



Peter Barta

For years, the heat generated by the sun through large windows served as an annoyance to businesses in the building at 633 S. Front Street. But at Sun Moon Yoga, the rays warm Power Yoga sessions.

Yoga studio earns its name

■ Sun Moon Yoga makes good use of car dealership's design

By Joe Tougas
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MANKATO — There's a cosmic irony at the corner of Front and Liberty.

It's at this intersection where Sun Moon Yoga studio, operating now for about three years, finds itself practicing its ways of earthy, healthy, holistic exercises in what was once a car dealership showroom.

The brick building was designed to host a car dealership, which opened in 1930.

The architects, Jacobson and Jacobson of Minneapolis, did right by owners Frank Brandes and Ed Wing. The structure had huge glass windows in the front and, on the Liberty Street side, two walls' worth of opaque glass blocks, all of which harness the sunlight in a way that blasted into the showroom and bounced off the shining stone floors.

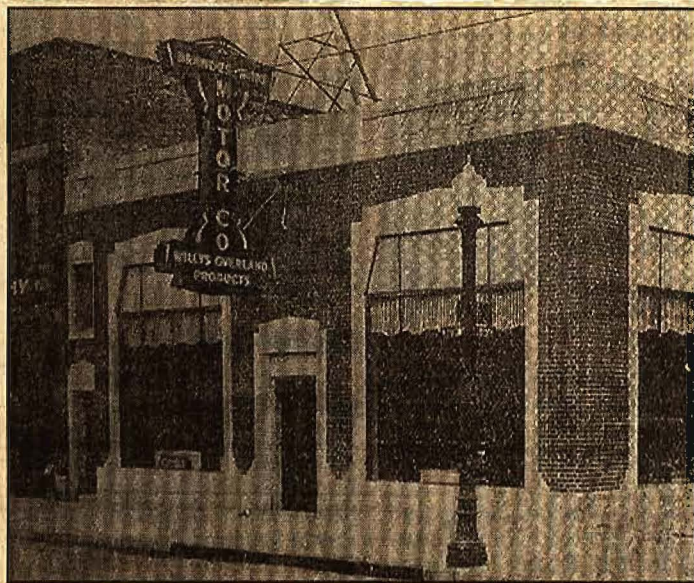
Lookback

The Brandes-Wing Motor Co. joined plenty of other car dealerships in the Mankato area, but its hook was that it distributed and sold Willys-Overland cars and products, and its showroom displayed such historically curious cars as the Whippet and the Willy.

The grand opening of the shop took place in 1930, but the business closed within two years, sat vacant for a while and by 1945 was the site of the U.S. Employment Service. In 1950, it was bought by Roy Frentz, who set up his appraisal business; over the years, he shared space with other businesses.

After space was converted for business office use, those windows and the solar-intensive heat they provided weren't exactly ideal. Shop owners who came and went often complained of that 4 p.m. sun roasting through the windows.

When Mona Ceniceros



File photo

Originally a car dealership at the corner of Liberty and Front, the building has over time hosted a number of businesses. The latest tenant, Sun Moon Yoga, took over the space three years ago.

opened the yoga studio three years ago, she also found the intense light and heat to be bothersome. The windows served as solar panels, and last year she spent \$600 on huge Mylar shades to keep the sunlight

from roasting her yogis. "You could bake cookies in here," she said, putting a flat palm on a thick window block.

"It was ideal to show off
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YOGA: 'Sun salutations' can be done literally in the studio

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cars, but when you cut it off and try to make little businesses in it, it's tough."

For her first two years, she was bringing in fans and moving classes to other rooms that are part of the studio.

Now comes an increasingly popular form of yoga, in which participants seek out high temperatures. It's a modified version of Bikram Yoga, informally referred to as Power Yoga, and the practice turns up the heat for more flexibility and sweat, otherwise known as detoxification.

All of a sudden, an annoyance has become an asset.

"If I were to put down on paper an ideal yoga studio and build it from scratch, and use solar heat instead of heat from other sources, this is what I'd design," Cenicerros said.

She now can offer, when the skies are cooperating, an intense yoga experience akin to the Bikram school of yoga, but she doesn't go as hot as 105 degrees. She keeps the temperatures for Power Yoga classes maxing at around 85 degrees. (On cloudy days, she uses space heaters.)

But when everything is in place, Power Yoga classes utilize sunlight and radiator heat to take the yoga experience to

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Mona Cenicerros

a different level.

The heat lends itself to better flexibility and stretching is easier, she said. It also serves as an agent for detoxification (sweating), she said.

At the same time, the Power Yoga classes are not for everybody. The intense heat can trigger claustrophobia, hot flashes in menopausal women and a number of other bad reactions. The advice is to take small steps, such as the Friday night introduction sessions.

Solar and radiator heat don't crank up the bill and are better for your body, and since yoga's principles are all about cleanliness and detoxification, the fit is one that could make the initial car dealer-

ship chuckle.

Yoga exercise sessions usually begin with what are called "sun salutations," which are now done literally.

"There's something awesome about doing sun salutations in a room heated by solar heat," Cenicerros said. "It just feels right."

The irony, perhaps, is that of all the businesses that have occupied the stone building over the 70 years, it's the yoga studio that seems the best fit.

Even the stone floors, including a ramp that was once used to drive cars onto the showroom, serve as a solid grounding force, more so than the hardwood floor Cenicerros had originally desired.

"For us, we're looking at the energetic qualities of stone," she said.

People tell her there's an energy to the building, which she supposes could come from a number of sources — the church next door, the funky qualities of downtown and the diversity of the neighborhood. A lot of it, though, she said, is the art deco style provided by the architect.

"I'm sure he never dreamed of people doing yoga in this space," she said. "But it couldn't be more ideal, if you work with it."