

NAMASTE YA'II

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Inhabit Yourself: A Conversation with Ana Forrest

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Ana Forrest is one bad-ass yogini. If you haven't seen a video of Forrest practicing, stop reading right now, load up Youtube and [watch one](#). I'll wait.

She moves with a stunning combination of grace and power. It was a year ago that I first saw photos of Forrest. Finally, I got to practice with her in person.



Ana Forrest at Yogani Studios in Tampa

Yogani Studios in Tampa hosted three workshops with her this past weekend that I had the great fortune to attend.

Ana considers a yoga class to be ceremony because the work done inside the class is sacred. She and her staff hold that sacred space by working with the “highest quality of attention.” They also require the same from you. If you haven’t attended a class with Ana Forrest, let me give you a little bit of advice: Do not chatter with your neighbor. Listen carefully to instructions and follow them. Do your best to stay tuned in. It’s only two and half hours. You can do it. She can help. Her voice is deep and grounded, and although she leads so many workshops she never sounds scripted; her words always seemed heartfelt.



She connects with her students, although there are so many, calling us by name (we have name-tags on our mats) and giving us shoulder rubs. She is serious, but also nurturing, like a mother. I sense she will scold me if I misbehave, but I also sense that she truly wants to teach me and to soothe me of any aches in body or soul. She is stern, but light. There is laughter. Which is good, because it’s hard.

I asked Ana how she keeps her energy high and fresh:

“I do it in a few different ways. I do prayers



every morning, especially when I teach...calling in the energies of the four directions to help me bring in the most healing energy and whatever is necessary to help people break through their shit so that they can get to something profound. Two is: I'm a fanatical turbo bitch about doing my own practice. I protect it really hard... and practicing with my assistants gets me off and brings my energy way up... Three: There's a huge amount of excess energy that boils in that room. You can feel it... I drink it in. I can get more high on a class I teach than my own practice sometimes because I just can't generate the same amount of energy that all of us together do. So, I'm constantly working on nourishing myself."



She says she is also careful not to fall into the role of “the sacrificial whore.” She won’t let her students vampire her energy, which (as a teacher myself) I understand is an important and difficult line to toe. Ana builds and sustains her energy so she can share it with her students. It’s the ultimate love of a mother. She will not be dragged down so that she becomes ineffective. She doesn’t want her students to get dragged down, either.

On Gravity:

Yes, it’s a fact of life, but you can learn to ride its waves. Ana calls what the Ashtangis call “floating” – “gravity surfing.” At first this metaphor seemed a little bit out there for me, but later in class when she demoed an arm balance transition, I realized that’s exactly what she’s doing. It’s very hard, when your weight is on your arms to imagine your legs pulling you up – seeming to defy the downward pull of gravity – but I watched it happen in her body.



My partner often questions the value of watching demos or exhibitions – most particularly of the Bikram comp style. I have always enjoyed watching them but have fallen short when trying to explain the value that I find in it. Watching Ana dance against gravity with such mastery over her skeleton and muscles was one of the best yoga anatomy lessons I’ve ever received. Sometimes, observing a person who knows her body so intimately helps you to understand your own body; and that is very valuable. (There are lots of great videos of Ana out there, but nothing beats a live show)

Ana’s advice to teachers who are running out of ideas:

“If you’re bored, you’re not going deep enough.”

And what she really wants to accomplish as a teacher:

“To teach people how to heal themselves by getting them to connect to their spirit.”

Ana Forrest wants us to change not only our bodies, but our attitude in the way we inhabit them. A big part of that is the quality of attention she seeks and another big part of it is letting go of the



stories we tell ourselves about how we are not enough, or not good enough, or smart enough, or skinny enough, or strong enough or whatever.

She says, “When you get to poses that seem ridiculous to you and far far away; the internal question to ask yourself is ‘what part of this can i do?’ ... and that would be the win.”

No matter how little your ‘can’ is, it will liberate you to move beyond your current abilities, growing your practice and turning it into a celebration. Doesn’t that sound more fun than a bunch of mental bitching?

I had a great time last weekend; I learned a lot about yoga and a lot about myself (like that I really need to towel off right when class gets

really hard for me). To be very frank about myself; I rarely leave a workshop without at least a little bit of shit to talk. I'm not saying that's good, or right, but is real and I am big enough to admit it. For that reason I was nervous about writing this article. I really lucked out because I don't have any this time. I just respect her way too much.



Ana's book *Fierce Medicine* just came out. Check it out!

Just for fun I asked Ana to recommend some of her favorite reads:

“Charles DeLint – Fiction/Fantasy set in here and now. City. Cement. Rape. Creepiness. And interspersed through that is the magic of medicine and the magic of the supernatural. He connects to the magic of here and now.

The Hunger Games - by Suzanne Collins

Elizabeth Moon ... for example *The Deeds of Paxinarian*. Elizabeth is a military person so she's got a really interesting view on self discovery and finding oneself and losing oneself through war. And since I love working with people in the military, that's one of my

passions, is giving people really good tools to do their job in an honorable way. And how to reconnect to what matters.

David Webber has a series called the Honor Harrington series.

There's a woman that has three different names who writes about a group called the Arcane Society and her name is: Amanda Quick, Jayne Ann Krentz, or Jayne Castle. They're very fun books and they're very sexy books so if people are scared of that they shouldn't pick them up. But they're also about people coming into their gifts; about being completely thrown around about them, but then finding themselves by learning how to use their gifts in the world which is what I teach.



Katelyn Thureson of Beerasana.com: Yoga Instructor, Writer & YogaStage Delegate

Also, about finding people who can connect to you, respect you and

love you, as weird as you are. And that's been an interesting journey.

Frank Waters heavy duty, academic reading ... about Native American ways

Black Elk Speaks by John Neihart

When White Buffalo Woman Comes Singing by Brooke Medicine Eagle.... about walking in beauty and walking in a sacred way.”

About the Author, Katelyn Thureson: I love yoga because it helps me to be flexible and strong in body and in mind. Yoga is the one thing that I have found improves all aspects of my life: I'm more in tune with my body. I'm more effective at my job, in the sports I enjoy and in relationships. The lessons learned in yoga support everything else I do and the same is true for all practitioners. I really get a buzz off of teaching because I get to share my passion with others and watch them light up. Beerasana.com