



Photography by LOYALL SEWALL

*Participants in a yoga class
at Pure Movement in Portland*



Some Like It Hot. Really Really Hot

Downward Facing Dog in Double Time

By DAPHNE HOWLAND

It's not just the heat at Portland Power Yoga. It's also the humidity. Owners Charles Terhune and Alice Riccardi turn the furnace up to between 95 and 105 degrees and pump moisture into their large, wood-floored studio, as do all official affiliates of Baron Baptiste's Cambridge, Massachusetts-based Power Vinyasa Yoga Studio. Entering the room for a basics class one Friday morning, I am immediately reminded of the lovely saunas I like to take after a good swim.

But here there's no sitting around. It's time for some serious "Vinyasa flow," one of the few yoga terms you might hear at what Terhune and Riccardi like to call "the yoga studio for people who don't do yoga."





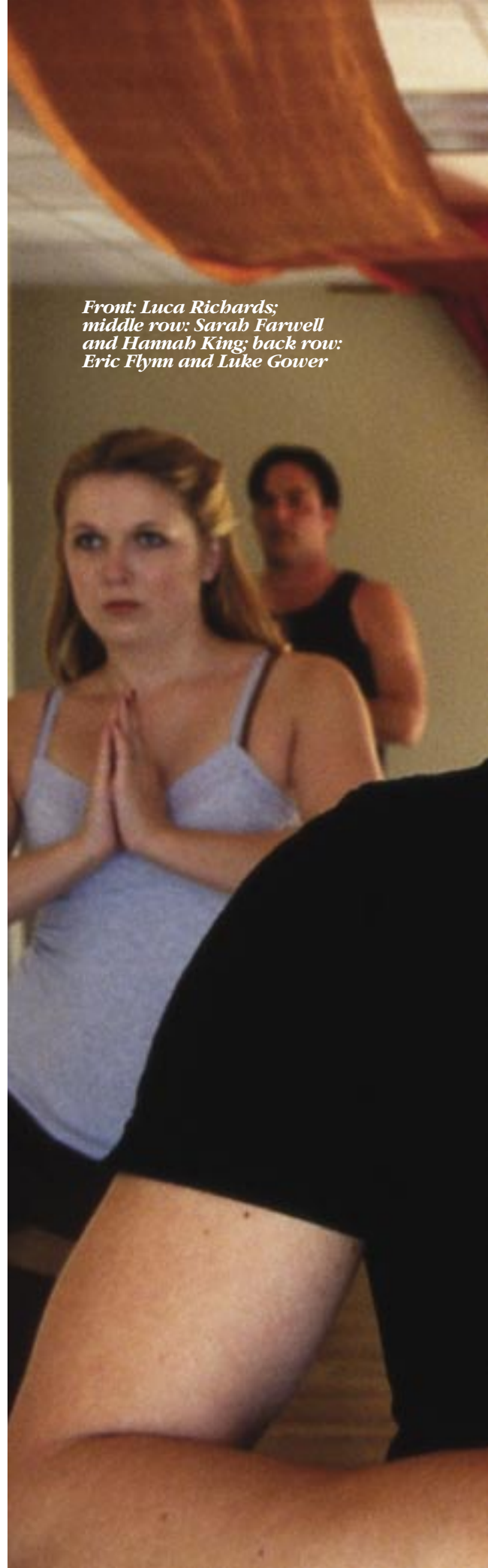
Portland Power Yoga's owners, Charles Terbune and Alice Riccardi, share a quiet pose in their studio. Photograph by Darlene Devita

Vinyasa is a method where controlled breathing is integral to a quick succession of standing, stretching, strengthening, reaching, lunging, and back-bending poses. Most Vinyasa flow employs a series known as sun salutations, which includes postures like “chair pose,” “downward facing dog,” “upward facing dog,” “warrior pose,” and “triangle pose.”

These challenging postures, whose names are pleasingly descriptive, are continuous, making for a vigorous aerobic workout. Advocates say the heat helps release stress and toxins and aids muscle flexibility, while critics warn that the heat can cause people to overtax their muscles' limits. (If you have any qualms about your ability to sustain a strong workout in extreme heat, check with your doctor.)

I set down my water bottle and towel and get on my mat. That relaxed sauna feeling evaporates as I try to keep up with the pace of this class in such a sultry atmosphere. “If you think this is hard, remember, no one said it would be easy,” Riccardi says by way of encouragement, a departure from the sandalwood-laced aphorisms often heard from yoga teachers who follow the likes of Pattabhi Jois, B.K.S. Iyengar, Indra Devi, Patanjali, and Bikramand. I won't be surprised if Riccardi, a former dancer somewhat new to yoga herself, blows on a coach's whistle.

In the twelve or so years I've practiced yoga, it's always been the very precise, slow-moving alignment-centric Ayengar style, which has improved my posture and muscle tone and helped start my day with a dose of serenity. But the extra energy of power



***Front: Luca Richards;
middle row: Sarah Farwell
and Hammah King; back row:
Eric Flynn and Luke Gower***

Power yoga, in all temperatures, combines a fast pace with strong poses to create an aerobic workout.

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A man in the foreground is wearing a black t-shirt with the text 'PURE MOVEMENT PORTLAND' and a logo consisting of three curved lines. He has his hands in a prayer position. Behind him, a woman in a black tank top and another man in a white t-shirt are also in a prayer position. The background shows a yoga studio with orange curtains and a window.

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yoga beckons, and many studios now offer it. Although Portland Power Yoga (425 Marginal Way, 761-HEAT, www.portlandpoweryoga.com) bills itself as Portland's first power Vinyasa yoga studio, several places offer classes in the Vinyasa and Ashtanga modes.

Portland Yoga Studio, (616 Congress Street, 799-0054, www.portlandyoga.com), the Yoga Exchange (106A Exchange Street, 329-5417, www.theyogaexchange.com), the Yoga Center (137 Preble Street, 774-9642, www.maineiyoga.com), and the Greater Portland YMCA (70 Forest Ave., 874-1111, www.cumberlandcountymca.org) all have on their schedules challenging power yoga classes in these styles. And Pure Movement (One Marginal Way, 871-7873, www.puremovement-portland.com), a fitness center more than a yoga center, offers an unheated, Baptiste-influenced power Vinyasa class. Other Maine communities offer power yoga as well; check with local studios.

In most power yoga classes, warmth is generated by the efforts of moving bodies rather than the furnace, but that can be enough to heat things up. In all the classes I sampled, I discarded my sweatshirt and extra T-shirt as the moves of each class intensified. While the method in these classes is recognizable, with the expected ups, downs, stretches, and breaths of the Vinyasa flow, each is colored with the approach and personality of the teacher and even of its regulars.

Portland's only other heated yoga center, Bikram Yoga (49 Dartmouth Street, 874-9642,



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www.mainebikramyoga.com) offers a precise “moving meditation” of 26 poses that co-owner Michael Seymour says is not considered power yoga, because it is a slower style that emphasizes breathing, stretching, meditation, and alignment rather than an aerobic workout.

Back at Portland Power Yoga, it takes no time for even my water bottle to “sweat” as the furnace churns out its moist heat. But I’m grateful for the warm water, to replenish the fluids that are sluicing off my body. My mat is soaked, and soon I am searching vainly for a dry spot on the towel to mop up the sweat from my face, the backs of my knees, my chest, everywhere. (Don’t even think of wearing cotton to a hot yoga class; only moisture-wicking fabrics will help keep you going.)

“So, how do you like this class?” I ask a regular. “Love it! Your body will ask you to come back,” she assures me with a smile.

Indeed, the other members seem refreshed and ready for the day as they make use of the studio’s showers and get ready for work. I hand in my soggy towel, buy a cold bottle of water, and hurry home to change my wet clothes. So far, my body has not asked me to go back to hot power yoga, and I have not asked my body, either. In fact, the next time I encounter a humid environment of 95 degrees, you’ll likely see me in a more restorative posture, my hands over my eyes to salute the sun and my arm extended in a warrior’s pose only occasionally—to keep the gulls away from my sandy, warmed-over lunch. *

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