relationship with each other. You could call it an 'aha' session, and we discuss its effect over dinner, and return

to our villa to do our homework.

DAY 6

During my long breath session, I am again reminded at how intelligent and also mysterious the body is. I feel more in tune with the continuous flow of my connected breath and then out of nowhere energy surges through my heart and sobs overcome me. Dolan gently guides me and the energy dissipates, leaving my heart feeling wide open. At the end of the session I am speechless but smile in agreement when