



In the flow

As a teenager growing up in Margaret Thatcher's Britain, Flo Fenton's youth was a far cry from her current Byron Bay existence, where she teaches yoga classes, hosts retreats and runs her own teacher training. A qualified homeopath and massage therapist, Fenton, 46, has allowed her practice to evolve across various yogic disciplines with the help of countless swamis across Asia and India. She's now working on stability at home, via a quiet life in Northern NSW—on the mat through her regular meditation and pranayama practice, and in helping others through her growing interest in yoga therapy. *Interview by Sue White*

What prompted your first experience with yoga?

I lived in Thatcher's Britain for the first 26 years of my life. It was hard. I was quite politically activated and there was a lot of conflict. For the last few years I was living in squats...

I was getting more and more outside mainstream society.

I got sick of it, went to India and got into yoga. It was like coming home. I clearly remember my first yoga class. I was naturally flexible, so the asana wasn't difficult in many ways, but it was more than that for me. It was finding something, which I felt brought me back to myself and gave me a connection to other people again.

You started out as an activist. How has that influenced your approach to yoga? When I first came to Australia I was involved in the North East Forest Alliance. I lived for six months in the forest—it was a healing time for me. There was a tepee and every morning there'd be yoga in there. I am still totally behind people doing environmental campaigns. Somebody has to do it, but I'm conflicted—whether you're on the right or the wrong side, it's still conflict. So I've stepped away from campaigning. I believe in mantra and meditation as world healing now, and that's what I do.

Your teaching and practice has evolved after seven years practising Iyengar, followed by an equally long connection with Ashtanga. What styles influence you now? My practice is an amalgamation of all the things I've learned that I feel serve me. About the same time that I got into yoga I did a 10-day vipassana [silent meditation] course in Thailand, but I spend more time now with sitting, pranayama and mantra than I used to. I draw these from the Satyananda system. The [vinyasa] asana I do now is more concerned with creating *sattvic* vibration [the yogic concept of positive, balanced energy]. I use a lot of props. I feel drawn to yoga therapy, and it's serving me to do a more subtle practice and have a really good understanding of what's going to support me in the long term.

You're a qualified masseuse, and also a homeopath. How do these complementary therapies fit in with yoga? Homeopathy has been a great support to me, and helps me to understand health and healing in a deep way. The homeopathy model—that illness starts on a subtle level, and only then manifests as physical symptoms—is consistent with the ideas expressed in the Vedas and also explains why yoga and meditation work to keep us healthy. Massage helped me to understand the body and its relationship to our emotions. In 2007, I was diagnosed with tendonitis in my left wrist, and took that as a sign to stop doing a lot of massage. I now do treatments very rarely, and focus on yoga therapy instead.

You practice first thing in the morning. Why is that important? I think any time is okay, but it needs to be regular. I'm better at sitting before I've started communicating, emailing and loading myself up with tasks. I'm not very rigid about a lot of things, but I'm rigid about that. I could make a lot more money if I let go of my regular practice time! But to teach and be authentic, we need to have our own practice, and that needs to be the most important thing. I feel it's about commitment. ❖