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LAKE BELL
IN OSCAR
DE LA RENTA

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In acupuncture, a type of Chinese medicine that's 3,500 years old, "hair-thin needles placed at specific points stimulate the body's healing abilities and enhance physical and emotional well-being," Jill Blakeway explains.

Acupuncture's Royal Couple

They're thoroughly modern, they're married, and they have a way with needles. Meet Jill Blakeway and Noah Rubinstein, the New York pair helping couples get pregnant, stay together, and stay in balance through it all. *By Nandini D'Souza*

STRIKE UP a conversation about acupuncture or alternative medicine and all roads inevitably lead to Jill Blakeway or Noah Rubinstein—or both. The wife-and-husband team, working out of the YinOva Center, just south of New York's bustling Union Square, perfectly epitomizes acupuncture's shift from fringe medicine to legitimate treatment option.

Blakeway's clients refer to her as the Fertility Goddess, a nickname she received from a patient quoted in the *New York Times* in 2005. Four years later, she and preeminent New York reproductive endocrinologist Sami David wrote *Making Babies: A Proven 3-Month Program for Maximum Fertility* (Little, Brown and Company). For anyone who raises an eyebrow at that title, ask the legions of women Blakeway has treated (including—full

disclosure—this one). The majority of them are cuddling their babies at this very moment. Blakeway estimates that 75 percent of YinOva's fertility patients have conceived, but she won't take full credit, chalking it up to a mix of Chinese herbs, conventional medicine, and Mother Nature taking her course. Although she's primarily known for her work on fertility issues, Blakeway has recently started focusing on libido and is currently writing her next book on the subject.

Rubinstein, a handsome, bookish forty-five, flies somewhat under the radar. He treats mostly men for fertility issues and both sexes for anything from pain relief to digestive problems; his clientele is wildly diverse. He tends to farmers, veterans, dancers, and athletes; he also takes care of the odd Hollywood celebrity or Middle Eastern royal

about whom he keeps understandably mum.

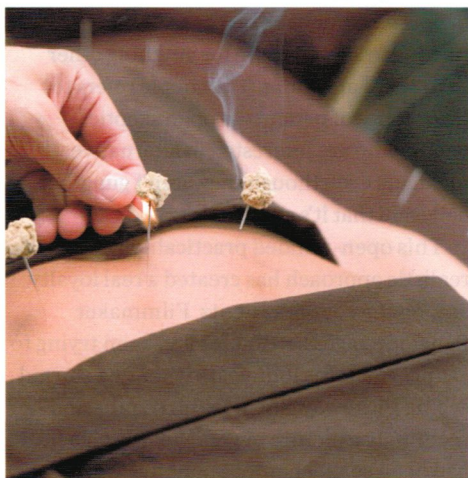
Blakeway and Rubinstein will be the first to say they don't play into expected stereotypes of Chinese-medicine devotees. "We like a cocktail and we enjoy burgers," says Blakeway, a trim forty-six with an open, mischievous smile. "Our patients appreciate that we're not scarily macrobiotic or holier-than-thou. We do the best we can, just like they do."

In everything, they aim for balance, the mainstay of Chinese medicine. Or, as Blakeway puts it: "80 percent is perfection. If you can be good 80 percent of the time, you can fake the rest of it." Such thinking helps maintain a healthy approach to work and life, especially since they recently merged practices.

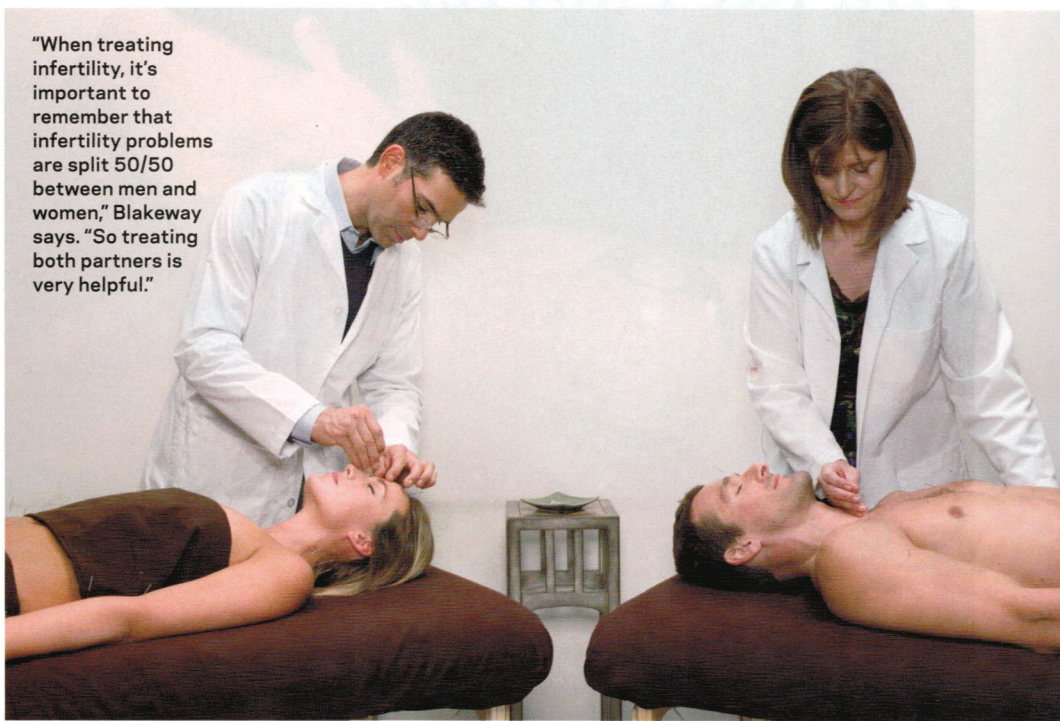
They spend three days a week in Manhattan and four days at their Chatham, New York, farmhouse, which sits on fifteen acres, complete with meadow and orchard. "We have a very yin and yang thing going on," Blakeway says. "Our city life is very yang—busy, frenetic, fun. We have a very yin life upstate. We have a vegetable garden. We compost. We take our dog, Louie, for walks."

In life and in work, they are perfect counterpoints, Rubinstein believes. She grew up in the countryside of Yorkshire, England; he is a born and bred New Yorker. "I do it this way, and she does it that way," he says, referring to their practice approaches. "And we balance each other out."

"In the moxabustion technique, the herb mugwort is clumped on needles and burned, warming the needle and stimulating the acupuncture point," says Blakeway. Moxabustion supports organ function, and healers use it to treat anything from pain and muscle aches to arthritis, digestive problems, and infertility.



"When treating infertility, it's important to remember that infertility problems are split 50/50 between men and women," Blakeway says. "So treating both partners is very helpful."



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The two met in 1995 while studying for their respective master's degrees at San Diego's Pacific College of Oriental Medicine. They took very different paths in arriving there. Blakeway had been running Prince Edward's charitable trust (she and Edward are childhood friends); she was a single mom looking for a job with flexible hours and ended up finding her passion. Rubinstein, who studied ethnomusicology at Bard College, had been a paramedic in New York City, and he wanted to continue to help people—but not necessarily in an ambulance.

They were study buddies, and each thought the other was adorable, but romance didn't bloom until years later, after they had set up their own practices in New York. She opened the YinOva Center as a family practice in 1999. (It now has seven acupuncturists and a massage therapist on staff.) He opened a wellness center that drew Broadway performers with musculoskeletal problems. They married in 2005, and Rubinstein considers Emma, Blakeway's daughter from a previous marriage, his own.

In the city, Rubinstein sees patients in the fourth-floor office YinOva used to occupy before Blakeway moved it to the ground floor a few years ago. Turns out, this is the ideal setup when they treat couples for fertility.

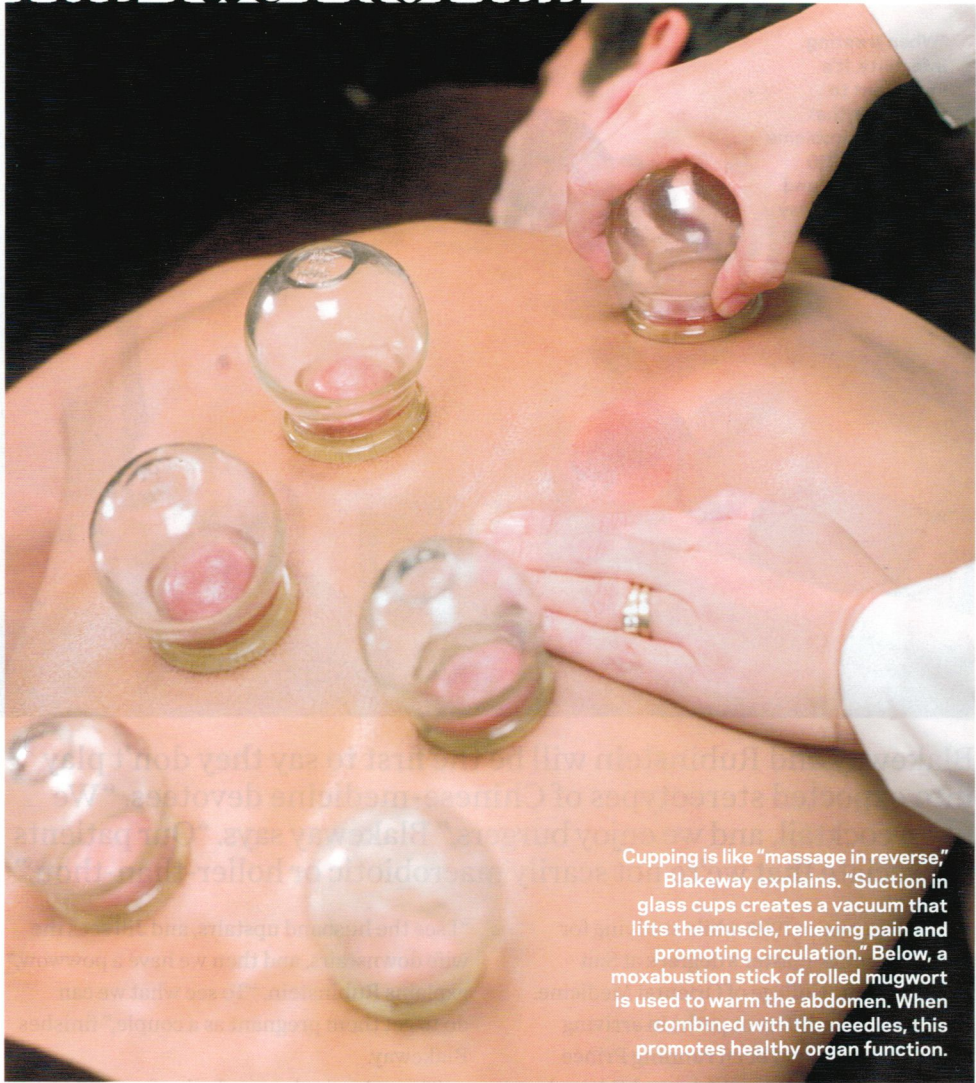
"I see the husband upstairs, and Jill sees the wife downstairs, and then we have a powwow," explains Rubinstein. "To see what we can do to get them pregnant as a couple," finishes Blakeway.

This setup is also conducive for men who have previously considered acupuncture only for pain management. People are familiar with acupuncture because of the strides it has made in fertility treatment for women, Rubinstein says, but it can also work for men. The security and anonymity of Rubinstein's patient room are a plus in that regard. "I can talk to a husband mano a mano in a way that isn't always comfortable for a guy talking to a woman," he says. "I can say to a guy, 'Dude, just do it.'"

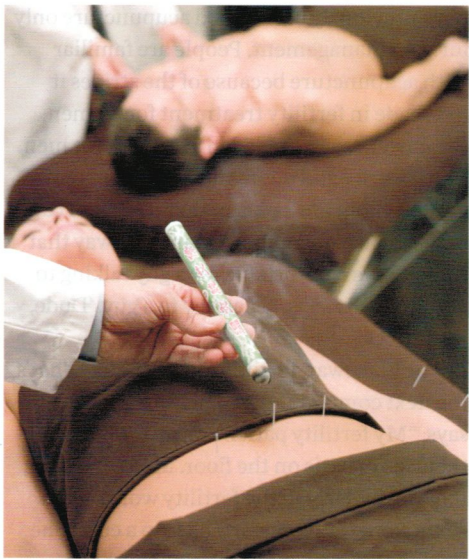
For Blakeway, fertility led to libido. "That's the next complaint my patients have," she says. "My fertility patients have told me that their sex drive is on the floor. Men can suffer, too, particularly in the fertility world when sex is sometimes performed into a cup." She started thinking about relationships and, again, about that balance and yin and yang.

The new book, scheduled for release in spring 2012, draws inspiration from the teachings of 2,000-year-old Taoist texts, which worked like "a sex manual given to couples when they married," Blakeway says.

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Cupping is like "massage in reverse," Blakeway explains. "Suction in glass cups creates a vacuum that lifts the muscle, relieving pain and promoting circulation." Below, a moxibustion stick of rolled mugwort is used to warm the abdomen. When combined with the needles, this promotes healthy organ function.



"They're full of frank and sensible advice. My book draws from these and gives couples a program to follow for six weeks." Each partner starts by taking a quiz to find out his or her libido type and then follows the program according to that type; the program

includes weekly dietary, exercise, and lifestyle suggestions. The end-game, Blakeway says, is to "help couples develop a deeper physical, emotional, and spiritual connection."

Kick-starting your libido is like a game of the chicken or the egg; ultimately, you have to want to have sex. "It can get to the point with my patients where I'll say, 'Just go home and do it whether you feel like it or not,'" Blakeway says. "You have to get the rhythm going."

She also hopes to debunk a few myths about what kind of sex is good, healthy, and balance-restoring. "We get bombarded by very sexual images that we can't live up to. It doesn't have to be pornographic," Blakeway says. "It's just sex." She often reminds her patients that Angelina Jolie probably doesn't really look perfect when she's in flagrante. "In real life, it's about having compassion for someone else and feeling connected." The book won't be a sex manual or the equivalent of the Kama Sutra, though. "The premise behind it is that your sex life is energetic and your whole relationship is about a state of energy," she says.

The good news for women? "If you're unable to reach orgasm, Chinese medicine can help with that," Blakeway says. But before you rush to your local acupuncturist, don't expect a quick fix. Blakeway and Rubinstein aren't interested in merely treating the symptoms; they want to treat the root of the problem, which could mean addressing a number of things, both physical and psychological.

One of the biggest culprits is lack of focus. "I believe almost all women can orgasm if they learn how to focus during sex and deal with any issues that interrupt that. It's a bit like meditation in that it's easier if you stay present." That means not worrying about tomorrow's board meeting or the kids' preschool applications when you're in the heat of the moment.

Inevitably, this research has had an affect on their relationship. "It has certainly reminded me of the importance of making time to connect. I know from my own life that two tired, busy people can easily forget to have sex, so we make the effort to keep romance and a spark going in our own relationship."

Despite their professions, neither is great at self-diagnosing things like everyday aches and pains, stress, and illness. Luckily, the other is there to catch any problem and prescribe the appropriate treatment. But they don't spend their evenings and weekends inserting needles and downing herbal tonics together. They're more likely to putter around their 600-square-foot garden, picking onions, chard, peppers, and asparagus. Cooking is a favorite pastime, and Blakeway posts their favorite recipes on the YinOva blog.

It's this lack of obsessiveness that makes Blakeway and Rubinstein so attractive to people who might be on the fence about turning to acupuncture for anything other than aches and pains. The couple refers to these types of patients as open skeptics—people who are interested in alternative medicine even though they aren't gung-ho believers that it's a cure-all.

This open-minded practicality and realistic approach has created a real loyalty among the couple's clients. Filmmaker Penelope Jagessar Chaffer had been trying to get pregnant for four years when she started seeing Blakeway. She was thirty-nine and seemingly a picture of good health. "No lie, I had been seeing her for about five weeks, and



IMBERLY
DONALD

kind zebra opal earrings
gold with white diamonds.

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I got pregnant," she says. Unfortunately, she miscarried, but with Blakeway's guidance and treatment, Chaffer became pregnant again. "I call Jill the Sexy Mary Poppins," Chaffer says. "She has this way about her. You can take a deep breath. I didn't expect someone who would go on a journey with me. This is what she does with all her patients no matter what she's treating you for."

Another woman, a New York media professional who wishes to remain anonymous, visited Jill two years ago for waning libido. Over time, the woman reclaimed her way in the bedroom, but she was most impressed by the way Blakeway wanted her to change her lifestyle, which had, overall, a positive ripple effect on her. "Jill has this great knowledge," says the working mother of two. "She really urged me to slow down. Obviously anyone could have said that to me, but coming from Jill, it was more meaningful. If I had gone to a regular doctor, I would have been put on drugs. Jill is holistic

Charlotte receives is nothing like the actual treatment for fertility. "It's kind of boring," Rubinstein says. "But they needed something that looked spectacular." Off camera, he treated actress Kristin Davis and several other cast and crew members during the shoot.

Since 2005, Rubinstein has run a practice upstate, built through advertising but mostly from word-of-mouth. The community has taken to Rubinstein; many of his clients are farmers, perhaps because there is a common language connecting the cycles of the human body and the land. He started welcoming veterans, too, men who weren't receiving the support they need for injuries that are, in some cases, decades old. It's pro bono, but his clients, mainly from World War II and the Korean War, find ways of saying thanks. "Wow, this is a guy who was on a battleship in World War II, and here he is in my practice, and he made me some cookies," Rubinstein says of one patient who baked him cinnamon-raisin treats. "How cool is that?"

Rubinstein was also responsible for one of *Sex and the City's* most famous scenes, when Charlotte tries acupuncture as a last-ditch effort to get pregnant. For the record, he'd like to note, the dramatic facial plume Charlotte receives is nothing like the actual treatment for fertility. "It's kind of boring," he says. "But they needed something that looked spectacular."

and isn't looking at the problem, but at its root. She understands that the psychological problem here is critical."

Celebrity hair stylist Ted Gibson, meanwhile, has been seeing Rubinstein once a week for the past six years. "I go even when I don't feel like there's anything physically wrong—I go when I'm having a bad week," says Gibson, who suffers from lower-back pain and the typical ailments of someone who is on his feet all day. "I always feel really fantastic when I leave. I go in because I want to be rejuvenated. I want a certain kind of balance in my life. I talk to Noah about my medication, about refreshing my mind as well as my body."

Last summer, Rubinstein spent a week on a yacht taking care of a member of a Middle Eastern royal family; he continues treating this patient today. He was also responsible for one of *Sex and the City's* most famous scenes, when Charlotte tries acupuncture as a last-ditch effort to get pregnant. For the record, he'd like to note, the dramatic facial plume

One of his upstate regulars is retired detective Frank Serpico—the Serpico, who has studied Eastern medicine himself. "Noah is very conscientious—it's not where you go and [just] get needles stuck in you," Serpico says. "He puts his heart into it."

Chaffer, who has also seen Rubinstein, couldn't agree more. "They don't come across as these famous prima donnas or hippies—Jill doesn't have long gray hair down to her bottom," she jokes. "They travel that fine line between being great at what they do but living in New York City in the 21st century."

As ever with Blakeway and Rubinstein, it comes down to balance, that golden mean between work and life, the city and the country, Eastern medicine and a Western world. They work at it like the rest of us, but they have a pretty good head start at figuring it out. "If I were having a heart attack, I wouldn't call my acupuncturist," Blakeway says. "Actually, wait, I have a husband who's a paramedic, so I would."