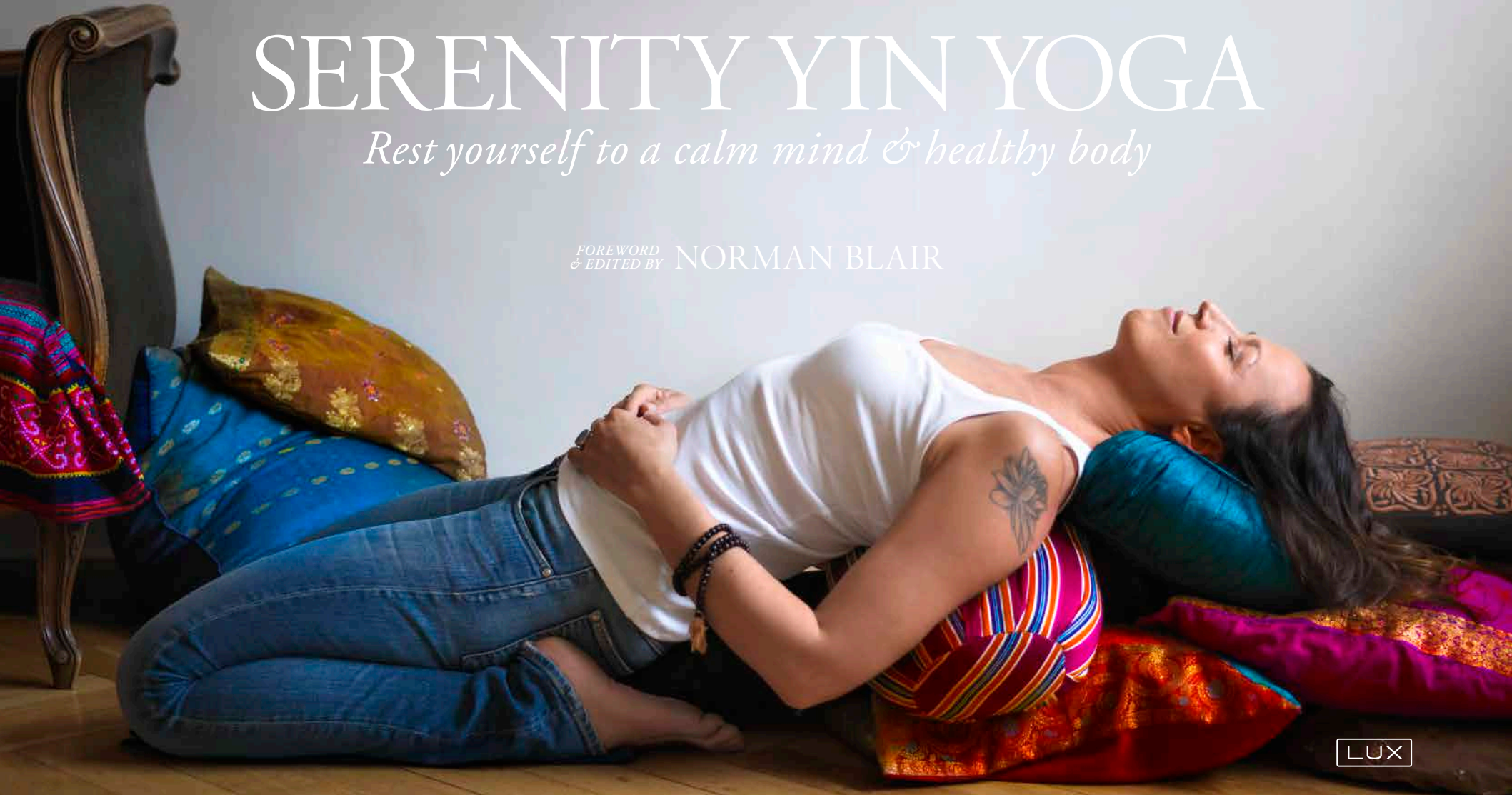


MAGDALENA MECWELD

# SERENITY YIN YOGA

*Rest yourself to a calm mind & healthy body*

FOREWORD & EDITED BY NORMAN BLAIR



LUX



MAGDALENA MECWELD

*Serenity*  
YIN YOGA

REST YOURSELF TO A  
CALM MIND & HEALTHY BODY

LUX

## *Welcome to the wonderful world of Yin yoga*

*What is good health? To me, it means living in harmony with nature: physically, emotionally, and psychologically. Living with what unfolds and staying calm in the face of all the ups and downs of daily life. In short, going with the flow and enjoying the ride.*

*I have been teaching Yin yoga for many years. In this book I share with you my knowledge, thoughts, and useful tips.*

*In order to make the book's contents accessible, I have divided it into four chapters.*

*In the introduction, I begin by telling you my story; how I found yoga in general and Yin yoga in particular. I then explain what Yin yoga is and what it is not.*

*In the first chapter, I perform the Yin yoga positions, explaining what they are good for and how to do them.*

*In the second chapter, I have put together Yin yoga sequences for various needs and situations. I also explain Yin yoga's connection*

*to traditional Chinese medicine and present a series of meridian sequences.*

*In the third chapter, I show you how easily Yin yoga can (and should) be performed anywhere, anytime, and by anyone. I am fortunate to have received help from my friends and students, who kindly agreed to show you how they perform Yin yoga in their lives. Aside from the pictures of me in the first chapter, all the photos in this book—including the cover—were shot in our homes and at our places of work, with our own props and in our own clothes. Regardless of whether you're male or female, young or old, sturdy or slender, rigid or flexible, my hope is that this chapter will inspire you to weave Yin yoga into your life.*

*If you have never tried Yin yoga, or you've only ever taken a few classes, you might be wondering how to start practising on your own. Well, you just do it. Choose a position from chapter one (starting on p. 18), lie down,*

*breathe deeply, and relax. You may wish to start with an easy position like Sphinx (p. 48), then advance to trying a few positions at a time. Gradually, you can move on to the sequences (beginning on p. 78), read more, and go deeper. If you are entirely new to Yin yoga, I recommend that you start by reading the introduction (beginning on p. 8). If you have Yin yoga experience, you can delve directly into the positions or sequences.*

*In my experience, it is best to establish a yoga routine at home and occasionally go to instructor-led classes. Home yoga practise is a bit more demanding in that it requires more discipline, but there are ways to distract the comfortable side of your nature. It's okay to have music or the television on while in the positions; you can even surf the Internet. What's important is that you do the positions. Even just a few minutes of daily yoga makes a big difference in the long run.*

*I wish you many serene moments.*



## *The art of slowing down*

*We live in busy times. We have demanding schedules and tight belts, tired bodies, and busy brains. What we most require is often a quality of relaxation and an experience of slowing towards stillness: this is a world out of balance. By being more balanced, we can feel at ease and be less frenetic.*

*Ease can come from many different directions — learning to express ourselves with clarity, connecting to natural rhythms, simply slowing down. One way of finding some slowness is through the practise of Yin yoga, which is beautifully described in this book.*

*I first met Magdalena on a summer day in 2006. I was immediately struck by her brightness and curiosity. I was teaching a Yin yoga workshop in Stockholm, Sweden, that she attended. As she candidly admits, 'it was agony'. But Magdalena, like so many others, has discovered the delights of slowing down on the yoga mat. What was an agony of stretching has now become the joy of release; what was anxious agitation has now become a bit calmer and slightly quieter. This is a process that many people around the world are engaged in: this softening and loosening so that we might become clearer in our relationships, both with ourselves and with others, so that we might become better beings.*

*Yin yoga has played an important part on my path and I am privileged to have been a part of Magdalena's journey in teaching her this practise. Since that day in 2006, we have been sharing our stories, exchanging experiences, and working together.*

*When Magdalena brought out this book in Swedish, my first response was, 'it's beautiful — let's translate it into English'. I am honoured that Magdalena has let me take part in bringing Serenity Yin yoga to a wider audience. She has continued to be curious and tells her tale with a voice of authenticity, relating the Yin yoga practise to her own personal life and that of the people around her.*

*I salute Magdalena's courage and I wish this wonderful book well.*

*Let the seeds of our practise  
continue to blossom.*

*Norman Blair*



# YOGA SENSE

My yoga journey began on a beach in Thailand. I know it sounds like a cliché but it's true. It was in the summer of 2000 and I was 30 years old. I had just sold my first article to a travel magazine and with the money I bought two cheap tickets to Thailand. I rented out my apartment for two months and took my daughter, who was then 13, with me to the island of Koh Samui.

It was there, on the calm beach of Mae Nam at sunset, that I saw a middle-aged man practising Hatha yoga. We started talking and he asked if I wanted to try. After some hesitation, I agreed. Over the next few weeks, we spent an hour together every day practising yoga on the beach. His name was Peter; he was sunburnt and had a long braid down his back and a gold chain gleaming at his hairy chest. He came from Bulgaria and spoke a thick Slavic version of English. Whenever he met someone, he lit up like the sun. I don't know if it was his Bulgarian yoga technique or the poetry of his instructions—'Look into the horizon, who are you, who are you?!'—that made me endure the pain I experienced when doing the position Melting Heart, but after those initial beach sessions, I was hooked.

The irony is that until that trip, I had always avoided any form of physical exercise. I was always the one who got my period before PE at school and I only ever ran if there was a risk of missing the bus. I have neither a dance nor gymnastics background—rather I have a 'hunch on the sofa with a coffee/book/cigarette background'. But I had years of academic study behind me and was a modern neurotic loaded with thoughts and theories, many anxieties, and a great aversion to pain. On top of that, when I was a teenager, I'd had an accident that caused a significant injury to my back. Three vertebrae in my lower spine were fused, which caused me constant pain and restricted my movement; my sciatic nerve was pinched and sometimes I had to take painkillers just to be able to sleep. Or sit. Or stand. That was me.

It was in my early 20s that I opened my first book on Buddhist meditation and yoga philosophy. I was instantly fascinated. To me, yoga was

an inner practise. I read book after book about various spiritual techniques, but it was only after my experience with that Bulgarian beach yoga that I discovered a serenity and a presence within myself that I'd had no idea existed. It was my first intimate contact with my own body, and to my horror, I felt its huge limitations. I was stiff. I was in pain. I could get nowhere in the positions. Forward bends were the worst. My hands reached my knees and then ... stop.

In those two months on the beach, I did make incremental progress. I was inspired to seek out a yoga class when I came back to Sweden, and I became totally hooked. I would be a yogi! I signed up for Kundalini yoga with my first teacher, Sati Bacchus. She was surprised at my lack of flexibility and inability to touch my toes. I tried explaining that the stiffness was congenital, that my back injury aggravated the situation, that I was a hopeless case, that I would never get any further in the forward-bend positions. Never!

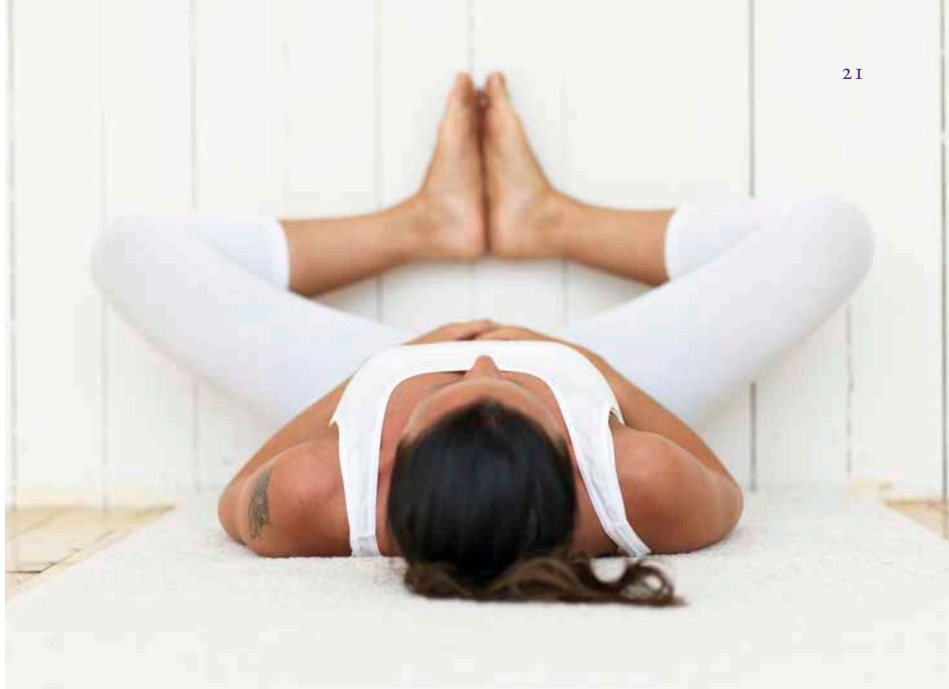
Before I went to Thailand, the doctors had warned me that I was going to be in a wheelchair by the age of 40. X-rays indicated that the pain would eventually become unbearable. Their harsh judgment became one of the main motivators in my persistence with yoga. I discovered that taking a single yoga class each week lessened the pain. Even though I suffered most of the time, I continued to go to class. I signed up for two sessions a week and the pain lessened even more.

The following year, at a lecture on the history of ideas, a man sat down beside me and said hello. His name was Jonas and he was to become my first Ashtanga yoga teacher. In a small studio in Stockholm, I did my first Ashtanga practise and another world opened up for me. This was a form of yoga that made me sweat and demanded more of my back than I was used to, and it also gave me beautiful arms (although I still had a stiff back and legs). Ashtanga became my yoga. The sequence of movements quieted my restless mind and I became stronger and more agile.

My yoga journey continued. I wrote an academic paper titled

A top-down view of a person in a butterfly yoga pose (Baddha Padmasana) on a light-colored mat over a wooden floor. The person is wearing a white tank top and white leggings. Their knees are pulled wide apart, and their feet are tucked under their buttocks. Their hands are clasped together on the floor in front of them. The word "BUTTERFLY" is written in a white, serif font across the center of the image, positioned over the person's head and upper arms. The person has dark hair tied up and visible tattoos on their upper arms.

BUTTERFLY



*Try Butterfly against a wall if you have back or knee problems.*

Sit with your back straight and your legs in front of you. Pull your heels towards your hips as you bring your feet together and let your knees fall out to the side. There should be a sizeable space between your heels and hips, in the shape of a diamond. Feel a lifting between your hips and your heart and then come forward until you reach wherever your body's limit is today. Relax so that your back becomes more rounded. Stay where your body says to stop. Try not to push or pull yourself down; let go of the ambition to come further forward. Sit on a cushion or block if your hips tip backwards. Keep your hands around your feet or stack your fists like pillars between the floor and your forehead if you can get that far forward. You may rest your head and hands on a pillow. Stay in this position for three to seven minutes. If you want, you can go straight into Reverse Butterfly from this posture.

*Butterfly is a great position to start all Yin yoga with. It is sometimes called the Down Dog of Yin yoga. Butterfly activates the back, thighs, and neck, and you get a lovely stretching of the entire back and an opening of hips without straining your hamstrings. Be careful when you do the pose if you have problems with your knees or back. If you feel discomfort in your knees, you can place a support like a bolster under them or you could try Butterfly against a wall.*



*It is fine to sit upright if you can't come down very far.*

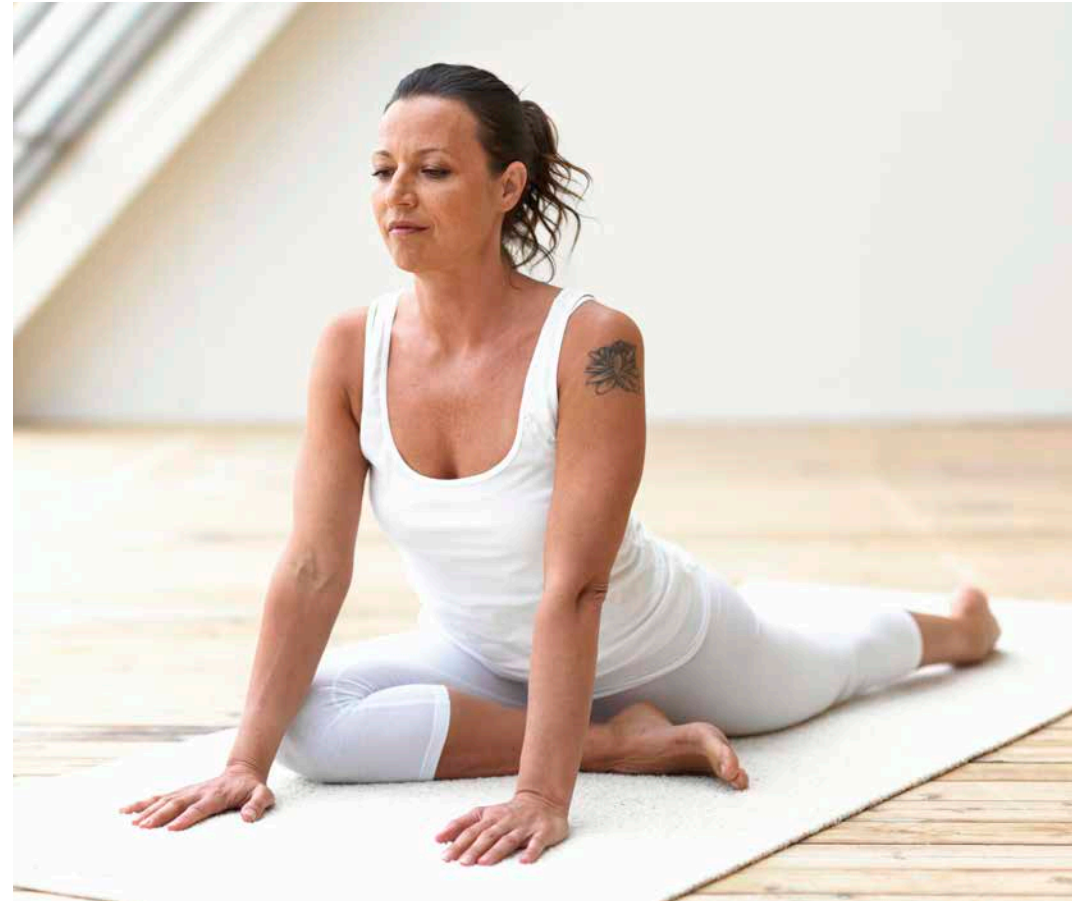
*Sleeping Swan. Completely relax your straight leg, shoulders, abdomen, and back.*

# SWAN



*Swan stretches out stiffness in the hips, groin, front of the thighs, gluteal muscles, and hip flexors. Swan is exhausting for many of my students because these areas are often so tight. The posture opens and stretches areas we are not used to relaxing. There are two versions of the position, Sleeping and Sitting Swan. If you experience pain or strain in your knees, a good alternative to this posture is Eye of the Needle (p. 32).*

Kneel down on all fours and fold a leg in front of you. The further forward you place your front leg, the deeper you will stretch your hips. Stretch out your back leg. Make sure that your hips are parallel to the floor and fairly level. If one hip or thigh is off the floor, which is true for nearly all of us, you can place a pillow or support under it. For Sleeping Swan, lower your upper body down onto your leg, stretching your arms out in front of you. Make sure your back leg stays straight. It is important that your weight is on your hips and not your knees. In Sitting Swan, you can hold your back more upright, with your hands on either side of your body or in front of you. You can practise both versions of Swan in the same sequence or separately. After a few minutes in Sitting Swan, lie down in Sleeping Swan for a few more. Hold for five minutes on each side; one to three minutes if you are a beginner.



*Sitting Swan. Make sure that your back leg is straight and relaxed.*

*Legs on a Chair allows you to relax completely. It is similar to Legs up the Wall (p. 44), but it allows for even deeper relaxation. It activates the parasympathetic nervous system and allows you to experience a wonderful rest. This posture is excellent for easing stress and is also suitable for those with back and knee problems, especially those who have osteoarthritis in their joints. Legs on a chair can (and should!) be performed at any time during the day, and it is also a 'dessert posture' that you can perform last in any Yin yoga sequence.*

Place a chair in front of you. Place a blanket on the seat and put your legs on the blanket so that your thighs are vertical. Rest your upper body on another blanket or rug, placing pillows under your neck, lower back, and hips. Relax your body fully. You can place something soft over your eyes to deepen the relaxation and promote inwardness. Resting your hands on pillows will help you to relax even more. Stay for as long as you like, and enjoy.



*Adding pillows, some furniture, and resting in the position for ten minutes transforms Legs up the Wall (p. 44) into the Restorative Yoga posture Legs on a Chair.*

# LEGS ON A CHAIR



# POST-RUN

*15–20 minutes*

After running, we must stretch our legs, hips, gluteal muscles, and calves, all of which have contracted as a result of the exercise. Assume these postures immediately after running. No matter how much you exercise, Yin yoga is an excellent complementary exercise. Remain in the postures for three to five minutes. I highly recommend Legs up the Wall (p. 44), which is a good way of resting the body after strenuous exercise.



1 • BUTTERFLY 20



2 • HALF SADDLE 54



3 • SHOELACE 40



4 • DRAGON 52



5 • RECLINING TWIST 60

## ANXIETY RELIEF

*15–20 minutes*

Anxiety is often an undefined fear and inner pain, a feeling of approaching catastrophe. This sequence works with different levels of anxiety. The postures are demanding and can create intense sensations in the body. Please let go of any preconceived notions that these postures will help you completely overcome your anxiety: this can be just another way of setting ourselves up to fail, which then feeds more anxious feelings. If you can, accept the anxiety and simply perform these postures without attaching any goals or achievements to them.



# JET LAG

25–30 minutes

During all longer trips, especially when we are flying, our whole system becomes imbalanced. Drink plenty of warm water during the journey and especially when you reach your destination. Upon arriving, take it easy and get lots of rest. The kidneys are particularly vulnerable, and this sequence is helpful for the kidney/urinary bladder meridians. If you don't have time for the full sequence, it is fine to simply perform Legs up the Wall (p. 44) for ten minutes.



1 • LEGS UP THE WALL 44

2 • BUTTERFLY 20

3 • SPHINX 48

4 • DRAGONFLY UP THE WALL 42

5 • LEGS ON A CHAIR 68



1 • SQUARE 46

2 • SPHINX 48

OR

2 • SEAL 50

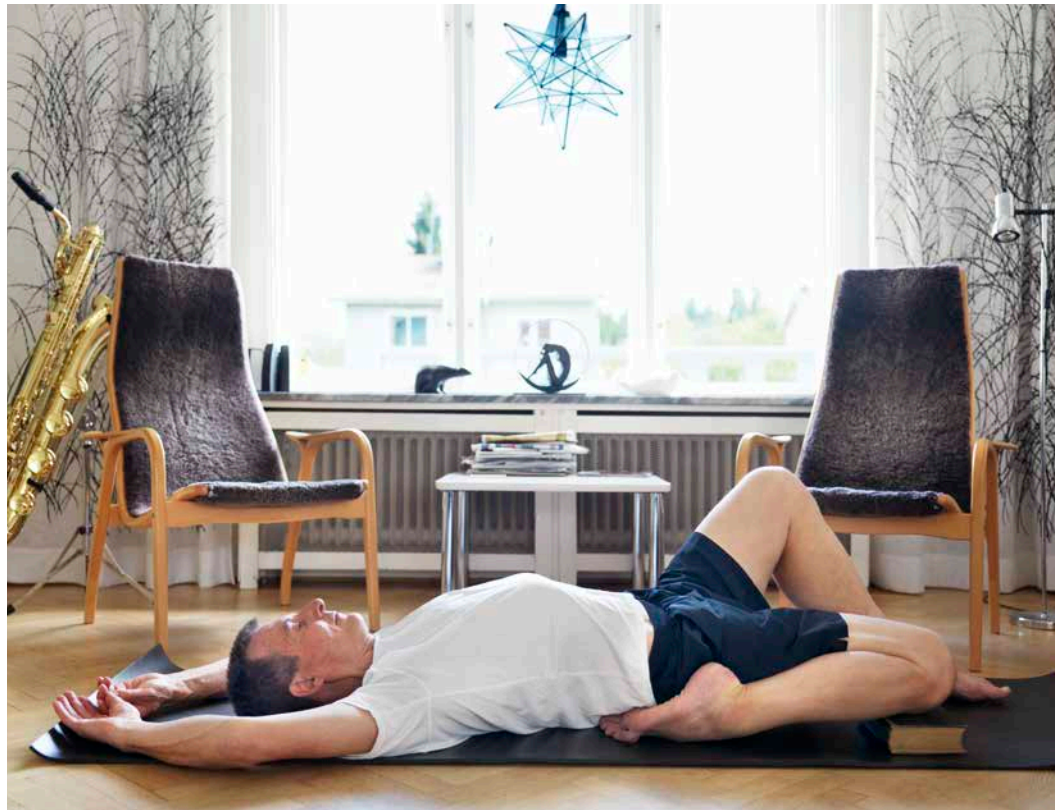
3 • DRAGONFLY 42

4 • LEGS UP THE WALL 44

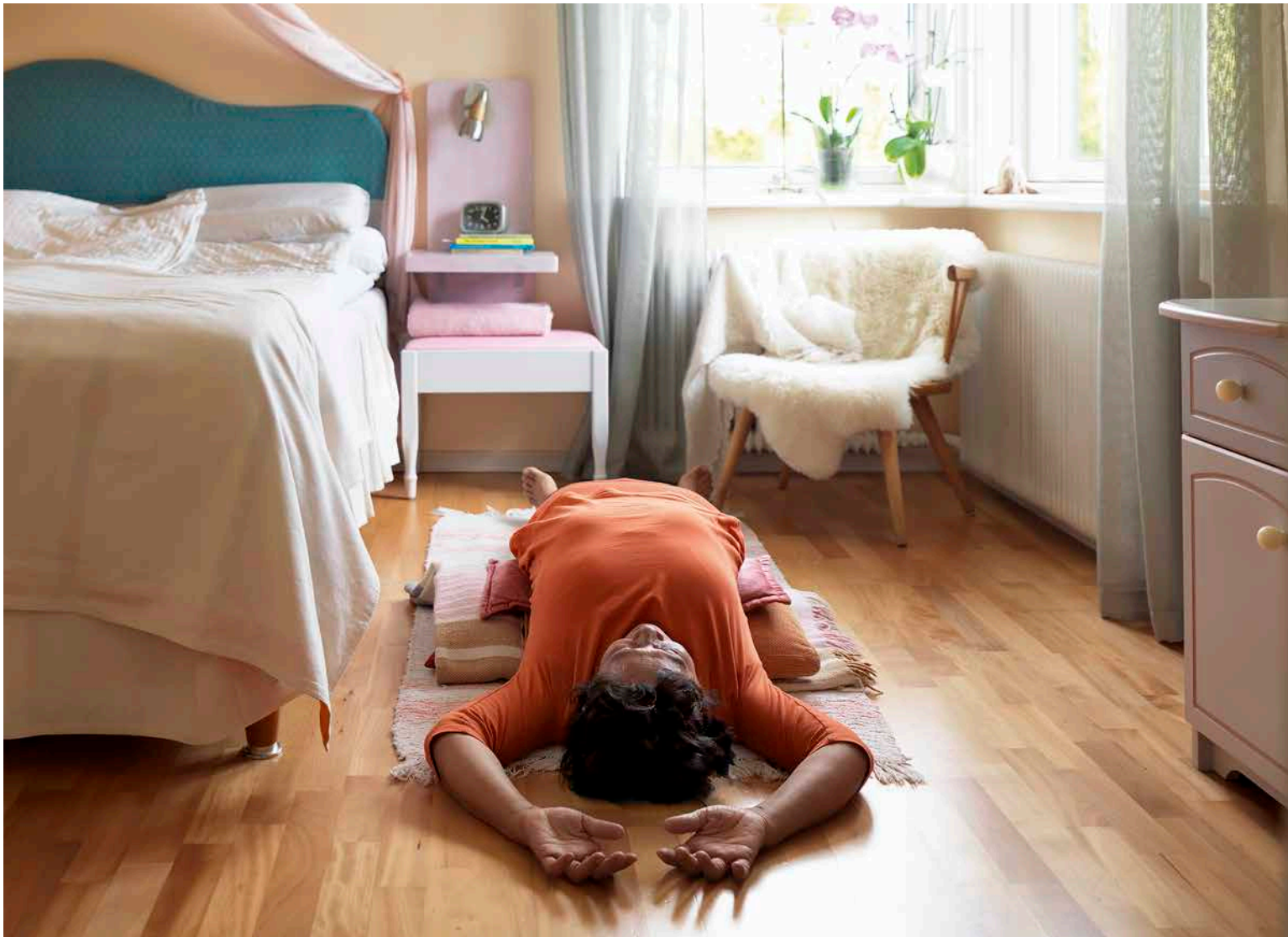


AFTER WORK · *Roger Kearsley*

When Roger (66) is not caring for his grandchildren, playing his saxophone, or out running, he brings out the yoga mat he received as a gift from his yoga practitioner daughter Maria, and rests in uncomfortable positions. He lives with his wife Elisabet and is semi-retired from his job as an electrical engineer. Yin yoga came into his life four years ago, when Maria introduced him to it. For several months, the whole family practiced with me. I have observed Roger's body develop from considerable stiffness to much greater flexibility. In particular, Yin yoga has helped him to relieve his back pain. His favourite posture is *Dragon* (p. 52). In this short sequence, Roger demonstrates two positions that are good to perform after coming home from work.



HALF SADDLE (p. 54) with a book under the knee for support.






BUTTERFLY AGAINST A WALL (*a bed in this case*)  
20





KIDS' YIN YOGA · *Casper & Rasmus*



'Serenity Yin yoga is beautifully crafted. Thousands of words have been expressed in wonderful pictures, explaining postures and options, flows and benefits, and the practice and practicalities of Yin yoga. This book will enhance any yoga library.'

—Bernie Clark

'I am constantly surprised how much Yin yoga has grown in the last decade. Magdalena's lovely book, which is now offered in English thanks to the skillful translation by Norman Blair, will make even more people captivated by its unique body/mind benefits.'

—Sarah Powers

Imagine that your body is agile and healthy. That your mind is calm and balanced. That you feel energetic and happy. Only a few Yin yoga sequences can have that impact on your life.

Yin yoga is a tranquil and restful yoga. It has been described as unbearably nice or nicely unbearable, but above all, it is easy—everyone can do it.

My wish with this book is to help you become agile, calm, and energetic: in short, to get you in better shape. To help me with this, I have recruited my friends and students, all of whom practise Yin yoga with me. I hope that, together, we will inspire you to try Yin yoga on your own, at home, in your own time and without pressure. You don't even have to wear special clothes. Lie down in the simple positions, relax and just be.

If you do Yin yoga once a day, that's fantastic.  
If you do it once a week, that's fantastic, too.  
If you only ever do it once, that's also fantastic!

Welcome to Yin yoga.  
—Magdalena

*Magdalena Mecweld is an experienced and much loved yoga instructor. This book was first published in 2012 in Sweden to great acclaim, garnering a devoted following. This is Magdalena's first publication in English.*

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LUX

