



BETH M. HOWARD

# SHAPE

JOE  
WEIDER'S

**Review:**  
Best new  
running,  
walking  
and sports  
shoes

## Fab Abs, Butt & Thighs

**9 SUPER SCULPTERS THAT  
HIT YOUR TARGET ZONES**

Start losing  
weight now  
**How to get and  
stay motivated**

## Spring Leaning

**Shape up with our  
backyard boot camp**

**TOP 10 ADVENTURE TOWNS**

April 1998





## escapes

ever since I watched the movie "The River Wild," I've wanted to learn to row. In the opening scene, Meryl Streep's double looks so strong, athletic and centered sculling on Boston's Charles River in the morning fog. This peaceful, romantic notion combined with rowing's reputation as an ultimate all-body workout was what prompted me to go to Lake Austin Spa Resort in Austin, Texas, the world's only spa with a year-round sculling program.

On day one, Clay Felker, the water sports coordinator, wasted no time launching me onto the water, no instruction first, in a double shell. Long a fan of learning by doing, I didn't mind. We immediately began moving down Lake Austin. The jade-colored lake, with its slow-moving current and warm temps (about 60 degrees) struck me as the idyllic place to test my oars. (You use two oars in sculling, one in crew rowing.) Wind, thunderstorms and motorboats are a rower's only potential enemies.

Once in the boat, Felker instructed me to push against my sock-clad feet secured in straps, extend my legs, let the seat slide back on its rails, pull straight back on the oars, pull my body forward on the return stroke, and begin again, focusing the whole time on staying balanced so as not to flip the boat.

Felker turned around in the boat to observe my stroke, giving me helpful tips. "Don't arch your back. Use your legs, not your arms. Hook the top half of your fingers over the oar grips like a monkey. And if you want to

Finding strength,  
rhythm and grace  
on the water

By Beth M. Howard

at. Lake Austin flows through a deep canyon flanked by soaring limestone bluffs. Purple Texas bluebonnets carpeted the lush, green slopes, while up in the sky, hawks dipped and soared.

Since rowing requires complete focus, the only thing I saw much of was Felker's back. His muscles strained with each stroke as he rowed, his form smooth, graceful and strong. We continued this way in sync for six miles.

Felker, aware of my impatience to learn, put me in a single shell on my second day. He chose a heavy wide-bodied boat made for beginners. I was tense for fear of tipping, but after 20 minutes of repetition and several near-flips, the movements became automatic. I sensed the Zenlike state that makes rowing addictive.

On day three, Felker put me in a racing shell. I did tip it over, affording me a necessary and inevitable lesson in how to get upright again. We rowed in silence in our single shells for 12 miles,

sightsee, you should be in a sea kayak."

He had a point:

There *was* a lot to look

deprived hours later, we stopped at a lakeside restaurant for hamburgers and beer. A jukebox blasted country western as we laughed at our decadence. The chef back at the spa would shudder if he could see us wolfing down this high-fat fare. But hey, we'd *earned* it.

Back from our 24-mile journey, Felker said that I'd crammed a month's worth of rowing into three days. "Yes," I said, holding up my raw hands, "and I have the blisters to prove it."

Later, while getting a massage, I envisioned a woman sculling on a river in the morning fog, her strokes strong, rhythmic and graceful. But this time, the woman in the vision was *me*.

**Beth M. Howard** is a free-lance writer based in Santa Monica, Calif.

### details:

The resolution package (three nights) is \$1,090, for accommodations, meals, two spa treatments, a personal training session and all activities. Contact Lake Austin Spa, 1705 S. Quinlan Park Road, Austin, TX 78732; (800) 847-5637; in Canada, (800) 338-6651.



## sculling Lesson