



TRUE *to* FORM

The ancient practice of yoga has changed a lot. Writer and yoga fan Emilie Dingfeld test-drives some new incarnations of the tried and true.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETER TAMLIN

WHEN IT COMES to yoga, I'm more of a purist than a mixologist: I like my practice straight-up. So when *Glow* asked me to try it with a splash of jock, a twist of Pilates and a dash of acrobatics, I was skeptical. You want me to do sit-ups in a yoga class? *Please!*

We're walking a fine line between natural evolution and a dilution of the form's roots, says Shiva Rea, a renowned L.A.-based yoga instructor and the creator of DVDs such as *Core Yoga*. Good yoga fusions are like jazz, she says. "Jazz came from African Americans in the South who merged classical music with

the sensibility of African music.... When it comes to yoga, there is a difference between someone saying, 'Oh, I'm going to create a fusion form,' and it happening as part of something they're already doing." It must fit with yoga's purpose: uniting mind and body.

I've given many traditional yoga classes a try: hatha (slow paced), restorative (deeply relaxing) and ashtanga (more athletic). I've always gravitated toward the latter for its precision and structure, which reminded me of my days in the ballet studio perfecting the placement of my fingers in an arabesque.

Anywhere between one and two hours long, the classes expose my body's weaknesses, and the focus on breath slows my erratic thoughts after a stressful day.

But as I read more about the complexity of ashtanga and how it *should* be practised I became intimidated. I found it challenging to carve out time in my schedule for the recommended daily practice and I'd get frustrated with my lack of progress in what I considered super-challenging poses. If I couldn't do them perfectly, then what was the point? But this Type A attitude was keeping →

me from enjoying myself, so I decided it was time to break some rules.

First up: a visit to Toronto's Misfit Studio for a yoga-Pilates fusion class. My teacher is Amber Joliat, the soulful, edgy 34-year-old owner of the studio and a former professional dancer. We do sun salutations as Nina Simone's version of "Here Comes the Sun" plays, and then progress to shoulder presses with weighted Pilates balls while holding *utkatasana* (a squat with knees and big toes touching). Everything burns.

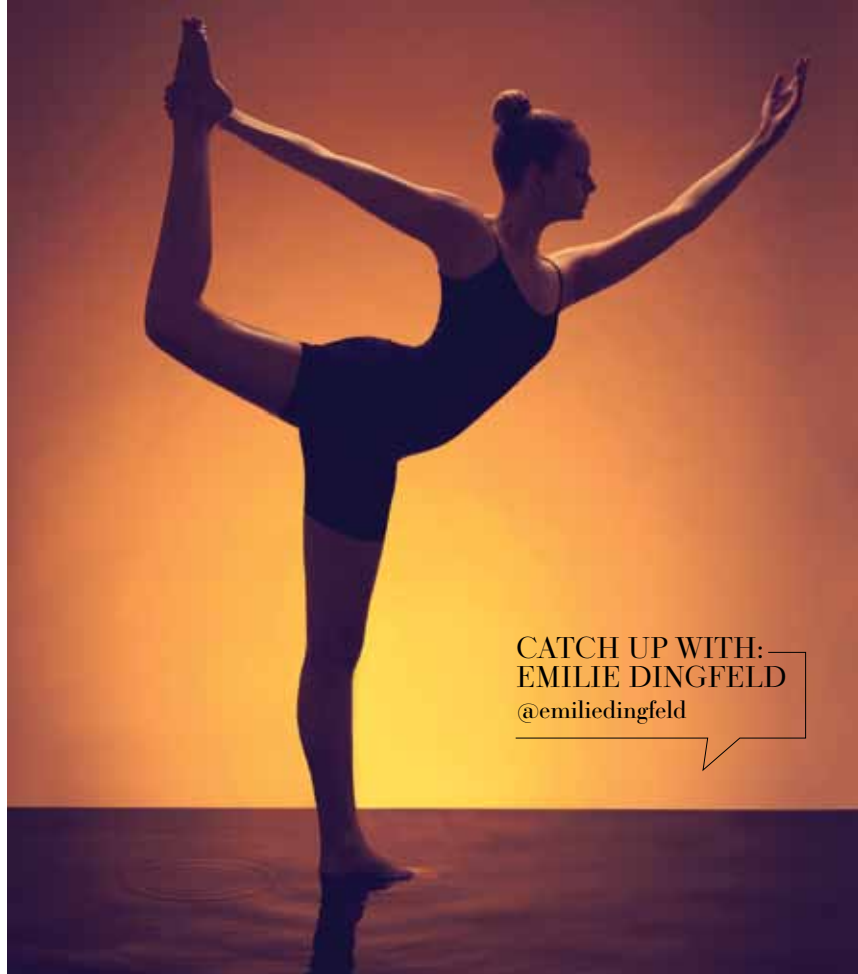
As we move through the class with the fluidity of dancers, I'm on fire—in a good way. The music pumps me up, the yoga cools me down and the Pilates kicks my ass. This frenetic energy is just what people need, according to Joliat. "I think about how TV commercials were when I was a child," she says. "They were simple and catchy. Now, there's dancing and music and...people need to be constantly stimulated—a class needs to involve a lot and it needs to be entertaining."

Feeling emboldened, I summon my inner athlete for Jock Yoga. "This class is intimidating in an 'Oh, my God, this is going to be hard' way, but not in an 'I'm going to burn incense and chant' way," says founder Michael DeCorte, 37.

DeCorte—handsome and muscular—cranks up the thermostat and the yogis (er, athletes) stand on their mats waiting for the starting pistol: a yogic soundtrack with a beat. We begin with the familiar salute to the sun, but here's the rub: He has us continue the sequence of forward bend into plank position and then lunges until at least 12 of the 20 students have pools of sweat on their mats. I *beg* my sweat glands for moisture. My triceps quiver like wet noodles, and my upward dog is more of the puppy variety.

Encouraging us with positive imagery, DeCorte gets us to do split squats with one leg perched on a stack of blocks (a move derived from his boot camps). "You know when you walk behind someone and it looks like their butt cheeks are winking?" he says. "That'll be you." I grit my teeth through the lunges, aspiring for a *derrière* with a cheekier personality.

My next mission is to get swept off my feet, literally. Dubbed "aerial," "anti-gravity" or "suspension" yoga, the practice involves using a sling that hangs from the ceiling to



CATCH UP WITH:
EMILIE DINGFELD
@emiliedingfeld

support more advanced postures, such as headstands and backbends, as well as deepen the stretch and improve circulation. "When you're [upside down], you send nourishment into the cells and the brain," says Beatrix Montanile, owner of The Flying Yogi in Toronto, who is 60 but looks closer to 40. It is said to impact the way we stand and move, and it enhances our glow.

Using props in yoga isn't all that new, though. Ropes, straps and blocks have been a part of the practice for centuries. A modern spin-off of the ropes is the suspension system.

At an intro class with Montanile, I'm hesitant at first to take my feet off the floor and trust the small "S" hooks to hold me up. Airborne, with the sling against my back and my feet rooted in suspended handles, I sink into a deep lunge that requires Herculean strength to keep my legs from splaying out. To flip upside down, I tip back and wrap each side of the sling around each foot. Head over heels, the blood rushes to my head—there isn't a pale face in the room. My spine feels like an elastic band pulled taut; it's a sensation I could get addicted to

and so I contemplate installing one of these devices at home so I can use it all the time. (My landlord would not be impressed.) But Montanile, who has been doing yoga for 26 years, assures me that Flying Yoga doesn't have to replace my regular classes. "You should mix up your practices. We need different forms of yoga on different days," she says.

It's back to basics, though, in July, when I attend the Lolë White Yoga Session in Montreal. I practise hatha with some 2,000 people, under the tutelage of Lyne St-Roch, owner of four namesake studios in Montreal and one in Magog, Que. To the sound of an electric harp, we move through a steady series of moves. I briefly forget about sculpting my muscles and melt into the poses I know so well. "Yoga is too much about performance today. It is about taking care of the body," says St-Roch.

It was there that I recalled what Rea said: "Yoga should feel good in your body immediately." That simple notion resonates with me. As I tried these new takes on "my" yoga, I felt refreshed. @

YOGA ESSENTIALS

These basic tools from Gaiam will have you ready for any yoga class (fusion or otherwise)—at home or in a studio.



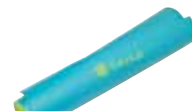
3-in-1 Strap & Sling, \$15



Yoga Mat Wash, \$13



Yoga Block, \$13



Peacock Yoga Mat, \$20