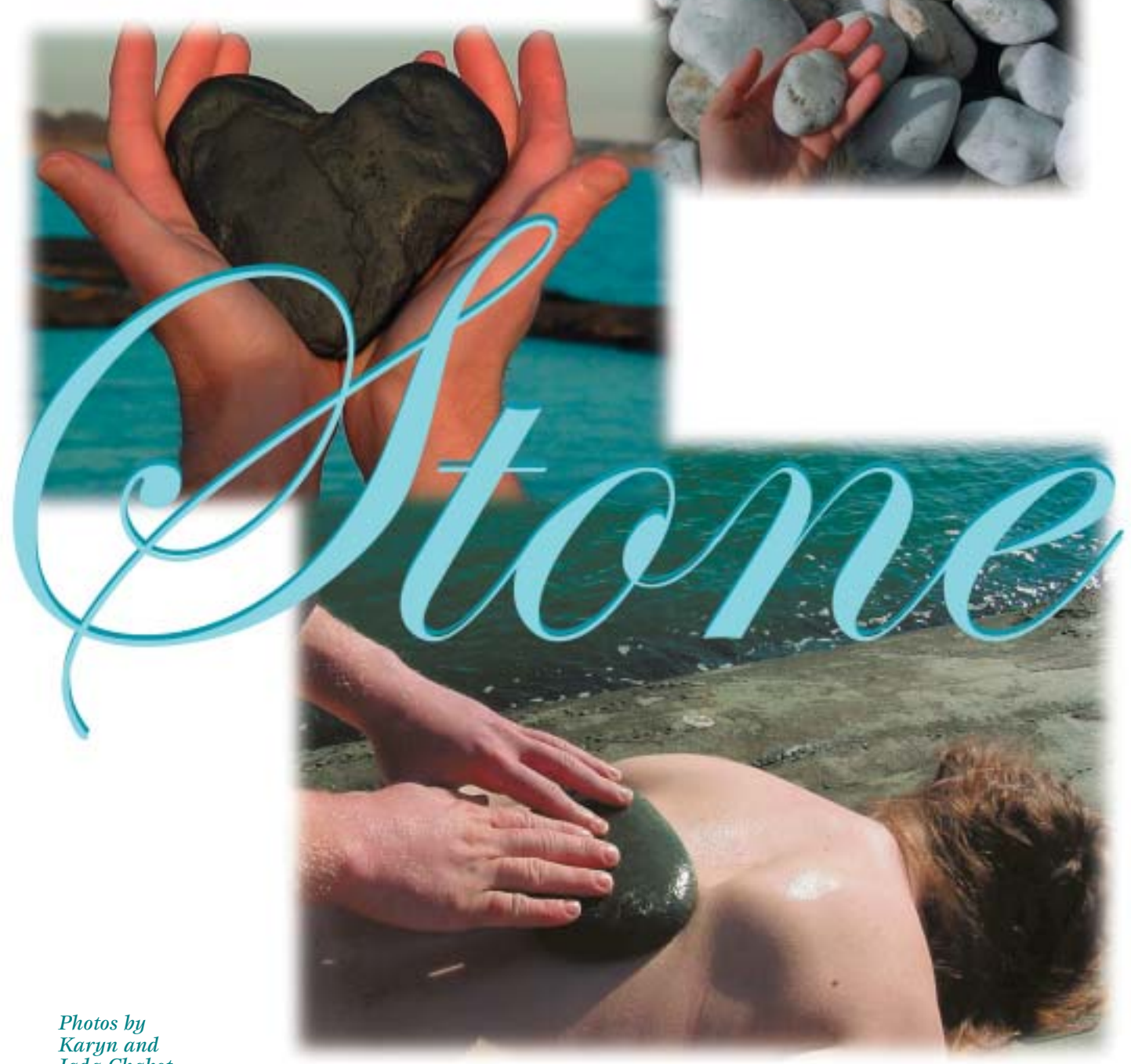


The  
*Breath*  
within the



*Photos by  
Karyn and  
Jada Chabot*

“Stones are  
alive, but  
they are in a  
sweet coma.”

Some of the most progressive healers in the world

have begun using stones in their massage work – not to replace healing hands, but as an adjunct

to traditional massage, facials and healing treatments of all kinds. Stone massage is an ancient, enduring form of therapeutic bodywork using heated and cooled stones as extensions of the hand. It is a harmonious collaboration of healing energies between the client, the therapist and the stones. Be mindful that the beauty of this therapy, and all therapies, is manifested by the transference of deep compassion and trust between the therapist and the client. This compassion becomes imprinted within the matrix of each stone.

Pointed, textured stones are used as tools for deep sports massage. Round, flat, warm stones are laid as balancing agents upon specific energetic points along the body, otherwise known as chakras. Smooth, velvety stones are heated in water, then glided with firm pressure along oiled, sore muscles. Cooled white quartzite stones refresh the face (especially after waxing), refine the pores and soothe inflamed skin. For some people, stone therapy can bring deep tissue release and alignment between body, mind and spirit. For others, it means gently allowing the heat of the stones to soften tension and melt worries away. The experience of an eloquent, deep, structurally restorative and spiritually uplifting stone massage is unsurpassed in its transformational potential. The key is in finding a skilled stone therapist who incorporates highly textured and charged stones at a comfortable room temperature with traditional hand and elbow massage. Add in just enough patience and healing intention and the stage is set for bodywork bliss.

Most people who have experienced good stone massage work will typically use the adjective “grounded” somewhere in the description of how they felt as the stones were glided across or laid upon their body.

– Dr. Vasant Lad, Ayurvedic physician

Skilled stone therapists are taught to work with the Earth energy, which follows the downward flow in the body called *apana vayu*, a Sanskrit term. The purpose of stone massage is to anchor the root

(*muladhara*) chakra and the second (*svadhisthana*) chakra of the body. These chakras help our bodies stay connected to the Earth. Many people in our technological society feel disconnected, rushed, high on coffee, over-stimulated and stressed out. The quietude we are in search of comes from within. The warmth, energy and texture of the stones help distract us from our busy, scattered minds, imparting a quiet focus. This is especially true when using sea stones, as they soothe the body on all levels, similar to the waves of an ocean. When a stone therapist works with the downward flow in the body and anchors the lower chakras, the client experiences an oasis which restores wholeness and balance in a world where people eat their lunch while they are driving and read their e-mail while listening to their voicemail.

According to the principles of Ayurveda, we are microcosms of the macrocosmic universe. Within the universe exist five basic elements: ether, air, fire, earth and water. Ayurveda classifies these five elements into three aspects referred to as *doshas*. In order to function, all three doshas must exist within the body. What makes us unique is the preponderance of the doshas within the body when we are conceived and then born into the world. Keeping these doshas in balance is the key to staying healthy. Stress, negative thoughts, feeling disconnected, wrong food choices and lack of exercise are just some of the things that throw us out of balance.

What are the three doshas? First, *vata* means “what blows.” It represents the ether and air elements (wind) within the body. These elements are high on cold, windy days during the fall and winter. When *vata* within the body is out of balance, people tend to experience anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, paranoia and



*There are some things which greatly reduce the Shakti in the stone. Mechanically tumbled stones have less healing power than stones that have been naturally tumbled by ocean waves.*

loneliness. Second, *pitta* means “what cooks.” It represents the fire and water elements within the body. These elements are high on hot summer days. When *pitta* within the body is out of balance, people tend to experience self-condemnation, jealousy, anger, competitive thoughts and aggression. Finally, *kapha* means “what sticks.” It represents the earth and water (mud) elements within the body. These elements are high in the spring and on cold, snowy days in the winter. When *kapha* is out of balance, people experience greed, lethargy, apathy and heaviness.

After carefully observing clients and friends, the most common complaints I hear are stress and anxiety, which consequently derange the *vata* dosha within the body. When the *vata* dosha is out of balance, it can blow the other doshas around causing an overflow of these other energies. That’s why keeping *vata* in check is crucial. There are specific bodywork techniques and lifestyle choices that pacify and calm the *vata* dosha. I have implemented these principles into the art of stone massage and esthetic bodywork called Sacred Stone Therapy.

### **Shakti Factor Within the Stones**

In the Vedic tradition, *Shakti* can be described as the feminine vibration of *prana* in the cosmos. It is the counterpart to *Shiva*, the vibration of the male aspect. *Prana*, in Asian medicine, refers to *ki* or *chi* – life force. It is also a Sanskrit word meaning “before breath.” The *Shakti* factor in stones is literally the divine breath of the Mother within the stone. We know that atoms are made of swirling microcosms of energy, of life. Holding a stone is analogous to cradling a living stone galaxy within the palm of your hand. It is a microcosmic house of energy we can call divine. It tells us that life really matters since matter has life. In Latin, the word “matter” is cognate to mother (*mater*).

There are some things which greatly reduce the *Shakti* in the stone. Mechanically tumbled stones have less healing power than stones that have been naturally tumbled by ocean waves. Polishing a stone can be akin to sunburning human skin. It is a mechanical process that weakens the stone. When a stone is polished, the surface undergoes a sealing process, greatly reducing or even eliminating its frequency altogether. A stone’s chemistry, the frequency at which it vibrates and its geometrical form will determine its healing potential.

## The Stone Radiance Variable

Stone massage is a form of thermal hydrotherapy. If you integrate cool stones, then it's a form of cryotherapy as well. When you alternate the temperatures, it's called contrast hydrotherapy. This will expand and constrict the blood vessels, stimulating vascular gymnastics and supporting lymphatic drainage. Consequently, the skin will appear rosy and firm, pain and swelling will be reduced, and vitality will be restored.

Stones radiate heat at various intensities. According to clinical research, the term *stone radiance variable* can be described as the measured length and rate of time in which a stone gives off heat.

Professor Don Hermes at the geology department of the University of Rhode Island said, "New England sea stones can be classified as metamorphic, igneous or sedimentary. In Rhode Island, the stones are mostly igneous." Stones are rated in terms of high, medium and low thermal radiance. New England sea stones tend to give off heat at a slow, steady rate for an enduring period of time. They would be considered to have a high stone radiance variable.

Stones found along the inland rivers, near dormant volcanoes, tend to get hot very quickly, increasing the burn factor. The rate at which they give off heat is intense, accelerated and sometimes unpredictable. Basalt stones would be considered to have a low to medium radiance variable and are typically the stones available by mail order, over the Internet or used in popular spas. →



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### The benefits of stone bodywork

- Irons out tight muscles, softening the tissue with heat.
- Sedates the central nervous system when the stones are laid upon the spinal column.
- Increases circulation and vitality.
- Improves the tone of visceral organs.
- Aids in elimination by stimulating peristalsis.
- Relieves sinus pressure.
- Reduces inflammatory conditions with the use of cool stones.
- Adds pranic energy, or chi, to the session since stones are living, swirling microcosms of energy.
- Grounds the body by reducing the wind (vata) element within the body.
- Increases kinesthetic awareness of the body by alternating textured and smooth stones.
- Incorporates sound and vibration, i.e., clicking, tapping.
- Residue of sea salt from sea stones purifies and balances the electromagnetic field.
- Reduces cellulite dramatically when used with castor oil.
- Gently exfoliates the skin, enhancing liver function.

## How does stone bodywork soothe the attributes of vata?

**Dry:** Stone bodywork is a form of hydrotherapy. The stones are heated in water and the dampness of the stones hydrates the skin. The oil used to massage the skin also reverses dryness.

**Rough:** The softness in the voice of the therapist helps reduce the rough quality of vata. The silky stones smooth over rough areas. The colors and lighting in the treatment room should be soft.

**Hard:** An extra soft cushion, pillows/bolsters and cozy blankets on the massage table will take away the bumpy, hard feeling of the stones under the body. The stones will sink deeply into the cushion.

**Subtle:** Stones are anything but subtle. They belong to the Earth element. Also, the humble confidence of a skilled stone therapist is almost tangible. A soft, but firm, touch will ease any insecurity.

**Mobile:** The stone layouts encourage absolute stillness and give the client a sense of quietude, much like the corpse pose at the end of yoga class. A blue sodalite or lapis is placed on the throat chakra to prevent excess chattiness. Too much idle chatter increases the mobile quality of vata.

**Light:** The stones and sandbags add the quality of heaviness. The stones add a compression factor which triggers a relaxation response. The touch of a skilled stone therapist will ground the client. The lighting in the room should be dim. Copious amounts of warm oil add a heavy, cozy quality.

**Cold:** The heat from the stones, oil, warm towels, warm colors and warm room will reduce the cold qualities of vata. The only time to use cold stones would be in cases of inflammation like tendonitis. In this case, the therapist would surround the site with a cocoon of cold stones. The face is also a site of pitta, so cool stones on the face will not disturb the cold attributes of vata. The therapist should have a compassionate heart.

## Sacred Geology 101

Practitioners who wish to use stones for massage can find them within close proximity to their homes, healing centers or spas, and along beaches or riverbeds. New England beaches are blessed with an abundance of smooth and textured stones of all colors which are ideal for heated and cooled stone massage. Stones found along the coastlines reflect the kind of bedrock at their source (usually not too far away). Since the local bedrock can be quite diverse, the stones at the coast can also vary from one locale to another. Along the west Rhode Island coast, for example, most of the stones are various granites and metamorphic gneisses derived from nearby stones to the north.

New England stones were made from bedrock several million years ago. Hermes said, "The volcanic igneous stones were erupted; the intrusive igneous stones were intruded into the crust. Both were derived from molten magma in the mantle or the more shallow crust." Without getting too technical, we can simply call New England sea stones mineral composites. "These stones consist mostly of igneous and metamorphic minerals, the most common of which are quartz, feldspars, micas and some accessory magnetite amphibole," he said. These stones consist mostly of granitic, metamorphic minerals. Some granites even contain small amounts of magnetite, which make them slightly more magnetic. Magnet therapy is a highly effective way to realign the electromagnetic field of the body, reduce pain and accelerate healing. Stones act like magnets on a subtle level, drawing out repressed emotion, deep sorrow and pain, and transforming them if the client is ready for transformation. They help reorganize the structure of the energetic human anatomy and assist in polarizing imbalances within the physical body. Nearly all minerals possess some magnetic character.

Darker stones tend to get hotter and stay hotter for longer periods of time. These have the most iron and the highest magnetic intensity. The grayish stones can get very hot too, but they don't get as hot as the darker ones. The differences are subtle. Be aware that using the hottest stones can also increase the potential to burn. The gray stones are safe, predictable and easy to work with. Therefore, it is best to use a mixture of many different colors, shapes, textures and minerals.

## Textural Distinction

Some stones have a slightly more velvet surface with some non-abrasive edges, while others are silky smooth and perfectly round. It's like the distinction between velvet and silk. The textured, velvet surfaces are perfect for deep massage as they grip the connective tissue. Their high skin-gripping factor means they don't slip off the body. The silky stones tend to slide along with greater ease, making them ideal for gliding on sensitive

areas of the face. The textured stones slightly exfoliate the skin, gently increasing kinesthetic awareness, bringing the client back into their skin, so to say. The textured stones are more porous by nature, giving them a sponge-like action. This sponge action soaks up energetic debris, negativity and bacteria. As a result, textured stones need more recharging and physical cleaning than silky ones. Silky stones are less porous and wonderful for a light, refreshing massage. But when they begin to cool down, they can be confused with the smooth surface of the palm of a hand. Their radiance variable is low, which means the rate in which they give off heat is fast, intense and sometimes unpredictable – especially if they are basalt. Consequently, silky stones can be too hot and slippery to place directly on the skin. While some New England sea stones are silky smooth, the majority of them have a velvet textural distinction.

### The Dosha-genic Color of Stones

Some stones have subtle color variations that help with the bodywork process, as each color corresponds with one of the three doshas. A greenish hue is indicative of oxidized parts of copper sulfide deposits. This muted green soothes the attribute of oiliness and edema in both the pitta and kapha doshas. Some stones may have foliation or stripes of muted reddish colors or burnt orange, colors which soothe the oily attributes of both pitta and kapha. These colors have a balancing effect on the copious amounts of oil that abhyanga (oil massage) indicates.

A clear pink color can soothe the attribute of heaviness in the kapha dosha, which is responsible for deep-seated grief and sadness. A clear rose quartz is very effective when it is placed on the heart marma point. If a client is experiencing heavy grief due to the loss of a loved one, then a raw, unpolished ruby would be appropriate at the heart marma point. A ruby may also be placed on the third eye as it amplifies the energy of the pituitary, promoting mental concentration and sharp intuition. This is why many yogis and gurus choose to wear a red bhindi or mark between their brows.

Stones that are muted blue gray can soothe the attribute of heat and lightness in the pitta dosha. This color instills peacefulness, removes anger and nourishes the auric field. Blackish brown stones soothe all the doshas, since black is a mixture of all colors.



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during stone massage, as it interferes with the work of the stones.

If a client has a ruptured, herniated or deteriorated disk, bony protuberances or osteoporosis, don't use heavy stones directly over the spine. Counsel clients to avoid having a micro-dermabrasion, waxing, glycolic acid peel or any other professional peel within one week of a heated stone facial. Never put cold stones and crystals in the client's hands, as the hands are extensions of the heart. Cold temperatures constrict and repress emotions, shutting down the heart chakra. An exception to this guideline is people with high pitta conditions, since pitta represents the fire element in the Ayurvedic tradition. If a client is in an angry mood, turn down the temperature of the heating unit or do a traditional massage without heated stones.

For the angry client, use cool white quartzite stones on the face. If a stone slips off an area more than once, use your intuition as to why. It may be an indication the stone doesn't need to be on that body part. Stones have consciousness and awareness. A particular stone that has fallen or slipped off should possibly be removed because it needs to be recharged or it should be placed on a different area of the body.

Utilizing stones in your practice can offer entirely new levels of therapy. Bringing cohesion to the body, mind and spirit, infusing pranic energy, offering magnetic health properties, increasing vitality and circulation, and decreasing inflammation are just a few of the avenues stone work can address. And that's not even taking into account the benefits of stone work to the therapist. Many therapists turn to working with tools, especially stones, after injuring their own hands. Stones can attack knots efficiently and quickly without hurting the therapist. Bodyworkers also reap the rewards of the warmed stones as they work not only on the client, but by default, on the therapist's own hands.

There is much to be understood about working with stones, including the spiritual element they bring to the table, but by the reaction of clients and therapists alike, there is great promise to be realized. **M&B**

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### Conditions that reduce the Shakti factor within stones

- Storing stones in plastic bags without thought or exposure to the elements.
- Harvesting stones without prayer, gratitude and reverence for Mother Earth.
- Mechanically tumbling or polishing stones.
- Overusing bacteria-ridden stones that have never been recharged.
- Using harsh chemicals on the stones.
- Using the stones without respect.

### Conditions that increase the Shakti factor within stones

- Instilling your stones with mantra, prayer or reiki.
- Harvesting your stones according to the cycles of the moon with reverence, gratitude and honor to Mother Earth.
- Storing your stones in sacred geometrical patterns or piling them in the form of Buddhist stuppas or shrines.
- If the stone was given to you by a child or as a gift.
- Exposing your stones to an electrical storm (notice how they subtly vibrate in your hand).
- Cleaning your stones with gentle soap and recharging them.
- Borrowing them from the Earth for healing purposes only.
- Arranging them outside for three days in the sun and rain.
- If your stones are from the sea, bring them to the shore and give them a quick bath or fill a bucket up with sea water to pour over them.
- Smudging the stones with frankincense or sage.
- Placing them on top of a large amethyst geode crystal cluster for three days will automatically clear your stones and crystals.
- Placing them in the freezer for three days or soaking them in milk for three days will remove negativity.
- Surrounding them with white light.
- Music and mantra will allow your stones to sleep sweetly in their comas.