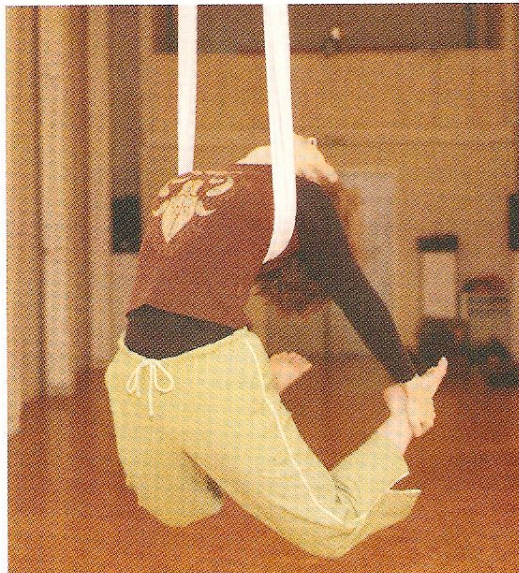
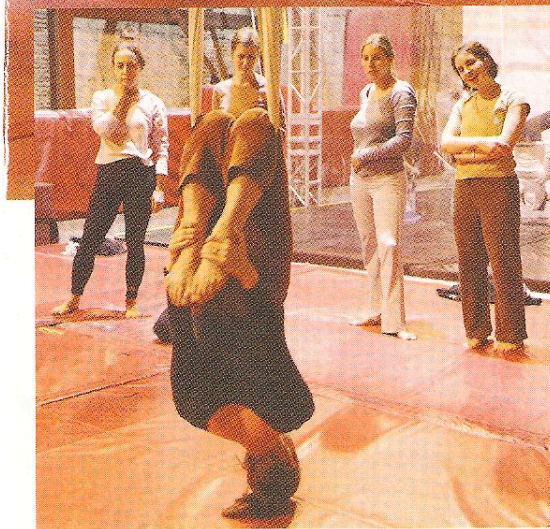


Michelle Dortignac (far right) teaches her Aerial Yoga class in Brooklyn, New York and (left, above and below) demos two different versions of Dhanurasana (Bow Pose).



Heighten your practice

After taking up the aerial silks, yoga instructor Michelle Dortignac quickly transformed her asana practice. Her shoulders and spine became stronger and more flexible, she developed her core abdominal muscles, and she felt a total boost to her circulatory system.

So she started an Aerial Yoga class every Saturday in the hip Williamsburg section of Brooklyn (aerialyoga.com). Inspired by Jayne Bernasconi's Aerial Yoga class on a low-flying trapeze in Baltimore, Dortignac works with two hanging fabrics tied together at the bottom to create a little swing. Students begin on the mat and continue on the silks. "The class really suits a broad range of people," says Dortignac. "Some students are dancers, some are aerialists, some have studied yoga but have never done anything in the air."

At Bernasconi's Aerial Yoga class (airdancebern.com), students begin with pranayama, moving back and forth while holding the trapeze bar. Then, they'll use the bar to help them root in Trikonasana or stretch over the bar in a grounded Downward Facing Dog that eventually lifts them off the floor. "We're investigating movement in a meditative form," says Bernasconi, who teaches yoga and runs her own aerial-dance company. The practice helps balance body and mind, on the ground and in the air. A favorite asana is the Lotus, sitting on the bar perpendicularly, so it supports your sacrum.

Rebecca Drake prefers fabrics for her Aerial Yoga class at Triangle Yoga in Chapel Hill, North Carolina (triangleyoga.com), where flying yogis range in age from 11 to 60. "I find that the people who sign up for aerial yoga are curious, they like to explore the way their bodies move on the floor and in the air, they are playful, and adventurous," says Drake, who adds that they also get greater body awareness, increased balance and stability, and a safe, supported place to stretch and be open.