

the **NEW** yogas

Are new hybrid practices just marketing exercises designed to catch the wave of yoga's popularity, or are they pushing the boundaries and expanding yoga's horizons? Greg Wythes talks to three Sydney teachers who are exploring these edges.

the multitude of styles of hatha yoga that confront today's yoga students can be quite bewildering, particularly for those just starting out. Today just about everything seems to be tagged with the word yoga: Aqua Yoga, Ci-Yo, Yoga on a Paddleboard, and even Nude Yoga. Some of the new styles emerging are traditional and come with a lineage that can be traced back to an Indian master or school. But others seem to open up newer ground and are developed from different sources – though in many cases there is a strong foundation in one or another of the more popular styles. Some of these sources have a similar eastern philosophical resonance, such as qigong, shiatsu, or Zen. Others find a common physiological ground in practices like dance, Pilates, Feldenkrais, or physiotherapy. This development raises a number of

questions, including: does yoga need to be part of a tradition to be regarded as yoga? Other questions that come to mind include: With all of these styles available, how does one make a choice? Should yoga be static and unchanging, or is there scope for development, change and possibly even evolution?

The three styles of yoga presented in this article are not meant to be representative of all the new styles, but are contemporary examples of this trend. Two of them take the physical practices of hatha yoga and combine them with the energetic practices of traditional Chinese medicine. This shift from the Ayurvedic model to the Chinese model is a growing trend. It is becoming more common to hear yoga teachers talk about meridians and qi, rather than nadis and prana.

Zen Ki Yoga

Janie Larmour, www.thecentreofyoga.com

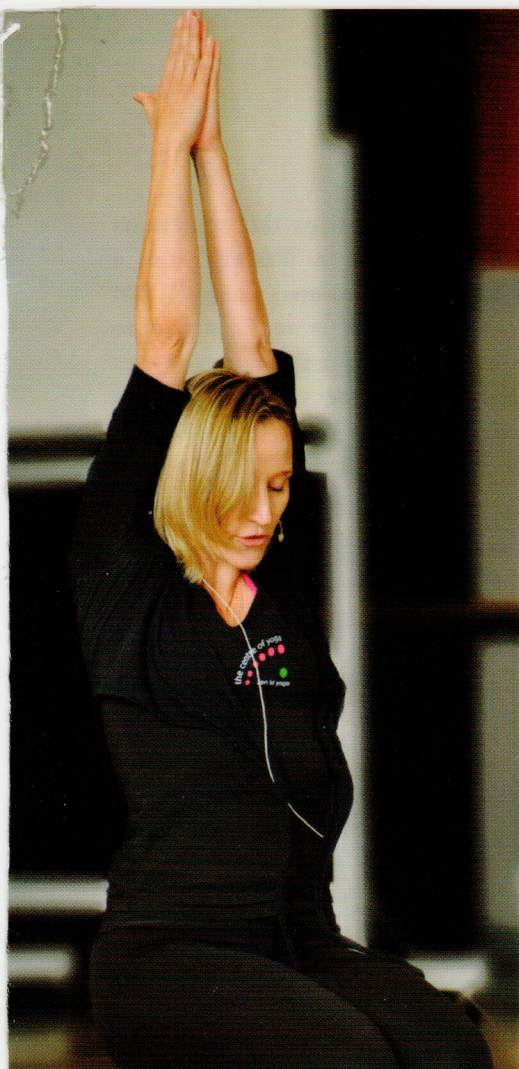
Janie Larmour came to Zen Ki Yoga (ZKY) searching for something different, something she couldn't find elsewhere, something that combined the physical with something deeper. With a background in personal training in Sydney and New York, a high profile client list, and a mind attuned to continual improvement, Janie found the internal work of this Japanese based style exactly what she was looking for.

"Zen Ki Yoga is based on Zen Shiatsu, traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), the principles of yin and yang, macrobiotics, the five element theory, and the seasons," says Janie. "We are working on the 12 meridians as an acupuncturist or shiatsu practitioner would, but using movement to make the energy flow instead of needles or

tactile pressure. We may use traditional hatha poses, but also movements that are nothing like them."

Most of the ZKY practice is done on the floor, rather than in a standing position, and in this way it is very different from more traditional styles. It's dynamic, with each movement repeated a number of times before moving to the next. To the student on the floor, it is strong, demanding and challenging; although it appears gentler to the external observer. Each movement has a specific purpose and this may be at the level of soft tissue, or that of an internal organ, or at a more subtle energetic level.

There are no set routines in ZKY and as the seasons change so does the structure of the class. These seasonal changes




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are based on the five-element theory of traditional Chinese and Japanese medicine. The content of each class is attuned to the needs of the body and the emotions during each season.

One of the most interesting physiological aspects of ZKY is its capacity to target specific parts of the body. "By working internally, we can spot-reduce fat," says Janie. Suzy, one of Janie's more experienced students, has felt the full benefits of this approach.

"I'm so in love with what this yoga does for me," says Suzy. "It's completely changed the shape of my body. The women in my family have a pear shaped body and as I entered middle age my body developed this same shape – it's my genetic inheritance. But working with Janie I lost most of my hips and now I have the shape I had when I was 30. I started going to one class a week and then two and now three. I don't know how it works but I'm trying to find out."

This kind of result is often associated with strong cardiovascular training, with an emphasis on burning calories through strenuous physical activities. ZKY takes a more holistic approach and Janie doesn't offer a simplistic explanation. "We have a lot of focus on building strong and deep core strength which allows the entire body to function in a more balanced way," she says. "That deep inner strength allows our digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems to function as well as giving us spinal stability. As well, there's a strong focus on the quality of the blood, especially its capacity to carry oxygen." But it would seem the complex interplay of the physiological and the energetic components of ZKY provide the foundation for these changes to occur.


These three styles represent a new dynamic that appears to be operating in the yoga world. A dynamic of innovation and change through

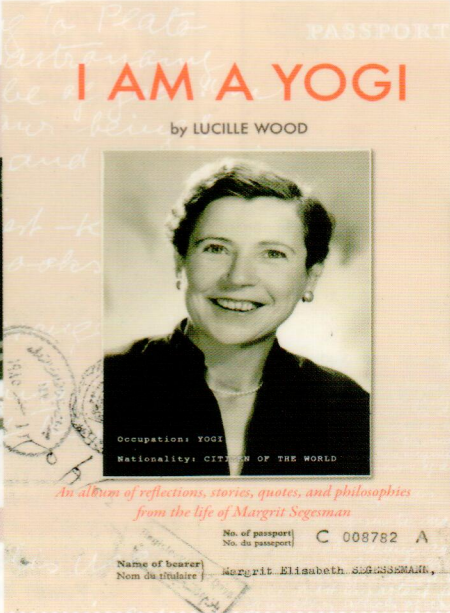
fusion, and perhaps this represents a new maturity in Western yoga, a kind of generational change. But in many ways it is not dissimilar to previous periods in the history of yoga when new approaches emerged from the meeting of creative minds and traditional practices.

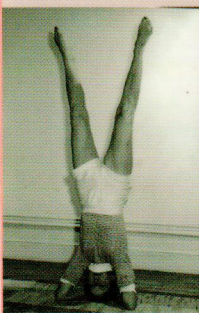

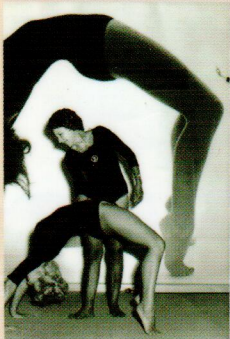

THESE STYLES OF YOGA MAY, OR MAY NOT, pass the test of time, but what distinguishes them at the moment is the way they speak to many contemporary yoga students, and, more importantly, the way they display a real sense of authenticity.

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