

## Spin instructor Carl Morley left rat race to open gym

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Carl Morley, a product strategy manager at Oracle, had an "out-of-control" habit.

He couldn't stop teaching spin classes.

When not developing software, he was at Equinox and Crunch teaching 21 sessions a week and leading his 13 personal training clients.

"It was getting crazy. The engineers at work, who really did fit that 'engineer' stereotype, didn't know what to say - they would comment on my arms. I was getting to work at 5 a.m. so I could get back in time to teach."

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Today, two years after quitting Oracle, Morley has opened his own gym - and he's bringing tech with him. With video-game-like incentives, Wheel House, his 5,700-square-foot yoga and spin studio in Embarcadero One, seems built for type A's. During spin classes, people will be able to watch their exertion levels - and compete with others in the room - as chest monitors live-stream heart rates across the walls and e-mail feedback after each workout.

With two new Soul Cycle studios arriving in the Bay Area this summer and the recently opened yoga/cycling studio OMPower, San Francisco is set to be inundated with high-intensity indoor cycling classes and hard-core yoga. Characterized by headset-clad instructors, club mix music, heavy cardio and a very intense clientele, "spinning attracts a certain kind of person," said Morley.

Even Wheel House's online sign-in process is meant to minimize interaction. And workout summaries will automatically sync from the MyZone heart rate monitor around each student's chest to a cloud account to be reviewed at home. For a population that already favors life-tracking tools like Jawbone step counters, a heart rate monitor might be appealing (the better to fit spin class into the day's calorie count).

"When I spoke to my parents about doing this, they were like, 'Really? That's what you're going to do? After all your training?' " said Morley, who is 38 years old and lives in the Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. "But I'll never leave technology behind. It gives me an advantage over other fitness institutes because I know what it can do."

Designed by the Huntsman Architectural Group (which does work for companies like Genentech), Wheel House is a sleek, hardwood-floor studio. It has iPads at the door, TV screens stretching around the walls, and a playlist built by Morley (who, clients say, favors Dolly Parton techno remixes). In a large curved room overlooking Battery Street, Morley holds court over 50 bikes. The smaller yoga/core room with 35 mats offers tiered classes based on difficulty, "not just a bunch of flow yoga." Yogis, taught by a former Wells Fargo manager with an economics degree, can keep their heart rate monitors on - to see whose drops the most.

One loyal client, Anna Chan, 40, is the director of Rysigo Technologies Corp. and has been following Morley for 10 years.

"The monitoring is very appealing, very exciting. It'll be nice to be able to see progress while I work out," said Chan. "And I'm competitive - very competitive. In class I push myself and the person next to me. It's a race, and that motivates me."

Morley, she said, has developed his clientele through his intense and whole-body approach to classes (he's apparently called "the pied piper of spinning").

"He's much more than a simple instructor who teaches a class; he talks to you about your diet, your lifestyle," she said. "Even in his spin

classes, it's not just spin - it's core, it's upper body. There'll be weights sometimes. You just never know."

Originally from England, Morley transferred to Oracle's Redwood City office 17 years ago.

He started taking fitness classes and loved the feeling of working out, something he hadn't done much in England, "where you go to the pub after work, not the gym." Soon he was taking up to five classes in a day, and one of his instructors asked him to sub for a class. "I was hooked."

"I made a lot of friends in fitness that were genuine friends. I saw results in them. It was so much more fulfilling than anything else I was doing, than CRM" (client relationship management software).

He started noticing ways that gyms, tapping into life-tracking and biofeedback technologies, could be more like computer games - with a constant progress ticker and strong sense of competition.

"As an instructor, there was no big incentive for me to excel. And there wasn't very much positive feedback for students, either. People do a lot of classes but don't see immediate results; you know it's good for you but you don't know what it's doing exactly."

With his students' support, he decided to open his own studio - and they all pitched in. Andre Seibel, an art director at Adobe Systems Inc., designed the Wheel House brand and logo. Another student became his real estate agent. And still another student, who was excited about the heart rate monitors because he'd had a stent put in, volunteered to be his lawyer.

"That's why I realized Wheel House would be successful - it's built on the people I've helped," said Morley. "It's nice to go into the business knowing I've got a big following."

Morley, who has kept his British accent, is fit but not frighteningly so. And, with tousled brown hair, a loose-fitting button-down and a toothy smile, he's definitely not the spin instructor stereotype popularized in Los Angeles and New York (taut women in spandex and ponytails who become celebrities). He "geeked out" describing why the bike model he chose is the best (smoothest sound, sleekest profile) and the heart rate monitors are really the most fair form of biometrics (they measure effort, not strength).

The first yoga teacher Morley brought on was 41-year-old Jon Isaacs, a former Wells Fargo manager with an economics degree from UCLA who started teaching yoga full time in 2001. He hopes to help the students learn to slow their heart rates down - and, since they'll keep their chest monitors on, they can compare results after class.

"As a young man, I was overworking. I'd lost all my hair at 23. And then I discovered yoga," said Isaacs. "Having spin in the Financial District will attract very intense people. A lot of people are discovering that sometimes it doesn't matter how hard you work, you might not get what you want."

He had been doing independent teaching and life coaching when Morley asked him to help lead the yoga studio.

"Some people, they love yoga or they love spinning, and they want to open a studio - idealistic and enthusiastic, but without any of the project-management expertise to carry it off, to execute. I knew Carl had that. We have that in common," he said. "And his tone is perfect. Honestly, if I were making a video game of a spin class, I would use Carl."

Touring the gym as it was still under construction, Morley jumped into the spot where he'll install a high-tech bike-fitting station, so that new people don't spend time adjusting in class.

"The whole space will be efficient," he said. "You just walk through the doors, put on your MyZone, and you're plugged in."

**Wheel House:** One Embarcadero, S.F. \$20 per class (monthly rates online). [www.wheelhouse-sf.com](http://www.wheelhouse-sf.com).

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