

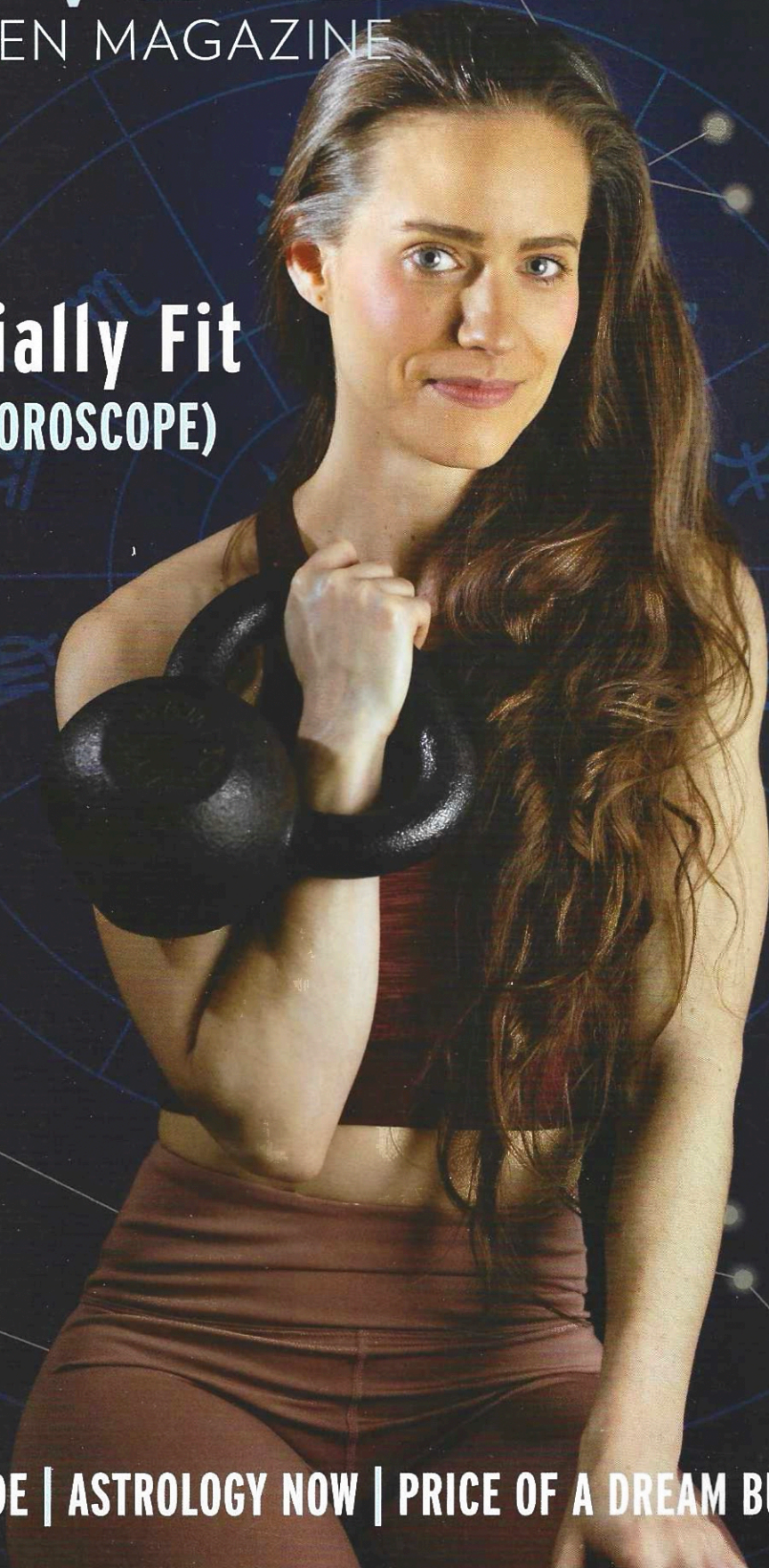
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MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE

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THE FINANCIAL GUIDE | ASTROLOGY NOW | PRICE OF A DREAM BUSINESS

Making a Living *in the* Stars

ASTROLOGY IS IN AGAIN, WITH A TWIST. MAINE-BASED ASTROLOGERS SHARE THE INS AND OUTS OF BUILDING AND SUSTAINING A BUSINESS.

BY CHELSEA TERRIS SCOTT

Peggy Schick places a folding chair for me at a narrow table covered in a white cloth, festooned with an owl nesting doll. The upper room in the 1852-built house that she and her husband have just purchased in Topsham smells like fresh paint and the sage Schick has burned to clear the chaotic energy left over from their move. Opening a manila envelope, she draws out two sheets of paper, each mapped in a network of lines and symbols, arranged around what looks like a wheel.

The first sheet is my natal chart, Schick explains, and the second represents my solar return, or the date this year when the sun was aligned at the exact coordinates in the sky that as when I was born. This second chart offers insights into what qualities and energies the coming year, birthday to birthday, may bring. Schick then pops open the owl and assembles two smaller night-birds, for a total of three. These, respectively, represent my Rising, Sun and Moon signs.

This session with Schick at Intuitive Astrology & Reiki is a psychospiritual exploration of my inner world, based on the numerical cal-

culations surrounding the exact time, date and location of my birth. Intuitive Astrology & Reiki is also how Schick makes a living. Or she's getting there. "I have been at it two years and have tripled my number of clients this year," Schick says. Her five-year goal is to keep increasing that "And eventually do it full time." Already she's doing "way more" astrology readings than Reiki treatments.

Astrology, in case you hadn't heard, is having a resurgence, reaching a new generation and embracing technology, from podcasts to software to create the likes of natal charts. It's popularity, particularly with younger people, may even be reaching the mainstream levels it reached in the 1970s. "Amid the millennial self-care set, astrology is back," declared the *Washington Post* in November. *The New York Times* recently covered how the trend intersects (or doesn't) with traditional therapy, and how therapists navigate a patient attributing problems to Mercury being in retrograde.

There are multiple apps for all manner of metaphysical exploration, from Co-Star (a hyper-personalized social experience bringing



Claire Gallagher isn't into predicting the future. She's more about getting her clients "in sync with the cosmic weather." And fit.

astrology into the 21st century) to Astrology & Palmistry Coach, which scans your hand, to Sanctuary, which has been providing personality assessments since 2018. Other popular astrologers with a national reach are The AstroTwins, the official astrologers for *ELLE* magazine and MindBodyGreen, and Susan Miller, who has earned a zealous following based on her books and popular website, Astrology Zone. But Maine has its own version of that, Robin's Zodiac Zone, a website produced by Robin Ivy Payton.

Both Payton and Schick are part of a small but dedicated band of professional astrologers in Maine. This isn't a category that the state Bureau of Labor Statistics tracks, so data is lacking. Database searches turn up a dozen psychics in the state, but only one professional astrologer. That might be because most astrologers have another component to their services, whether it's teaching or Reiki or running a retail shop. Despite their distinct services, psychics and astrologers, along with Tarot readers, are often lumped together because they fall under the category of metaphysical experts. In layman's terms, this category might be best explained as people who offer a service that outsiders don't entirely understand. Skeptics would call this a pseudoscience.

To prepare for our reading, Schick used a computer program plus her own discerning eye to choose which symbols and planetary interactions to highlight. "You have several Virgo placements in the Ninth House, which focuses on higher learning and personal beliefs, so I knew you could handle the details," she says. Schick explains that when she charts for a client, part of her preparation for their one-on-one involves a look at their temperament. With some people, she says she only gives the big picture, unless they ask for more. "I'm careful not to overwhelm."

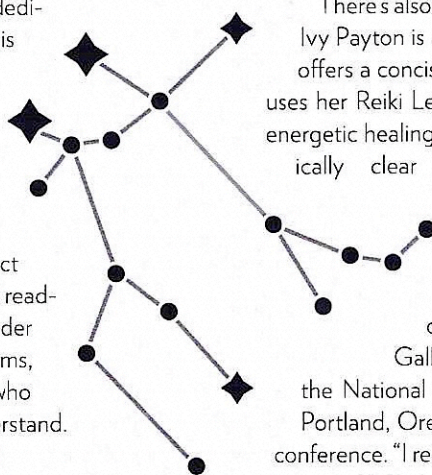
Being a details person was, and arguably still is, one of the prerequisites for entering the astrology business. However, the emphasis on mathematical ability has dissipated with the rise of online astrology tools. Schick's mentor, 76-year-old Arifa Boehler, says that "when I first started, you did all the calculating yourself. There were no computer programs to do it, so astrology attracted a certain type of mind. Nowadays, with programs that can calculate charts for you, more poetic minds can do astrology, which I think is a good thing. It's led to better books."

There's also an element of physicality to the new astrology. Robin Ivy Payton is also a popular yoga teacher. While Schick's business offers a concise menu of natal and solar return chart readings, she uses her Reiki Level II training—advanced training in the practice of energetic healing through a laying on of hands—to create an energetically clear space for herself and her clients. Meanwhile, Claire

Gallagher, 34, of The Body Astrologer, comes at her business from a perspective deeply rooted in physical fitness, offering what she calls lunar cycle fitness, or an online menu of fitness-focused offerings based on the cycles of the moon.

Gallagher was in her 20s, into CrossFit and studying at the National College of Natural Medicine (now a university) in Portland, Oregon, when she saw a poster for a medical astrology conference. "I remember thinking...why the hell can't I look away from this poster?" She'd never cared about astrology before then. Chinese medicine soon took a back seat when she enrolled in the Portland School of Astrology concurrently and completed a two-year program, followed by a three-year mentorship with astrologer Andrea Gerhz, during which she analyzed client charts.

Now she's a practitioner of physical astrology with a master's degree in both ancient Chinese acupuncture and nutrition, and she is a certified strength and conditioning specialist. Gallagher offers an online menu of



fitness-focused offerings based on the cycles of the moon. Her theory: depending on what phase and sign the moon rests in, our bodies have more or less bandwidth for movement. She's getting clients "in sync with the cosmic weather" but as she says on her engaging Instagram account (@thebodyastrologer), she's not into predicting the future.

Gallagher is also based in Topsham, where she runs her online business out of the home she shares with her husband, an acupuncturist. She creates and curates a library of fitness videos for her MOONrx (\$29–\$39 per month) or Elements subscribers (\$99 for the complete, two-month program). She's got a podcast, Cosmic Lifestyle (available on Patreon for \$5 per month) and Zoom conferences with private workout clients who are undertaking her Body by the Moon immersion program. She's also working on a book with a popular publisher of spiritual books, who she says quietly observed her Instagram feed over many months before reaching out.

When veteran astrologer Arifa Boehler moved to Maine in 1977, there was "not much astrology happening." The Damariscotta-based astrologer has worked in the field for almost 40 years and refers to herself as a "practical astrologer." She uses charts to help clients understand and use all aspects of their personalities. "I bring the chart, they bring their lives," she says.



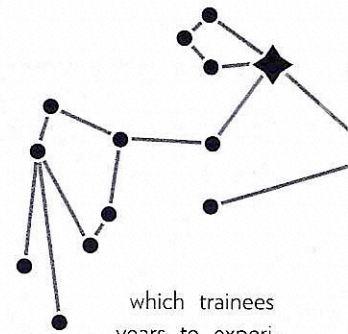
Left: Intuitive Astrology & Reiki's Peggy Schick, based in Topsham. Photo courtesy of Schick. Right: Gallagher's setup to produce podcasts in her house. Opposite page: Gallagher in the middle of a lunar cycle workout. Photos by Heidi Kirn

And her own. As she was earning a master's in special education for the emotionally disturbed, Boehler "learned a lot about traumas. I have had to do a lot of work on myself and have a natural inclination for reflection." Firmly based in the humanistic tradition, which accounts for free will in determining a client's destiny rather than the predictive, she studied with two teachers in Santa Fe, New Mexico. They focused on training Boehler in the intensive, technical chart calculation process—that would be pre-software—before getting into interpretation. She didn't start charging money for readings until 1981. "It was a big leap of faith," says Boehler, who offers first-time, two-hour natal readings for \$180. After the initial one-on-one, she will schedule shorter follow-up sessions to address further questions or new life events.

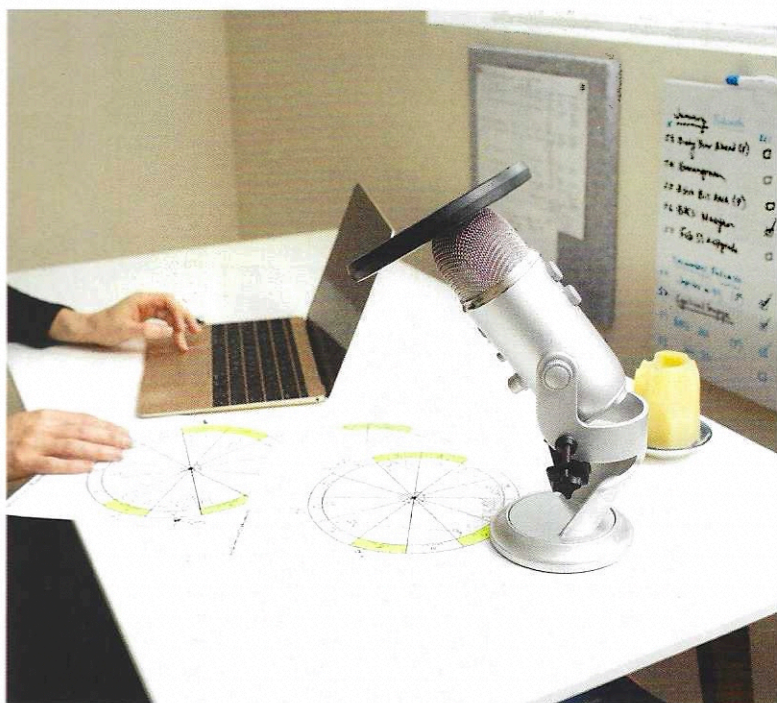
While readings are Boehler's bread and butter, she also hosts retreats

and teaches classes. One of her classes has been running for 20 years, with 12 students who have developed robust astrological practices of their own. "I consider it to be a professional class," she says. It's a closed group, with new spaces opening up only if a student leaves. She also offers a five-day Patterns of Fate workshop, in which trainees commit to two weekends per year for three years to essentially learn astrological practice. "We use individual charts as textbooks." Boehler, who once contracted with Camden High School to teach astrology to students in their alternative education program, says her greatest satisfaction is "watching people's consciousness [expand]" as they move "toward a more integrated self."

While working out of one's home offers the kind of flexibility that many entrepreneurs long for, some metaphysical services providers prefer to set up shop and serve whoever walks in the door. Heather Nichols, 41, offers her bevy of services and products out of Stones and Stuff, her storefront in Portland's Arts District. Raised Roman Catholic, she was not allowed to own a Tarot deck, "so I read playing cards growing up"

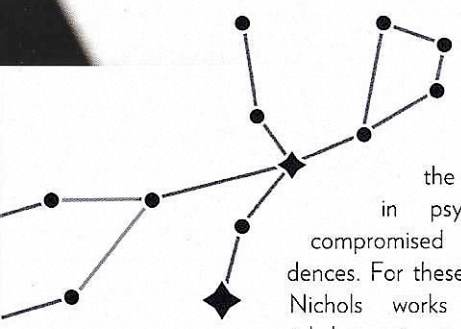
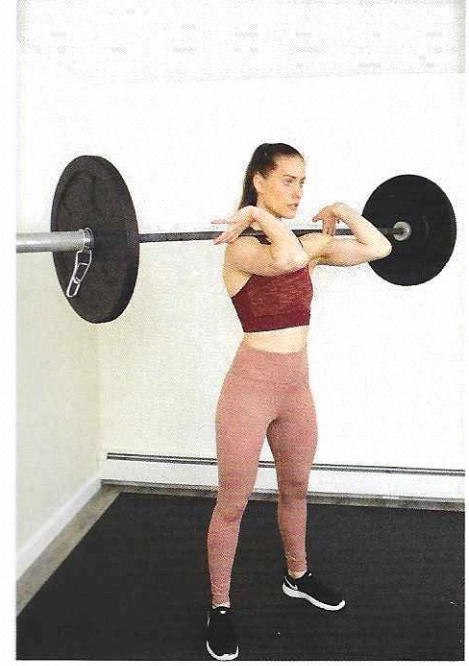
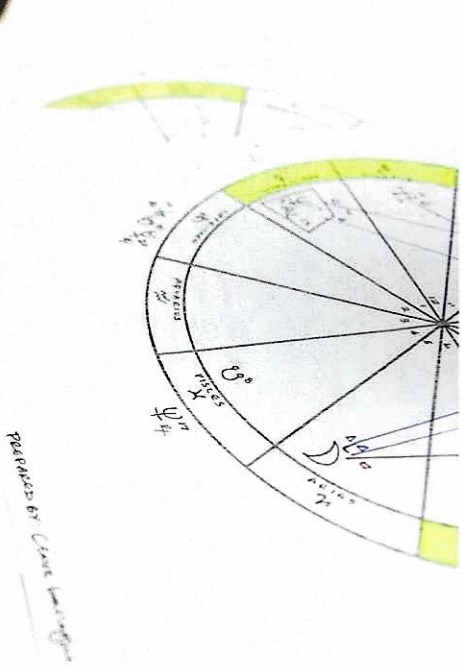
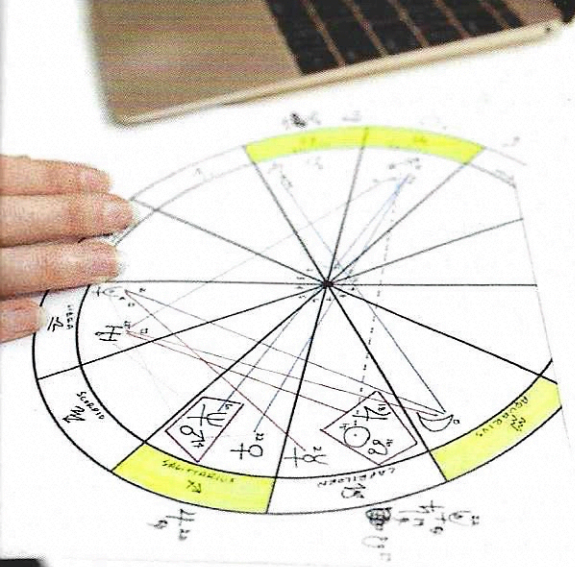


which trainees individual charts



(the numbers and symbols have their own esoteric meaning). While she is grateful for the "strong moral code" her religious upbringing provided, "I always knew I was psychic." As an adult Nichols embraced astrological study through reading and work with other professionals before making it her profession in 2002. When she began working for her business partner and friend David Pitt, he trained her in retail ownership. She bought him out in 2003, and has transformed the once geology-focused shop into an accessible metaphysical haven.

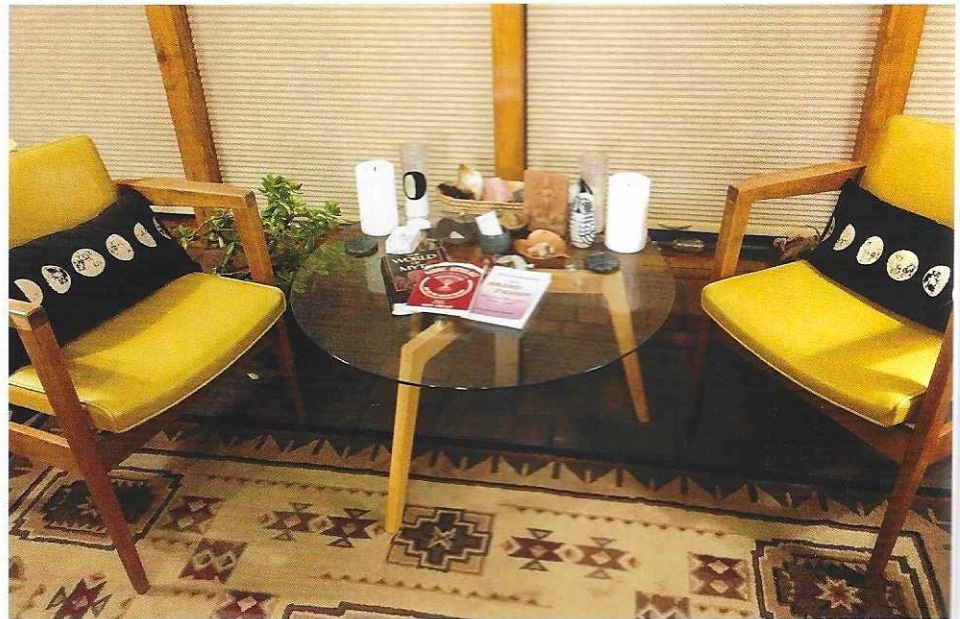
In addition to the vast array of Tarot cards, salt lamps and stones available for purchase, Nichols offers a core of three distinct services: Soul Retrieval Ceremony (\$350), House Clearings (\$150 per hour) and Astrology Readings (ranging between \$120 and \$225). Soul Retrieval involves assisting traumatized individuals with feeling whole again, while House Clearing pu-



rifies
the energy
in psychically
compromised resi-
dences. For these rituals,
Nichols works along-
side her partner and ener-
gy worker,

Ellen Mikesh. Her readings feature intuitive, one-on-one work with clients, examining their charts in an effort to remove emotional and spiritual blocks. Easing life transitions for clients is also a focus. Nichols offers ritual consultations and officiation for everything from weddings to death. While Tarot remains on her services menu, she recommends astrology for clients looking to address patterns in their lives. "I focus on helping people feel better emotionally," she says. "All of my work is about how to be honest about your emotions. Astrology is the best way to do that."

Metaphysical entrepreneurship comes with some of the same social complexities that a physician might experience, namely boundary issues from those who hope for diagnosis outside of a professional setting. "People will ask me to pull a card at the grocery store," says Nichols. She often finds that visitors to her shop want her to "prove it" to them that her readings are legitimate before booking. Her answer? "I am very confident in my work. My accuracy is through the roof. Book a session with me and see for yourself." Gallagher expresses similar challenges to boundaries, specifically around payment. "I chronically undervalue my services." To boost her income, Gallagher has put half of her Cosmic Lifestyle



Top left and right: Gallagher uses astrology to develop fitness workouts based on the cycles of the moon. Photos by Heidi Kim. Above: Schick uses her home office in Topsham for Reiki and astrology sessions. Photo courtesy of Schick

Podcasts behind a paywall.

At Intuitive Astrology & Reiki, Schick, 56, relies on a long career in non-profit development and communications to inform the business end of her livelihood. When not giving one-on-one readings, Schick teaches astrology classes through the Maine Jung Center, Leapin' Lizards in Freeport and the Osher Lifelong Living Institute at the University of Southern Maine. She also hosts astrology retreats for small groups. Whether teaching (*she charges \$30 per class*) or giving readings (*\$90 for an hour, \$45 for 30 minutes*), her process is an intuitive one. "Ultimately, my approach to

astrology is that it's all about supporting profound personal growth."

As for my reading, I learn that this is a Pisces-ruled year for me (easy-going) and that the interactions between my Third and 10th houses may indicate joy when communicating with others in a professional setting. Also, Capricorn in the 10th House could help me crush my workouts. I'm putting that to the test this month.

Chelsea Terris Scott is a writer and educator. She lives with her husband and their two daughters in Portland.