

"It's about time,"

says Baroness van Haersolte, a faint Dutch accent dusting her sentences, "that yoga came into its own. When I first started practising, 20 years ago in Sydney, people I knew said to me, 'Oh, are you going to join a commune in Queensland?'"

Little did they know that the baroness, who lives at Palm Beach and Paddington instead, would take yoga right to the heart of Sydney's inner circles.

It was van Haersolte who introduced yoga to Rowena Danziger, the very private, very powerful and much revered headmistress of Ascham, regarded as Australia's most prestigious girls' school, in Sydney's Edgecliff.

Danziger, whose networks of influence extend far beyond Ascham, has been practising yoga for almost 18 years, first with the doyen of Sydney yoga teachers, the late Martin Jackson, and now, privately, with Anna Prior, "a marvellous woman" from the Australian School of Yoga at Bondi Junction, in the city's eastern suburbs. "It's a very good way of keeping in good order," she remarks. "It keeps you flexible, it builds up endurance and it gives you strength, which is a bit hard to define."

Emotional strength?

"Balance and strength," Danziger replies.

In a nutshell, if Rowena Danziger is prepared to speak publicly about her belief in the benefits of yoga, then its credentials are on very firm ground indeed. And if that sounds patronising to other enlightened souls like van Haersolte, or former Federal Health Minister Carmen Lawrence, or *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* co-director George Ogilvie, or actor John Bell, it's still the case that yoga's guru-and-disciple image worked against it for a long time.

"Absolutely," agrees Alberta van Haersolte. "Yoga used to be thought of as something quite weird. I used to get so many funny remarks at dinner parties whenever I talked about it."

And now?

"Oh, it's a completely different reaction," she says. "If people ask me 'Why do you do yoga?' after telling me that they swim or jog or play tennis and feel marvellous, I reply that the difference is that yoga works on the immune system. It strengthens the immune system because it works on the internal organs of the body."

"I always say that yoga is my preventative medicine," van Haersolte adds.

Rowena Danziger ended up inviting the baroness to teach yoga at Ascham, which she did from 1981 until 1991.

"When Mrs Danziger first found out I was a yoga teacher," says van Haersolte, whose three daughters all attended the school, "she said I was the first one she'd met who didn't look like she needed a good steak."

The body of the baroness is hidden beneath cream trousers and jacket. But clearly anyone who starts the day as she does – with a headstand – makes a mockery of those who plod with bowed heads towards old age, believing that cracking at the seams is inevitable.

Van Haersolte is 60 and proud of her vintage, although she was hesitant at first to put it on the record. She recently began working as a freelance tourist guide and wasn't sure, in these ageist times, about the long-term results of such frankness. Earlier this year, she

was showing around a Swiss couple who were in Sydney for the World Congress of Anaesthesiology. When she mentioned that she was going to a yoga class that evening, the couple, both anaesthesiologists, replied that they also did yoga and that there was a yoga school on practically every street corner in Zurich.

Yoga schools aren't quite so prevalent here – yet – but it seems that large numbers of people from right across the social spectrum are turning, or returning, to the 3,000-year-old discipline, believed to have been introduced into Australia in the 1920s.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of these people are burnt-out gym refugees, although some gyms have wisely started including yoga classes in their programs. Wisely, because yoga looks like becoming to the '90s what aerobics was to the fast and furious '80s.

Yoga today has many high-flying, high-profile proponents. Executive vice-president of Bankers Trust Australia Gillian Broadbent has practised hatha yoga for 20 years while Alan Talbot, senior partner with Price Waterhouse in Melbourne, has

practised Iyengar yoga for 12 years. Patrick White's biographer, journalist David Marr, has also practised yoga on a regular basis, as have actor, director and *Lorenzo's Oil* screenwriter Nick Enright and actor Alan Lovell.

In an article published in *HQ* magazine in January, Larry Gallagher wrote that in the West, "yoga has been expanding steadily over the years, mutating to fit its new surroundings". The same month, in the magazine *Southern Crossings*, journalist and yoga teacher Collyn Rivers wrote that yoga schools across Australia were experiencing major increases in attendance – "particularly by people in their mid-20s to early-40s, although it is not uncommon to find students in their 60s and 70s. In Bondi Junction alone, there are four major yoga schools, all apparently thriving."

Rivers, who sums up the many paths of yoga as "the quest for awareness, using the body as a tool", says it has been estimated that in the United States, 4 per cent of the population "are doing yoga in one form or another ... We suspect it's the same in Australia, although it's hard to say because of the many closet yogis around."

As if to reinforce yoga's burgeoning profile across leisure-harassed Australia, a four-day World Yoga Convention will be held in Sydney in October. The theme of the conference, fittingly enough, will be: "The Integration of Science and Yoga in the 21st Century."

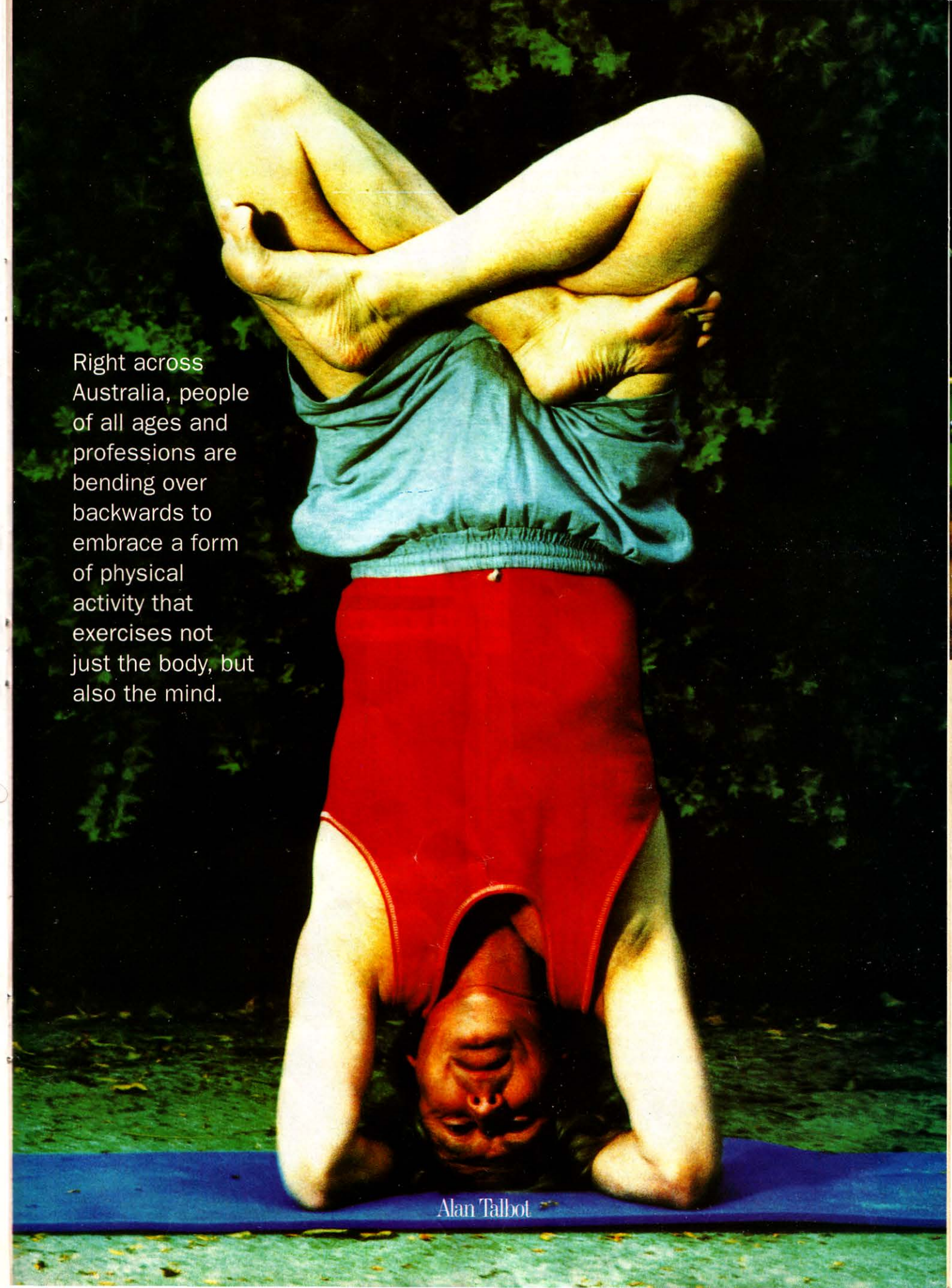
Meanwhile, in Melbourne, yoga has attracted such diverse figures as singer/actor Colin Hay of Men at Work and *Cosi* fame and high-profile ANZ media analyst Bob Peters, who has practised the demanding Iyengar yoga for years. Peters, who attends Glenn Ceresoli's Action School of Yoga in Fitzroy, where AFL football star Jeff Hogg is also a regular, says of his friend, Price Waterhouse's Alan Talbot: "He's like me: before we go on overseas business trips, we find where the best Iyengar teachers are."

Talbot has long been interested in meditation and eastern philosophy, and says he finds the spiritual side of yoga more satisfying than orthodox religion.

As someone who used to jog – "it gets very hard on the knees" – he found that physically, yoga also suited him better: "I have always

Let's get twisted

Story by Nikki Barrowclough • Photography by Andrzej Liguz

A full-page photograph of a woman performing a handstand with a backbend. She is wearing a red leotard and a light blue short-sleeved shirt. Her legs are crossed at the ankles and bent at the knees, with her feet pointing towards her head. She is standing on a blue mat against a dark, leafy background.

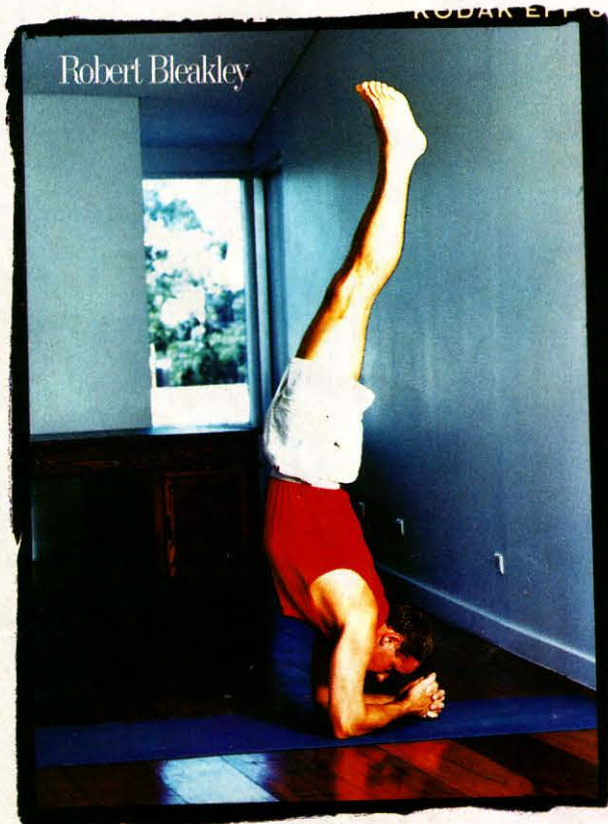
Right across
Australia, people
of all ages and
professions are
bending over
backwards to
embrace a form
of physical
activity that
exercises not
just the body, but
also the mind.

Alan Talbot

been very stiff," he says. "I have an English sort of stiffness ... and now I'm much more flexible."

Simon Marrocco, who owns the St Kilda Yoga School in Melbourne and who comments that 60 per cent of his students these days come from the professions, agrees that yoga is fast becoming part of the mainstream.

One of Marrocco's pupils is former ABC producer Vera Wasowski, who swears by her regimen. "As far as I'm concerned, yoga is much better exercise than jogging or aerobics," she says. "It doesn't tangle anything in your body and



it balances you psychologically through physical postures." Two years ago, Wasowski was retrenched from the ABC, an event that left her traumatised. She says that mainstream psychological counselling didn't help, whereas yoga has kept her sane.

Revelations about the remarkable long-term physical and mental benefits to be had from yoga are nothing new, of course. Yoga has attracted a long line of brilliant minds and famous figures, including US naturalist and author Henry David Thoreau, singer/songwriter Sting and world-renowned violinist Yehudi Menuhin.

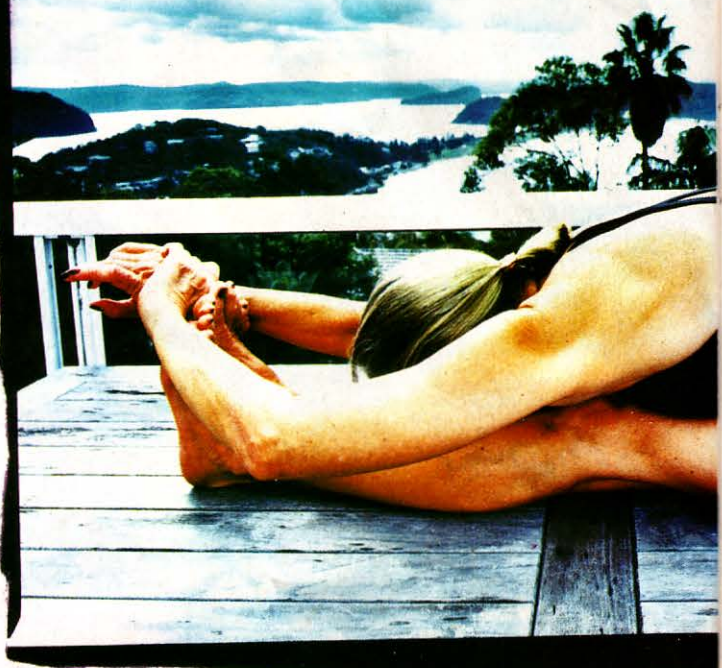
"The practice of yoga for the past 15 years has convinced me that most of our fundamental attitudes to life have their physical counterparts in the body," wrote Menuhin in 1994 in the preface to the book *Light On Yoga* by the celebrated yoga teacher B.K.S. Iyengar (who developed Iyengar yoga).

Sydney criminal lawyer Leigh Johnson, who began practising yoga in the 1970s, returned to classes last November after a two-year break following a car accident that left her with intense back pain.

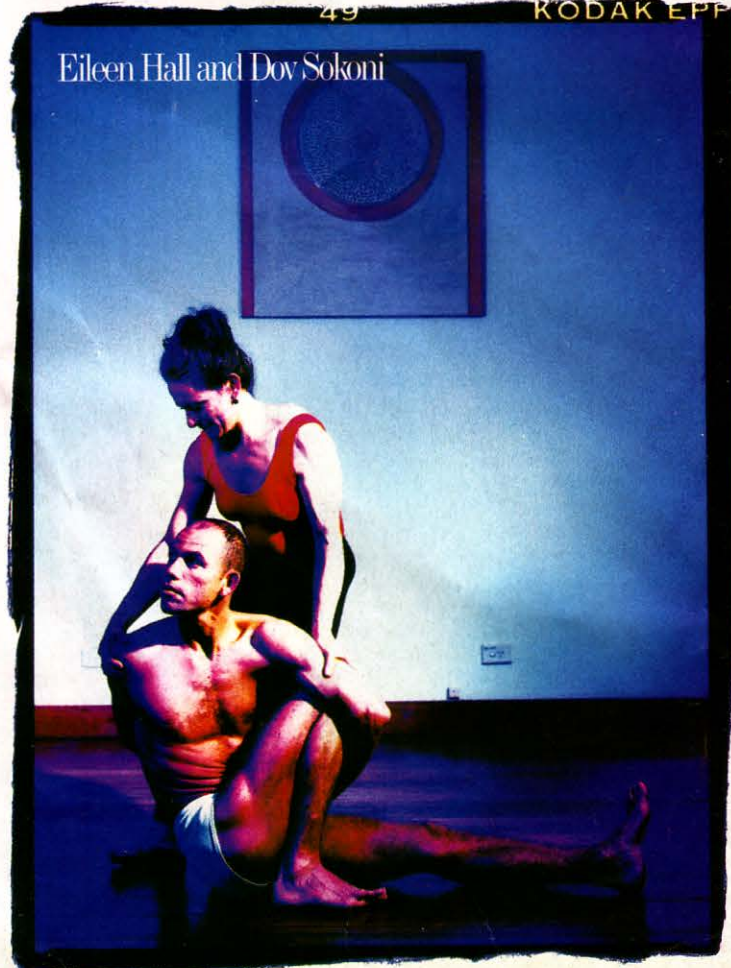
"My doctor recommended I go back to yoga," says Johnson. She adds that she has always found it to be "a sensational way of keeping your body fit and your mind free from stress".

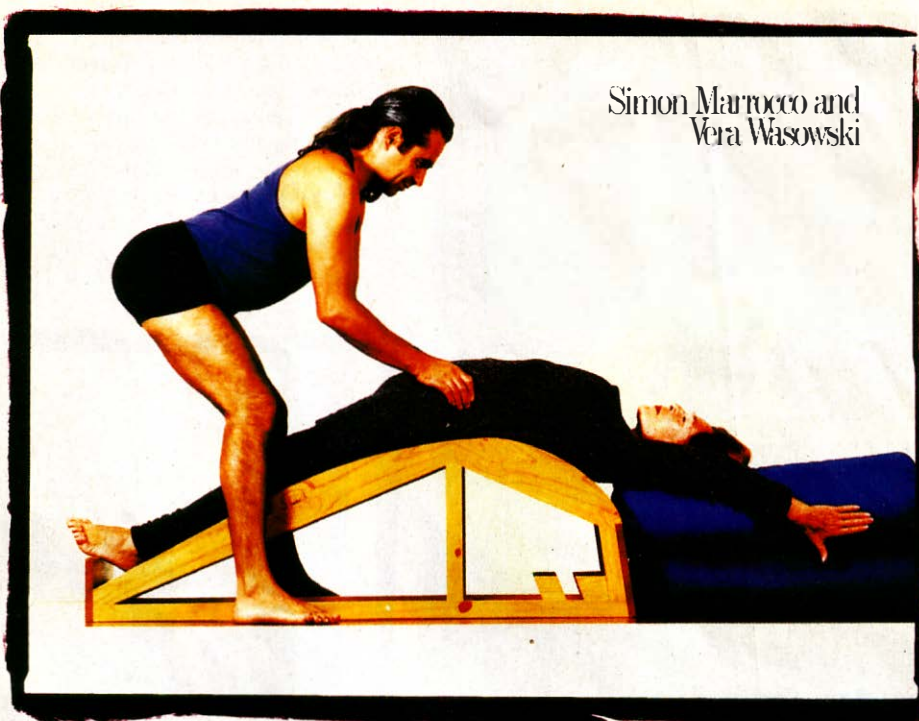
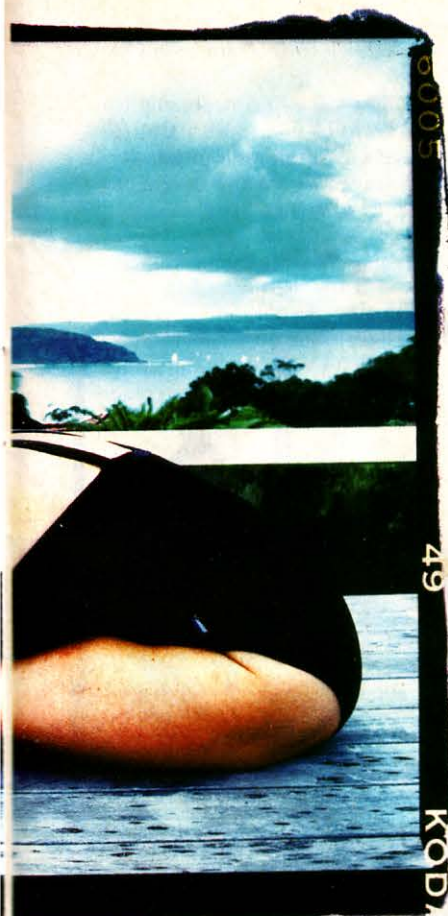
Moshe Lang, a Melbourne psychologist who took up yoga six-and-a-half years ago, comments that yoga is becoming

Alberta van Haersolte



Eileen Hall and Dov Sokoni





acceptable in the same way that acupuncture has gained a broader acceptance.

Lang, who is co-author with his wife, Dr Tasse Lang, of the recently published

book *Resilience: Stories of a Family Therapist*, says he was initially attracted to yoga because of the way it makes no distinction between mind and body.

"I think a lot of the health and emotional problems we have in the West come from this splitting [into two] of the mind and the body," he says.

"What western science can do is to sort out the nonsensical claims about yoga from the solid evidence. And in fact, scientific knowledge can contribute to yoga. Look at acupuncture, which was once regarded as a nonsense. In western science, people investigated the specific claims about acupuncture and there's a whole lot of research that's been done – and we know that acupuncture can help with a whole lot of things. It's now irreplaceable in medicine and it's becoming a western tradition. The same thing is happening to yoga."

Lang says he has played tennis for 30 years. Before taking up yoga, he had started having trouble with one of his shoulders, as well as an elbow.

"Now I have no pain at all and much greater ability," he says. "At one level, yoga gives me a wonderful sense of energy and tranquillity. It also reduces my need to sleep. The contradictory thing about it is that it teaches you to exert yourself, while at the same time, it's very relaxing."

Carmen Lawrence, who used to practise yoga several years ago, has taken it up again since the March 2 Federal election – not, as some might imagine, as a result of Labor's loss, but because of a shoulder injury. "I've always been interested in meditative activities," she says. This might seem like a rare thing in political circles, although former Prime Minister Bob Hawke was also a yoga disciple in the 1980s. Hawke studied at Shandor Remete's yoga school. The Yoga Shala, in Bondi. This is also the school that lawyer Leigh Johnson attends.

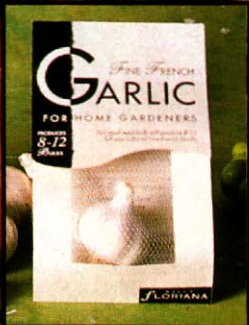
Actor Tara Morice, who played the transformed ugly duckling in the movie *Strictly Ballroom*, is another yoga enthusiast. So is Marie-Helen Gilly, grand-daughter of the French writer

Paul Claudel (and great-niece of Rodin's mistress, sculptor Camille Claudel), who lives in Sydney with her husband, Edward Gilly, president of the Shakespeare Globe Centre.

The man who has the run-down on yoga's who's who in Sydney's eastern suburbs is Robert Bleakley, executive director of Sotheby's Australia, auctioneer to the rich and famous and a yoga devotee himself. Bleakley comments: "Yoga provides a ▷

Fine French Flavour

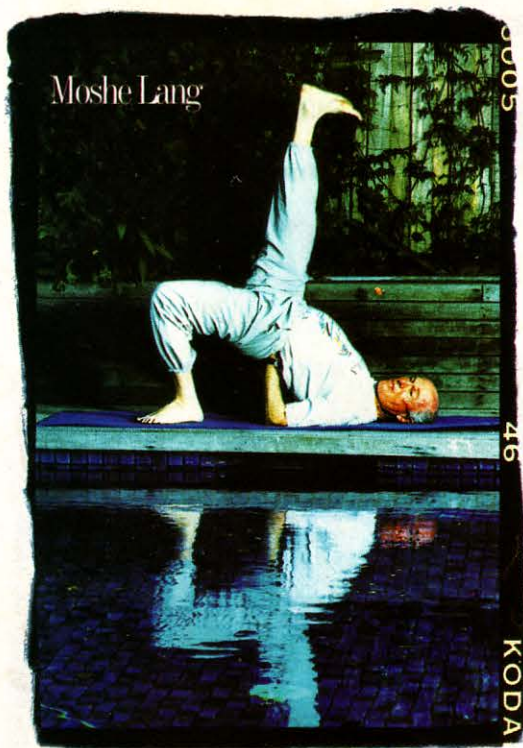
FOR HOME GARDENERS



PLANT FINE FRENCH GARLIC
SEEDLINGS AND SEED BULBS NOW.
AVAILABLE AT LEADING GARDEN CENTRES

fLORIANA™

Bringing your garden to life!



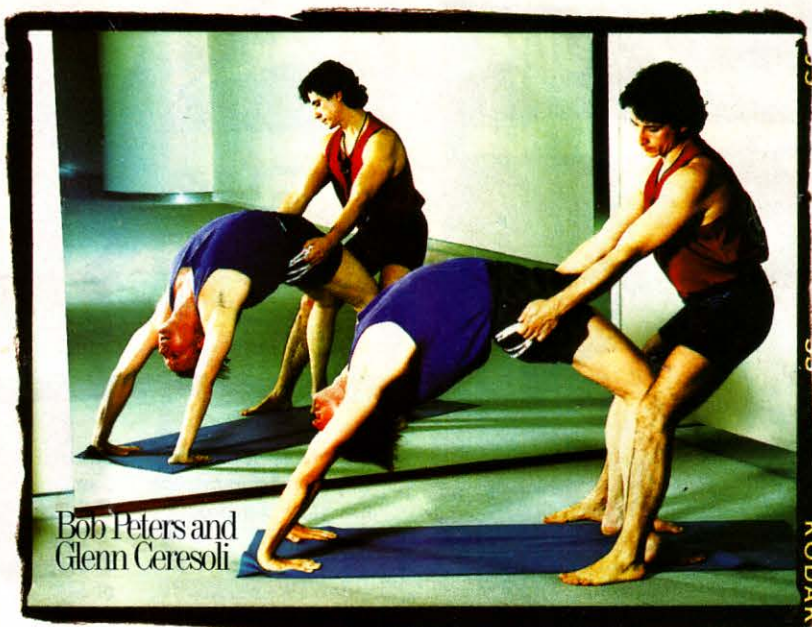
readily manageable means of providing a component of strenuous exercise that energises, rather than enervates, one."

In February, Bleakley opened his \$6.5 million brainchild, the Verona complex, on Oxford Street, Paddington. The centre comprises a

four-screen cinema, cafe/bar, Mambo store and yoga studio, Yoga Works, run by Eileen Hall and Trevor Tangye, who belong to the rare breed of Ashtanga teachers in Australia.

Ashtanga, which has taken off in the United States and is beginning to do the same here, is a particularly rigorous form of yoga which Collyn Rivers describes as being very appealing to those "seeking a physically challenging yoga alternative to aerobics". It was more vividly described by Larry Gallagher in the *HQ* article as being "a lot like slam dancing, only slam dancing isn't so painful".

On the other hand, Iyengar yoga (which was first taught in Sydney



ONE INVESTMENT THAT YIELDS APPRECIATION AFTER ONLY EIGHT HOURS.



Imagine waking from a solid night's sleep in this solid jarrah bed, lovingly hand-crafted out of timber salvaged from the 100 year-old woolstores of Western Australia.

The rarity of such timber marks every single piece of Woolstore Furniture as a unique investment.

But one you can appreciate every day it rises in value.

So visit our showroom and inspect Woolstore Furniture for yourself.

WOOLSTORE FURNITURE


AN INVESTMENT IN AUSTRALIA'S HERITAGE.

MELBOURNE:

SHOWROOM: 96 Pelham Street, Carlton
 Ph: 9349 2811. 12 - 5pm Monday - Saturday
 JOINERY: 459 Dorset Road, Bayswater.
 Ph: 9720 8400. 9am - 5pm Monday - Friday

SYDNEY:

NATURALLY AUSTRALIAN
 45 Circular Quay West, The Rocks.
 (opposite Overseas Passenger Terminal)
 Ph: (02) 247 1531. 9.30am - 5.30pm 7 days.

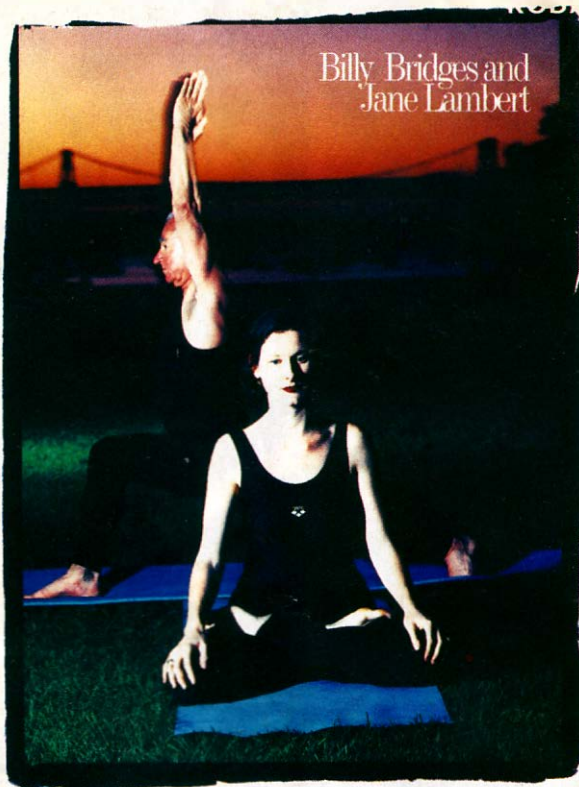
WF 101

by Martin Jackson), is best described as traditional Indian yoga emphasising precise postural alignment and control over all body parts. Hatha yoga is essentially the umbrella form of yoga, encompassing all the physical yoga postures, and can be taught either dynamically or more passively.

At Yoga Works, which has been open for only five months, there are already 400 students on the books, many of them in their early 20s. A quick check through the studio's card index reveals a mixed membership which includes bankers, business consultants and at least one anthropologist.

Hall and Tangye agree that yoga has evolved from its past "mystical" image of "blissed-out" devotees (and dare we say it, fundamentalist vegetarians living in Queensland communes). "We're trying to demystify yoga," comments Hall, whose students include Dov Sokoni, owner of The Wharf restaurant in Sydney.

Tangye adds: "Our minds go so fast these days that we have forgotten how to be patient. People have forgotten how to slow down and that's where yoga works very well. People can find an inner sense of themselves, where they become very still and



focused and outside stresses no longer worry them. Professional people in particular discover an internal sense of order."

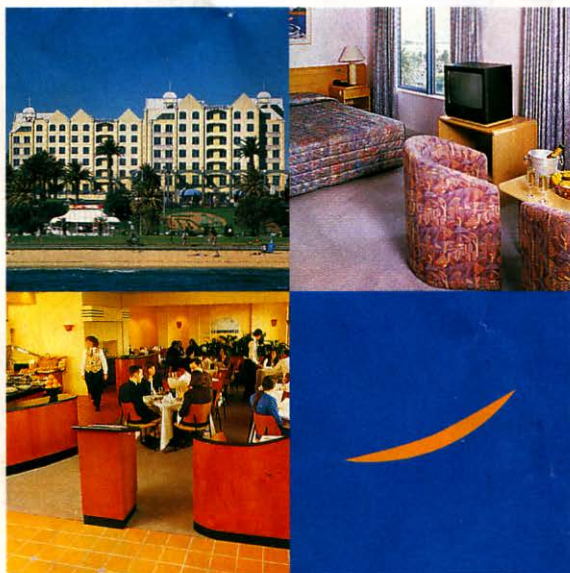
Certainly Tangye's remarks match the crop of articles that have been appearing in the print media during the past few years about the way the ruthless new work ethic, shortened careers (or no careers at all), longer working hours and rising stress levels have affected all of our lives.

Eve Grzybowski, founder of the Sydney Yoga Centre in Surry Hills, says she noticed that classes became even busier after the economic downturn and comments that today's office lifestyle, sitting for long hours staring at computer screens, seems to make it harder for people to "turn-off" after work.

"Before, people were more interested in the physical results to be had from yoga," she says. "Now, they want to know how to de-stress and to learn how to breathe properly

[a vital component of yoga], because it seems that more and more people are having panic attacks."

Christene Boddington, who has practised hatha yoga for eight years and recently opened a yoga school in George Street, ▽



Free breakfast,
free gym, spa, sauna,
free parking and kids stay free.

★★★★

Accommodation only \$68 per person
twin share.

We know you won't believe it!
After all it's an offer too good to be true. Give us a call on 1 800 64 22 44
or contact your AFTA or licensed travel agent.

GOOD THINKING NOVOTEL



NBA 015

Novotel Bayside Melbourne 16 The Esplanade St. Kilda Beach Melbourne 03 9525 5522.

Valid 1 June to 31 August 1996. Subject to availability. Conditions apply. Up to 2 children under 16 years in City View Room using existing bedding are free including breakfast. Over 100 hotels worldwide. Accor Asia Pacific operates over 40 Novotel hotels in the Asia Pacific region.



Sydney, ironically next to a gun shop, tells of a schoolteacher who found it almost impossible to switch off.

"We used to blindfold her and make her lie flat with her legs raised and supported by a platform. It slowed her mind right down," says Boddington. "Some people become overwhelmed by the problems of their life and their body takes on a certain shape. Yoga takes all of that on."

Boddington's pupils have included successful Sydney developer Jose de la Vega, who is currently working on the Walsh Bay redevelopment project, as well as inimitable Double Bay identity Billy Bridges, the jockey-turned-real-estate agent to millionaires.

Bridges, who would once have seemed a most unlikely candidate for yoga, began practising it two years ago with his wife, fashionable milliner Janc Lambert. He has since become one of its most passionate practitioners.

Bridges is just one example of a new trend in yoga. Eve Grzybowski says that while women have traditionally predominated in yoga classes, men are now beginning to catch up.

"Because of all the horse falls and all the exercise I've done over the years, I'd become stiff and not as agile," Bridges rasps down the telephone one afternoon. "Lots of business people are doing it - particularly those who have been through the turmoil of the past 10 years. Your mental attitude changes very quickly once you do yoga. And these yoga people learn about you very quickly, as clever as you think you are. I run through the

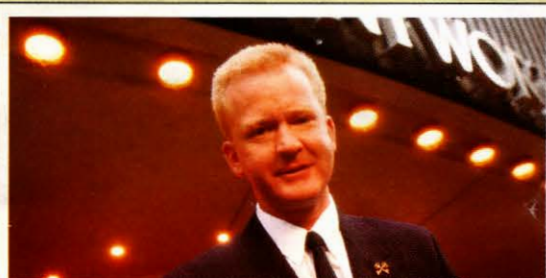


cemetery at Waverley once a month just to remind me of how unimportant we all are," he adds darkly.

It's not like Billy Bridges to speak darkly about anything, just as it's not like television current affairs presenter Jana Wendt to speak about herself at all.

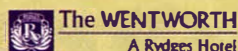
However, in March she dealt the coup de grâce to the cynics out there, the ones still thinking in terms of Queensland communes. She happily told a Sydney newspaper that for exercise, she does yoga at home, "face down in the shag pile". □

2,000 Extra Good Reasons To Stay At The Wentworth



Come and enjoy The Wentworth's renowned hospitality between June and August and you will receive 2,000 bonus frequent flyer points every time you stay* That's 2,000 points in addition to the normal five points for every dollar spent.

This bonus is a great reason to visit us soon. And it applies to each stay between June and August. So book early to take full advantage of this fantastic offer.



61-101 Phillip Street, Sydney, NSW 2000

Call Toll Free: 1800 676 960 or in Sydney on 230 0700
Fax: (02) 227 9133 or contact your AFTA or licensed Travel Agent.

*Qantas and Ansett Frequent Flyers earn a bonus of 2,000 additional points per stay at The Wentworth between 1/6/96 and 31/8/96. This offer is in addition to the usual five points per dollar spent. Conditions apply.
RWS 0031/GWE

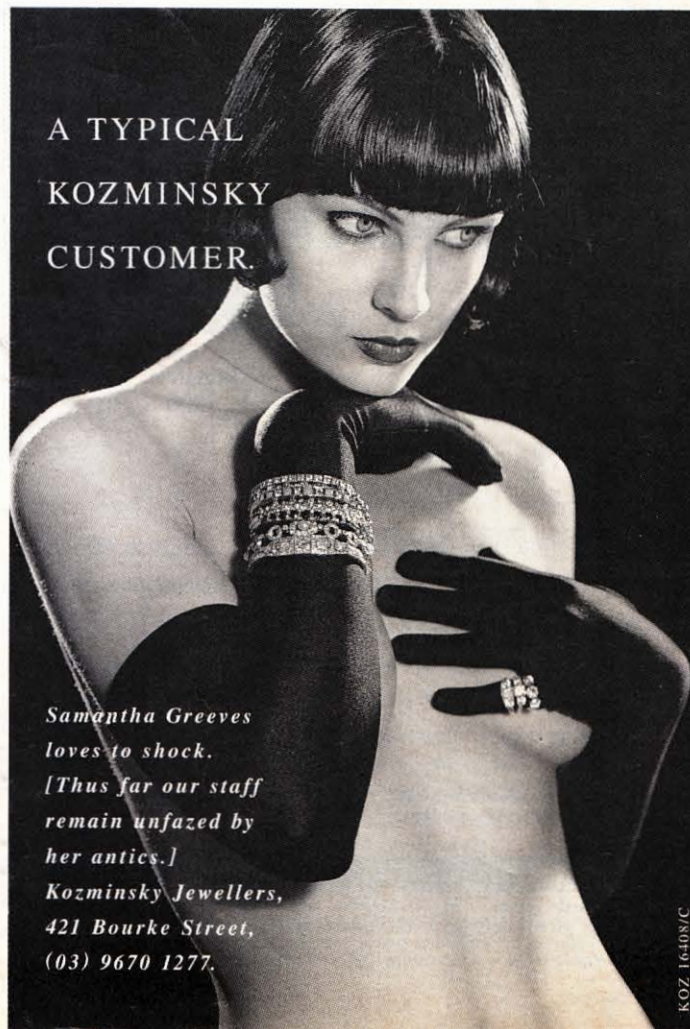


ANSETT AUSTRALIA
FREQUENT FLYER

Frequent flyer



A TYPICAL
KOZMINSKY
CUSTOMER.



Samantha Greeves
loves to shock.

[Thus far our staff
remain unfazed by
her antics.]

Kozminsky Jewellers,
421 Bourke Street,
(03) 9670 1277.