



by ASHLEY CROWNOVER

*Ashley Crowover*

Ashley Crowover is a writer, editor, and book nerd who loves to read the classics. Her novel, *Wealthow: Her Telling of Beowulf* (Iroquois Press), is a retelling of the story of Beowulf from the female characters' point of view. Learn more at [ashleycrowover.com](http://ashleycrowover.com).

# where mind meets body

Suzanne Bowen's passion gets people moving.

**For the past 300 to 400 years** — since the time of the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions — humans have thought of the body as a machine. You put fuel in it, perform routine maintenance, and the machine operates. But as the stress of living among our technological advances has become more intense and demanding, the desire to reconnect with an organic model of existence has resulted in an “updated” view of the human being as a natural organism. Instead of being composed of parts, it turns out, we are an interwoven whole. Our mind and body are connected, each affecting the other.

Science, which once encouraged us to see ourselves as little engines that could, has rediscovered an old truth: that a focused, thoughtful approach to physical well-being — what practitioners call “mindfulness” — reduces stress and improves overall health. This holistic view extends beyond basic health to physical fitness: recent years have seen tai chi, yoga, and Pilates become nearly mainstream forms of exercise in the United States.

The latest trend in fitness goes beyond these methods to take the concept of mindfulness to a new level. The “Barre Sculpt” method relies on intense attention to each movement along with exercise that uses the dance bar you typically see in ballet studios to strengthen and tone the body. “It takes the tension out of your body,” says instructor Suzanne Bowen. “It adjusts your mind, because you are busy concentrating on form. You have to breathe and focus on the movements, so you don’t think about your issues.”

Barre Sculpt is not just about calming your mind, however; it also shapes you up. “It’s like Pilates on steroids,” Bowen says. “Pilates is mat-based, but what I teach is weight-bearing. The same principles apply, but it’s with the dance bar. The difference versus traditional fitness is that you use your own body weight.” The result is muscles that are elongated rather than bulky, and a body shaped more like a dancer’s than a weightlifter’s.

The name of the facility Bowen recently opened with husband Levi in Cool Springs, Seren Motus Fitness Studios, speaks perfectly to the method’s effect on those who practice it: “seren” is Latin for “tranquil” or “serene,” and “motus” is Latin for “movement.” The focus on small movements and holding pos-

tures between positions is equally rigorous and relaxing, Bowen says. Some of the studio’s clients report feeling like they’ve had a massage after a workout.

Though doing barre sculpt can be intense, it doesn’t require you to be fit before you come into the studio. “We love beginners,” Bowen says. “You find a class that fits your personality, have fun, and get fit. It’s not about being a perfectionist.” Because having the heart rate go up, then down, then back up again is optimal for fat burning, the method’s alternating movement and holding of postures makes it a good choice for weight loss. “Most of our clients have achieved incredible results,” she says.

## Fitness Is Its Own Reward

The desire to help others in their quest for a healthy life has been a driving force in Bowen’s own. “It’s such a passion of mine,” she says, noting that “awareness is growing in Middle Tennessee that we need to take care of our bodies now, to move, eat

well, and take care of our minds.” The star of several best-selling fitness DVDs, her workouts have been featured in magazines such as *Fitness* and *Pilates Style*. The enthusiasm she feels for mind/body fitness is also reflected in her family’s activities. “We’re huge into fitness and hiking,” Bowen says. “We love going to Percy Warner Park, and the kids exercise without realizing it. They come into the studio, run around, and laugh and play with the exercise balls.” Husband Levi, a New Zealand native, was the winner of “Treasure Island,” New Zealand’s version of the TV show “Survivor.”

Equally as important as engaging in healthy movement, says Bowen, is moving in a healthy environment. The studio uses only green/natural cleaning supplies and other products. Further, Levi is the founder of Bowen Design Build LLC, a firm focusing on green design projects, and he made sure Seren Motus facilities were constructed and designed using environmentally friendly building materials and equipment such as cork flooring, low VOC paints, and PVC free yoga mats.

“We wanted the experience to be not just a great workout,” says Suzanne Bowen, “but someplace where you can inhale, like you’re supposed to and have it be healthy.” Nutrition also fits into the Seren Motus concept of holistic health. Plans are in the works for a six-week class on eating food “the way God made it,” Bowen says — organic, local, not overprocessed, and without additives or preservatives.

From what we put into our bodies to the activities we engage in, a mindful approach to fitness leads to a healthy body and mind. “It doesn’t matter how you do it,” Bowen says, “whether it’s walking, working out to a DVD, or going to local Y classes.” The important thing is to just do it. ☘



**JUST DOING IT**  
Suzanne Bowen, owner of Seren Motus, promotes healthy minds and bodies in her all-natural studio.

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