

Okra & Gumbo

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If you have spent much time in Plaza Midwood, you know some of the core folks that help make up the community. One of my favorites is a tiny yogi with great, curly hair and a huge smile. For the uninitiated, a Yogi is a scholar and instructor of Yoga. Alicia Roskind is the architect of the diverse and peaceful yoga studio, Okra. Everyone has asked where the name came from. She giggles when I broach the subject.

She states that when trying to find a name, Okra was mentioned almost as a joke, but she loved it. To her, it embodies the feel of "local" and homegrown, home cooking and healing properties, and it adds a bit of whimsy to a space that truly makes you feel comfortable and at home.



All under one roof (at Okra), you will find yoga, massage, and a cozy tea and coffee lounge that serves locally roasted coffee by Pure Intentions and teas by Charlotte-based company, Tea Rex. Next door to Okra is the sister business, Gumbo (of course). What else would you name it? Gumbo, to Alicia and her new business partner, Hal Smith, is "the perfect mix".

Hal moved to Charlotte in 2011. He has a background in retail and private equity. His passion is Chi Running which is a perfect mix with yoga and as it represents the discipline of being centered and balanced. He has always been into fitness and after settling in Charlotte, he was told of a great, new yoga studio in Plaza Midwood. The name? Okra! Hal delved into his yoga practice deeper and acquired his yoga instructor certification from Carrie Wren and Jillian Longworth (of Bella Vita) a few months back to go along with his certifications in Chi Running, Crossfit, and USA Track and Field.

Gumbo embodies their love of wellness and supports a lifestyle of nutrition, community, fitness, and fun. So many of the products that they carry in Gumbo reflect this mantra. They feature carefully, crafted jewelry and exquisite candles, not to mention one of

Charlotte's well known designer Caleb Clark's own fitness line of clothing (under his Enemy to Fashion umbrella). Caleb, famous for his edgy military/apocalyptic street wear, has now released a chic and sassy fitness apparel collection for guys and gals. Fitting to what Okra and Gumbo represent, the line is appropriately named "Positive Vibes Only". Hal and Alicia share a passion for the products they carry and what each line represents. They will only stock garments, accessories, equipment, food, and shoes that they can really get behind wholeheartedly. There is a standard that is obvious and repeated, that they only want to carry a product that is created by people who are also passionate about what they do.



Hal explains that there is a story behind everything they carry from socks and foam rollers, to yoga mats. They also promote vegan-fare take home dishes delivered fresh from Nourish: one of Charlotte's organic / vegan delivery services. There are many criteria to be met by Gumbo's proprietors but the main ones for them are that they are well made, small batched, ethically sourced, and a US product as much as possible. If you ask them what their favorite merchandise is they will both answer with, "there are no favorites, we LOVE everything we get", but if you were to press Hal, there is definitely a brand that is dear to his heart. "Lem's shoes are the perfect Chi Running shoe", Hal tells me while handing me one of the lightest running shoes I have ever held. "They are created to have zero drop and help with the key point of Chi Running which is center balance and alignment".

It is very apparent, while speaking with these two wonderful people, that this shop was a labor of love. I watched it transform in a little over a month into a dream come true for Alicia and Hal. All the work was done by a skeleton crew of close friends and neighbors built with love.

Okra offers many workshops including meditation and Acroyoga (offering their first teacher training class coming in the new year). They make it easy to try out their classes. First time students get two weeks for \$20 wherein they get unlimited yoga. You cannot beat that. The best part is that right next door (at Gumbo) is everything and anything one would need for their yoga (or any fitness) practice and to feed your fitness fancy and wellness needs. Okra represents the healing and relaxation aspects of your life while Gumbo is a celebration

of life and wellness making both worthwhile destinations in the little village of Plaza Midwood. Get your Namaste on.

Okra

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Gumbo

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