

## Love is alive

by Michelle Casas, staff writer

**H**ave the years drained the thrill out of your marriage? If you've been married a while and you're running low on romance, you're not alone.

Blame it on kids, high-pressure jobs and busy schedules. Heck, while you're at it, blame it on the entertainment culture. Especially those sexy movie stars that make sappy love stories come alive. It's enough to make our hearts flutter and fill our minds with hopeful thoughts that everyday romance could and should happen. The truth is we're not movie stars, and we don't lock lips like that anymore.

Thankfully, there is a prescription for replenishing passion and, no, it doesn't start with a "V." There are proven tactics that can rekindle the pleasure of being together. I don't mean heart-throbbing passion dripping with wet kisses, or long embraces and sweet nothings. How about intimacy in the form of some old-fashioned handholding, or listening instead of talking?

West Memorial resident Maggie Suter admits that if she wants anything remotely romantic to happen she has to arrange it. Mood-setting is no easy trick with 19-month-old Travis ruling the roost. Time taken from her toddler is tough enough, but Maggie believes caring for her marriage is worthy of the hours away. This Valentine's day, the Suter's will reignite romance with an overnight stay at The Houstonian, a heavily wooded oasis tucked into the heart of the city.

"Last year we got a sitter overnight and went to Galveston. That little bit of alone time, just the two of us, did our marriage so much good. We felt the effects of it for a couple of months," says Maggie.

And this year promises even more excitement with a visit to the hotel's Trellis Spa, which caters to couples. Specially designed couples suites come complete with dueling massage tables, a couples shiatsu hot tub and shower for two. And don't forget the champagne and strawberries available upon request.

Just escaping the city for a day or two is enough to rekindle romance. The Inn at Dos Brisas, for example, is doing the trick for a lot of Houstonians. This quaint, luxurious retreat is located just an hour's drive from Houston in the small rustic town of Chappell Hill. Yet there's darn little "roughin' it" at this rural locale. Dinner is a four-hour affair with eight courses of world-class cuisine. You'll find seclusion in one of four "casitas" nestled on a 300-acre ranch with ponds, streams, and 10 miles of paved trails for mountain biking or horseback riding. The perfect setting for a couple trying to

rediscover each other.

"What happens often is people who haven't been here before come up from Houston and they plan all these activities. Then they drive through our gates and they are so relaxed they don't want to do anything," says Michael Steinhart, managing director of Dos Brisas.

Rejuvenating romance doesn't require a wad of cash. Far from it, says Nancy Baker-Brown who counsels couples at her West University practice. Nancy insists that the biggest opportunity to make your relationship sizzle is in the day-to-day mundane stuff.

"Touch is so important, when you walk past each other in the hallway reach out and touch each other. Play footsies under the table or put your hand on his shoulder when he's sitting there. Little touches are so important and can put the spark back," says Nancy.

There's no better place to spark up romance than in the kitchen. The Village Table in West University and Memorial helps couples turn up the heat index. Couples cook several meals during an evening session in an intimate environment where bringing your favorite bottle of wine is encouraged.

"Food brings people together, and when couples can share that experience it brings them closer," says Pam Campbell, owner of The Village Table. Better yet, the couple gets to savor the romance for weeks by enjoying their prepared meals together at home.

Bellaire resident Annette Botas-Rock often reminisces about the most romantic moments with her husband.

"We took private dance lessons. We both loved learning something for the first time together and practicing at home. We'll resume this hobby once the kids are a bit older. I found it very romantic practicing the tango, being dipped, him taking charge and leading without my interference," says Annette.

It seems private dance lessons have saved many marriages according to Pahjmon Lipsey, area director of the Fred Astaire Dance studios in Houston.

Flowers, chocolates and jewelry may be your style. They are all well-used weapons in the arsenal of wooing your beloved, but Nancy says it's a special degree of attention that truly ignites romance.

"It's the behavior of love that counts the most. What people want and need is to be noticed, to be cared for and to be nurtured," says Nancy. "That's what romance is about."



Raphael and Maggie Suter enjoy a romantic evening away from their toddler.