



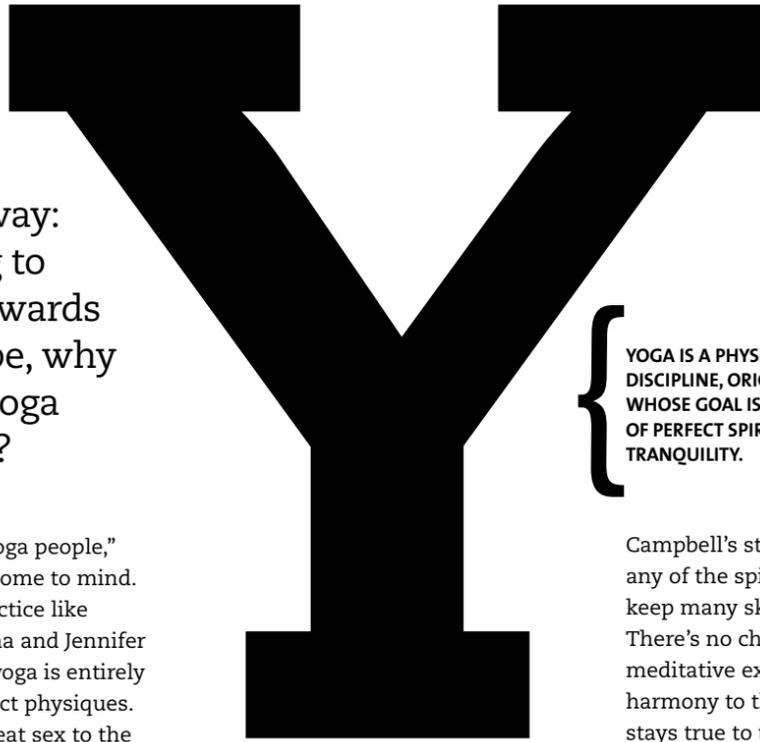
Yoga

for everyone anywhere

(Yes, even for you.)

By Rebecca Lavoie
Photos by David Mendelsohn

Look at it this way:
If you are going to
bend over backwards
to get into shape, why
not do it with yoga
style and grace?



YOGA IS A PHYSICAL, MENTAL AND SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE, ORIGINATING IN ANCIENT INDIA, WHOSE GOAL IS THE ATTAINMENT OF A STATE OF PERFECT SPIRITUAL INSIGHT AND TRANQUILITY.

When you think of “yoga people,” certain celebrities might come to mind. Famous touters of the practice like Gwyneth Paltrow, Madonna and Jennifer Aniston often claim that yoga is entirely responsible for their perfect physiques. Singer Sting has added great sex to the list of reasons to do yoga. But, even in celebrity circles, “yoga people” cut a pretty broad swath across the population. Comic Jerry Seinfeld does yoga. Bad boy Charlie Sheen thinks yoga is “winning!” AARP cover girls Candice Bergen and Jamie Lee Curtis credit yoga for their well-preserved looks.

The point is, yoga is being done by all sorts of people. Even here in New Hampshire, arguably the opposite end of the universe from Hollywood, yoga is all over the place.

Not only is there no shortage of yoga studios in New Hampshire, there is astonishing variety among them, from Kripalu, which recommends movement “in response to the body’s wisdom,” to Power Yoga, a Western invention that takes a fitness-oriented approach, to Iyengar, which encourages the use of props such as blankets, socks and straps to bring the body into alignment.

If you’re not a yoga person, the choices can be as puzzling as the Sanskrit terms associated with the practice (asanas, mudras, bahkti, dharana, spandex, etc.). But talk to just a few people within New Hampshire’s ever-growing yoga circles and you’ll hear a consistent message: there’s a yoga style, studio or philosophy for everyone, and you’ll know yours when you find it.

Namaste, indeed.

Yoga that Goes Deep

It’s useful to remember that yoga is, by design, a spiritual exercise. The meditative uniting of mind and body is designed to empower the spirit or soul of the practitioner.

Kc Cooley, who teaches Jivamukti yoga at her Karma Yoga Center in Manchester, says she first encountered the style while living in New York City in the months after 9/11. She was lifted and inspired and she’s now a certified trainer.

She notes that each class is “energized” with Sanskrit mantras and devotional music, providing a kind of revival of the mystical roots of yoga. In fact, the aforementioned yoga luminary Sting once said that the founders of Jivamukti “inspired and encouraged us to think of yoga not just as a system of exercise, but as a door to the infinite.”

Cooley puts that in her own words: “Yoga is a vehicle for enlightenment; not just for a better butt for the summer but to transform your whole life.”

Yoga in the Heat

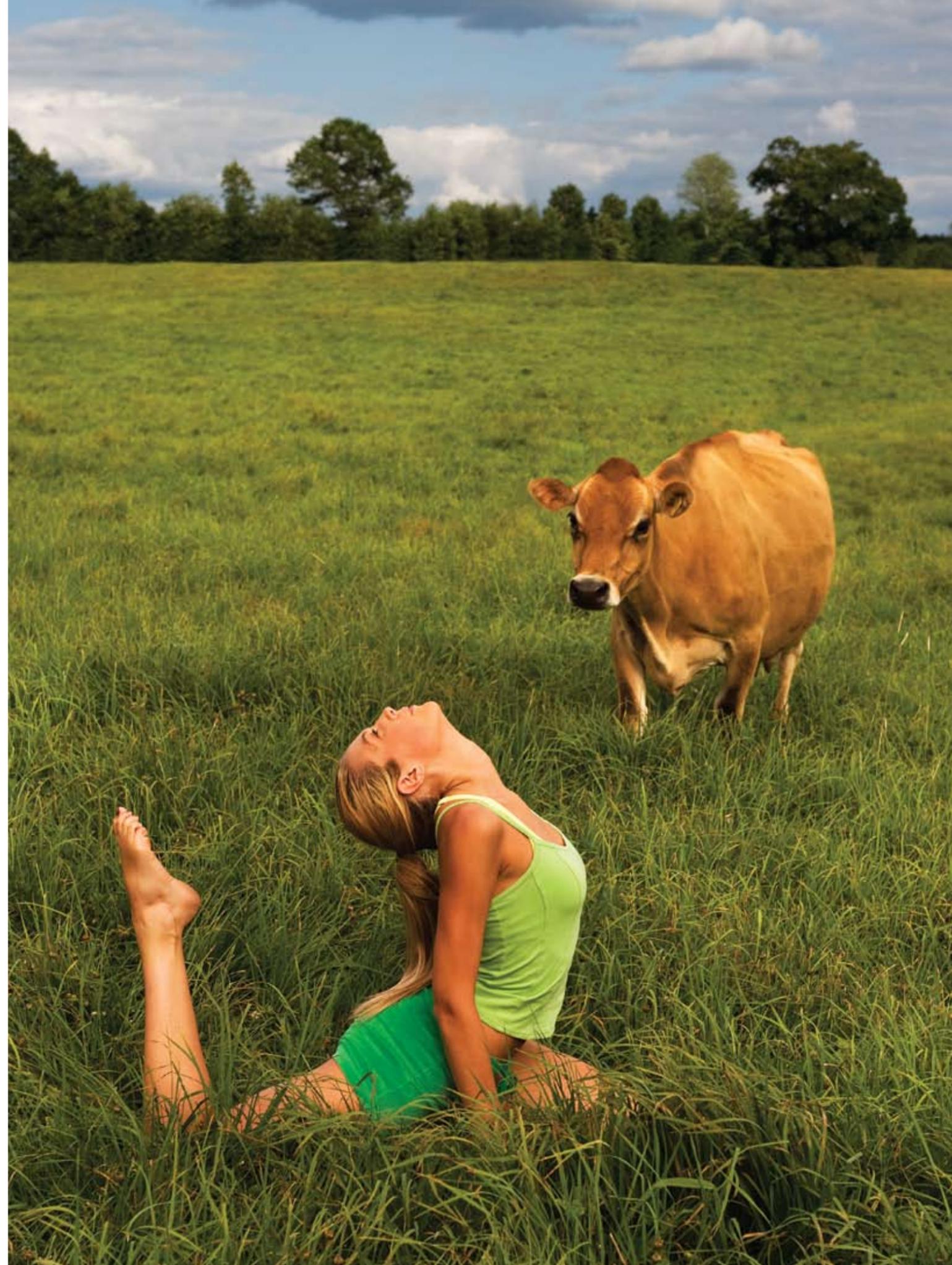
Pubali Campbell is the owner of Bikram Yoga in Manchester. Her studio is one of those you might have heard people describe as a “hot yoga place” and indeed it is —105 degrees, to be precise.

Campbell’s studio doesn’t incorporate any of the spiritual aspects of yoga that keep many skeptics from trying it out. There’s no chanting and no use of the meditative expressions some claim bring harmony to the spirit. Instead, her studio stays true to the Bikram philosophy: every class is identical, 90 minutes of a set of 26 stretches and two breathing exercises. The only thing that changes from class to class is the students who show up to take it.

“The heat provides an environment where it’s not possible to focus on anything other than what’s happening in that room, building tolerance, strength and discipline,” Campbell explains. “It’s pretty difficult to be distracted by real life when you’re trying to stretch, keep your balance and tolerate what is, for some, a pretty uncomfortable temperature.”

Despite what might sound like a hard-core and uncomfortable place to try yoga for the first time, Campbell stresses that Bikram is, in fact, a beginner’s yoga, and that you’re equally likely to find yourself sweating in Wind Removing Pose behind a toned pro or a fitness novice who’s got no idea what Wind Removing Pose even means. This speaks to one of the myths that Campbell is eager to dispel: that yoga is a sort of elitist practice without much connection to the lives of real people. In fact, she says the benefits have much more to do with how yoga changes one’s life when they’re not in the studio.

“Think about sitting in traffic. Think about when your kids are acting out, or when your boss comes in and says





something that makes you want to snap. A practitioner of yoga, someone who understands its concepts, he has honed the skill of taking a deep breath, of slowly contemplating something. That person has greatly reduced their odds of doing something they'll regret."

Still not sure yoga is for you? Well, as it turns out, there's yoga in New Hampshire even for those who have no desire to sweat it out in hot rooms or twist themselves up like a pretzel. In fact, there's one yoga club where the only requirement for entry is the desire to laugh a little — or a lot.

Yoga for the Laughs

Marcia Wyman is the founder of the New England Center of Laughter in Concord. Yes, you read that right — mere steps from where our grim-faced Legislature spends their days saber-rattling, there is something called the Center of Laughter, created to promote a growing type of yoga now being practiced in more than

6,000 clubs around the world. It's called Laughter Yoga and, according to Wyman, its benefits include stopping stress, improving circulation, aiding breathing and reducing the risk of illness.

And there isn't a Downward-Facing Dog in sight.

"The yoga part of Laughter Yoga is the breathing, or Pranayama," says Wyman. "We start the class with a prompt — something like an improv theatre exercise — to get the laughter going and then we do what's called meditation laughter."

Wyman says the prompt can be as simple as someone pretending to chase a runaway lawnmower or acting out a silly telephone conversation. This triggers a giggle, and in a group setting a giggle can quickly grow into a swell of uncontrollable guffaws. In Laughter Yoga, this is called — seriously — "Laughing for No Reason." It's a concept based on the idea that the body cannot distinguish between real and fake

laughter, but that the physical act of laughter itself has a positive impact on the body, mind and spirit.

Wyman explains that the brainchild behind Laughter Yoga, Dr. Madan Kataria, designed the practice to take place in social settings, where all are invited to participate for free. This, she says, gets people who might never otherwise see themselves as yoga people to give it a try, especially older folk who might not realize exactly how little they're laughing.

"We have done programs for younger people, but the thing is young people laugh about 300 or 400 times a day, whether they know it or not. Starting around the age of 40, we can measure our laughter at as little as 15 times a day and often we do that quietly, with some reservation."

Wyman is a former national archery champion and coach whose career was cut short by a stroke she suffered more than a year ago. She says that by training

{ Yoga People Places }

ASHTANGA

What it is: A vigorous series of six established pose sequences, practiced sequentially as progress is made.

Best for: Strength without weights, lung-busting cardio, weight loss. Experts whisper that Ashtanga is a great fit for "Type-A" personalities.

Where you can find it:
Yoga East
163-B Deer St., Portsmouth
info@yogaeastyoga.com

BIKRAM

What it is: A predictable 90-minute class for all levels practiced in a heated room.

Best for: Stamina, weight loss, focus

Where you can find it:
Bikram Yoga Concord
8A McGuire St., Concord
(603) 415-9642 (YOGA)
bikramyogaconcord.com

Bikram Yoga Manchester
195 McGregor St.
Manchester
bikramyogamanchester.com

Bikram Yoga Nashua
5 Pine St. Ext., Nashua,
bikramyoganashua.com

HATHA

What it is: One of the six original types of yoga, Hatha

encompasses nearly all types of yoga practice, offered on every level imaginable. A basic and classical approach.

Best for: Calming down, de-stressing and pretty much every other benefit yoga brings. Everyone can do it.

Where you can find it:
Earth and Sky Yoga
15 North Main St.
Wolfeboro
earthandskyyoganh.com

IYENGAR

What it is: A purist yoga using straps, blocks and harnesses that have earned it the name "furniture yoga."

Best for: Learning the fundamentals and a systematic full-body workout. Detail-oriented, patient types.

Where you can find it:
Ancient Healing Arts,
2 West Park St., Lebanon
ahayoga.com

JIVAMUKTI

What it is: A meditative form for all skill levels that links the breath with intention and movement

Best for: Those seeking a path to physical wellness and spiritual enlightenment.

Where you can find it:
Karma Yoga Center

83 Hanover St., Manchester
karmayoganh.com

KRIPALU

What it is: A three-part practice that teaches knowing, acceptance and oneness with the body.

Best for: Self-empowerment, personal transformation, breathwork and anyone looking to learn the basics from the mechanical to the spiritual side of yoga.

Where you can find it:
Moving Spirit
32 Daniel Webster Hwy.
Merrimack
movingspiritogadance.com
The Yoga Center
28 South Main St., 3rd Floor
Concord
yogaphile@yahoo.com

KUNDALINI YOGA

What it is: Constantly moving poses with breath control

Best for: Getting a yoga buzz
Where you can find it:
BeBliss Yoga
Conway
beblissyoga.wordpress.com

POWER YOGA

What it is: It's yoga aerobics-style.

Best for: Burn, baby, burn. And then, burn some more. Start slow, even if you think you're

Superman. And bring plenty of water.

Where you can find it:
New Hampshire Power Yoga
704 Milford Rd., S. Merrimack
nhpoweryoga.com

VINYASA OR "FLOW"

What it is: A form of Power Yoga with poses flowing from one to the next with each breath.

Best for: Weight loss and general fitness

Where you can find it:
Living Yoga
120A North Main St.
Concord

www.livingyoganh.com
Yoga Balance
135 Hooksett Rd., Manchester
yogabalance.info/main

YOGA ON THE BEACH

Where you can find it:
Niralambaya
Amy Spencer, Instructor
Windham Town Beach
gracesimplyis.com

YOGA ON HORSEBACK

Best for: Those who wish to fold flexibility and focus training into the riding experience.

Where you can find it:
Bear Brook Stables
Allentown
Allenstownlothlorienfarm.net

to become a Yoga Laughter leader, she not only recovered from depression and some of the lingering physical effects of the stroke, but that she became a true believer intent on helping others reap the benefits of the practice.

Yoga at the Beach

Amy Spencer, founder of Niralambaya Yoga in Windham, agrees that yoga should be personalized and accessible to every level of student. Known for her interdisciplinary style of teaching, her studio takes yoga classes to a place she says takes some of the mystery out of yoga and gets some of even the most skeptical hooked: the town beach.

“The energy of the class shifts for both the student and the teacher when the practice takes place outside,” Spencer explains. “You feel very connected to the Earth and each other and it is a bit easier to tap into a very powerful universal energy.”

Spencer says that even though beach yoga is a limited summer offering at her studio, the Saturday class, which she started four years ago, has seen a doubling of its participants each year. This has had the added effect of increasing awareness of yoga in the community at large.

“I have some students that will not come take classes with me indoors,” Spencer adds. “They just love being outside in the sunshine and in nature.”

Yoga on Horseback

The Windham Town Beach isn't the only place yoga is connecting people with nature. In Pembroke riding teacher and occupational therapist Beth Brown offers another unique practice: yoga on horseback.

“My interest in this began in a few places I had students who weren't interested in competitive riding, but who loved being with the animals and wanted more to do with them. In my work as a therapist, I've long realized that yoga's blend of mental and physical focus is incredibly beneficial, and in so many ways it's the same with riding. You have to be one with the horse and to maintain balance much as you do when you're doing yoga. It seemed like a perfect fit.”

There aren't many people who teach yoga on horseback, but Brown

ABOUT THESE PHOTOS:

We gave photographer David Mendelsohn the kind of challenge he loves: “Give us something ‘different’ to illustrate our yoga story.” To accomplish this he and some other folks went to great lengths. Here are some of the credits where credit is due: Our cover and page 43 — Amber Shonts, yoga student and NEMG model at the UNH Organic Dairy Research Farm in Lee Page 40 & 44 — Elizabeth Anderson, yoga student, at the Stratham Fair Page 7 & 47 — Mark Taylor, instructor, Rasamaya Yoga Studios (Newburyport and Dover) in Market Square, Portsmouth

Thanks to Karrah Kwasnik, Wendy Mendelsohn, Katie Benway, Nermina Kovacevic, Peter Mathieu and Concetta's Closet for cow wrangling and wardrobe assistance, and to Trent Schriefer from the Organic Dairy Research Farm for his patience, the use of the farm and his spot-on casting of the cows. Visit our Web Extras page at www.nhmagazine.com for more images and a Market Square video.

predicts it is a trend that will take hold in New Hampshire. Her students usually work with her one-on-one, first warming up their horses, then using centering exercises and imagery designed both for balance and strength and to create a stronger bond between horse and rider.

“Being one with the energy of the horse is very beneficial to your riding and your body,” she says. “Specifically, yoga in the saddle loosens the pelvic girdle and improves a rider's position, but more important seems to be how it settles the minds of both the student and the animal.”

And as great as this sounds you have to admit it would be pretty cool to see a horse trying to do the Lotus Pose.

Yoga for the Journey

Yoga practice as a metaphor for life isn't limited to classes in barns and on beaches. At the Yoga Center in Concord, Jim Ready

teaches Kripalu, a yoga in which the poses are less important than the inner journey the person experiences while moving through them. According to Jim's partner, Gloria Najecki, many well-meaning yoga teachers are missing the point when they lure students into classes to try and solve a specific problem, such as a bad back or stiff golf swing.

“As yoga keeps moving further into our culture's mainstream, that essence [of the inner journey] can easily get lost,” she explains. “It is the practice of presence — of being in the moment — that creates transformation. When we learn to ‘do’ that, the healed back and improved golf game flow merely as happy consequences.”

While Jim and Gloria's philosophy embodies the kind of language that makes many practical Yankees skeptical or even reluctant to embrace yoga, it conforms to a basic concept of even the most conservative teachers. Practicing yoga requires students to let go of the things that keep them from making progress, both in their yoga and in their lives.

Pubali Campbell stresses that there is no “wrong” yoga, just different forms, but that they do share that important sense of letting go, of surrender.

“You can't just get up and leave in the middle of a Bikram class or do a headstand if you decide that you want to,” she says. “And it's not because the teacher enjoys power. It's a very disciplined strictness because listening to someone, letting them teach you the art, is the only safe way to do it.”

The notion of “giving in” to the Universe might seem out of step in New Hampshire, where individuality is so prized that the state became the only logical target for an invading Free State movement. Yet yoga seems to be taking over the cities and towns here, which might say something about how it does jive with the sensibility of the Granite State.

“In yoga, there is no free speech and no personal freedom,” Campbell says. “Is it hard? Yes. Is it hot? Yes. But like everything else, this kind of good, old-fashioned hard work is the only way to make progress.”

And that sounds like traditional New Hampshire values in a nutshell.

Stretch Free or Die, indeed.

