

The Guide resident

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GOURMET SPECIAL

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Julian Daizan Skinner has been teaching yoga and much more in SE5 for five years now



ZEN MAN

Julian Daizan Skinner set up Zenways in Camberwell five years ago, so what led him to SE5?

Words TRISH LESLIE

Around 30 years ago, Julian Daizan Skinner quit his job, sold his home, gave all his money away and entered a Zen monastery. So what led the chap from Chatham to give up a promising career in pharmaceuticals for ancient Eastern philosophy?

Daizan (the name given to him by his teacher – it means ‘Great Mountain’ in Japanese) says the seeds were sown on a family trip to the seaside when he was seven. ‘I was in the water when suddenly the tide turned and water was over my head,’ he explains. ‘I tried to walk towards the shore, but a strong undercurrent held me back. All I could do was to jump up to get a breath, and then another one, but I knew I wouldn’t be able to get any more. Something in me just accepted there was nothing I could do – and in that moment the universe, if you like, opened up. It was a sense of everything being completely

and utterly alright. Like there simply weren’t any problems of any kind.’

Fortunately somebody dragged the young Daizan out of the water, but the feeling of that near-death moment stayed with him and over the years he began to ‘wonder whether you could actually live there rather than just die there’. ‘Lots of twists and turns’ led him to Zen and eventually five years in the mountains of Japan, where he was the first Englishman to achieve the status of Roshi, or Zen Master, in the rigorous Rinzai tradition.

Daizan headed back to the UK, where he walked through the centre of the country. He didn’t touch money for the entire 64 days of his 777-mile journey, relying instead on people’s kindness and generosity.

Feeling that the energy centre of the nation was ‘very much London’, he moved to the capital and began to teach yoga. Just over five years ago, one of his students suggested he take a look at an unused clubhouse on Camberwell Grove owned by the Butterfly Tennis Club. ‘It was absolutely perfect,’ he says. And so

Zenways was born.

The centre now offers a range of activities focusing on wellbeing, health and consciousness development.

Daizan describes

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his mission as helping people to find a happiness that doesn’t depend on external circumstances. ‘It’s the kind of happiness that nobody can give you and nobody can take away from you.’ If Daizan’s serene presence is any indication, it certainly works.

Find out more information at zenways.org