

HEALTH

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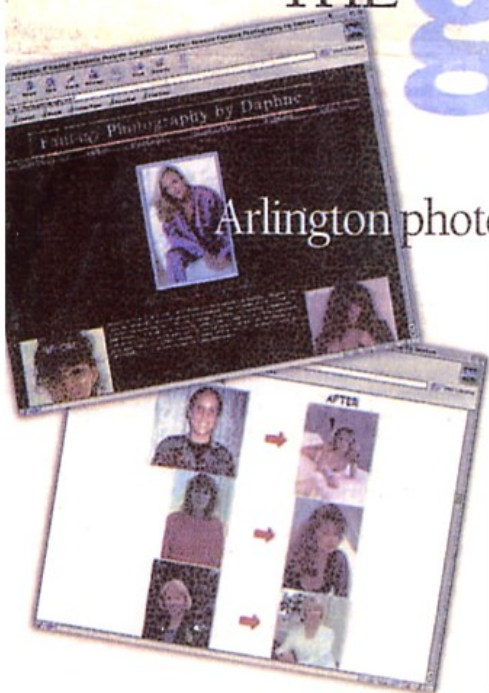


PHOTO BY MARK RSETTE

Diane Dalpe and Daphne Weld Nichols of Fantasy Photography in Arlington help bring out the beauty within their clients.

Releasing THE goddess within

Arlington photography studio unlocks natural beauty



Those gorgeous centerfolds have a huge advantage over the average woman.

She doesn't have the makeup staff, the personal hairdresser, the artful airbrushing and soft focus. Her body has better things to do than drape itself over silk sheets and fanciful backgrounds, wear night clothes more appropriate for sleeping than nocturnal play.

Photographer Daphne Weld Nichols is doing her best to level the playing field by turning average women, even women who are far from a size 2, into fantasy goddesses in their own right. At her studio, Fantasy Photography in Arlington, women briefly become centerfolds — baring as much or as little as they want — to show the men

in their lives that they can be just as sexy as the supermodel with the personal entourage.

Lately, Nichols is seeing a new type of client: women, as well as a few men, who want her to take pictures of themselves as an incentive to lose weight.

"Since January, they're coming in and they want to accept themselves exactly as they are, even if they have 60 pounds to lose," said Nichols, who has been specializing in fantasy photography for the past 20 years. "It's fabulous. Instead of saying 'I want to lose weight,' it's saying 'I love wherever I am now, I'm beautiful as I am.' Even if they still want to improve themselves."

Diane Dalpe, Nichols' business partner, recalled a recent client whose significant other

Health Matters

BY JENNIFER LORD

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Bringing fantasies to another level

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constantly made remarks about her cellulite.

"She said 'I want to see my cellulite, I want to see how I look. I want to see me as he sees me.' She was very specific," Dalpe said.

"She really wanted me to zoom in on her cellulite," agreed Nichols.

Clients use these "before" photos as a visual affirmation of their goal to lose weight. Extra flab, cellulite or not, the women in Nichols' photographs all look beautiful. It's more than just a trick of the camera, Nichols and Dalpe claim.

Sessions start with the burning of a smudge stick, a tightly packed bundle of sage, sweet grass and copal leaves. It smells ... well, kind of illegal. The stick is used to purify both the studio and the client, to dispel "negative energy."

Then the crystals come out, especially rose crystals, to help relax the client. Both women are Reiki masters and may use the laying of hands to additionally relax the client – and a small glass of wine doesn't hurt, either. Dalpe might read the client's palm or use tarot cards to gain insight. The session date, incidentally, is chosen according to the astrological chart.

"Our clients start off apprehensive, but as we progress, they get more into it," Dalpe said. "I'd say 90 percent of them leave feeling they're in a different place.

"We're not dealing with models," she added. "We're dealing with people who have never done this and sometimes they're literally shaking."

The pair work together with the ease of a long partnership. Dalpe is the talkative one, her conversation veering off on tangents. Nichols interjects here and there but she's constantly in motion, springing up from her seat to fetch a photo book or darting out of the room to greet

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Diane Dalpe

the travel agent next door.

On the windowsill are the tools of their trade – an incense burner, crystals in rose and amethyst, a glass pyramid, the credit card scanner. Samples of Nichols' work are everywhere, but eyes are immediately drawn to a gold-framed portrait on the floor of a nude blond woman, reclined, her face upturned and hair cascading, sexy even without showing her torso.

Nichols estimates that at least 80 percent of her clients are in committed relationships, most of them married.

"The young ones are the ones who want to change," Dalpe said. "They're innudated with those images of perfect women. But the women in long-term relationships – that's different. He loves you for who you are. A lot of men love plus-size women and these women don't real-

ize how beautiful they are to them.

"If you love yourself, if you have confidence and self esteem and you are empowered, it doesn't matter what you look like on the outside," she added. "And there is a softness that comes through in the face when you are nude or wearing lingerie. The clothing is a barrier – we've found that with a lot of people."

Since Sept. 11, many of the women who are coming to the studio talk about a new appreciation for their husbands. Some who are married to firefighters or policemen have even come in with their husbands' uniform to incorporate into their photos.

"That horrible tragedy and how it has shaken us all to our core, has changed many relationships," Nichols said. "Maybe the relationship wasn't great, maybe they were even considering ending it. But this is what many women have told me, that there is now a whole new appreciation for the relationship, that they're looking at their lives and wondering why they were even thinking about changing it."

Of their dieting clients, most return after they've met their weight loss goal. Often, the before and after diet pictures show changes that can be seen only by the portrait's subject, Dalpe noted wryly.

"It's not just dieters – it's people who come to us in a period of their life when they have self-esteem issues," Dalpe said. "They may be trying to get a man to commit, they may have just gone through breast cancer and reconstructive surgery or had implants.

"No matter how gorgeous these people are, no matter how thin they are, they never think they're thin enough."

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