

## DOWN DOG MISSOULA

By Ryan Newhouse

When John Squillante opened the doors of Down Dog Missoula in February 2007, he saw his dream turn into a reality. It was a dream Squillante sparked less than a year earlier, sitting with his new wife after their wedding reception. They asked each other what they wanted to do with their lives, and Squillante answered immediately, "I want to become a yoga instructor and open a studio in Missoula."

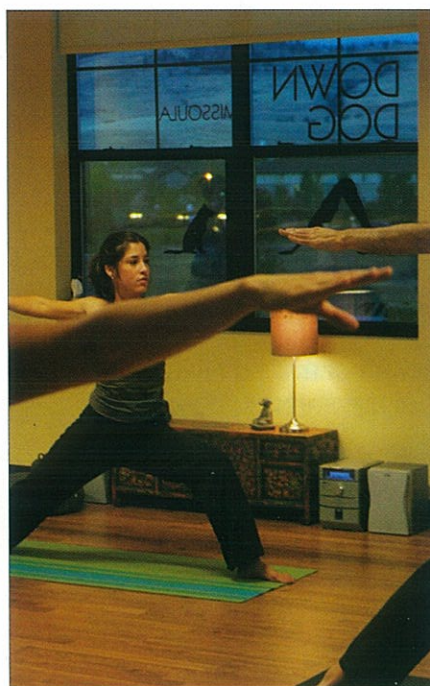


Photo by Angela Hawkaluk

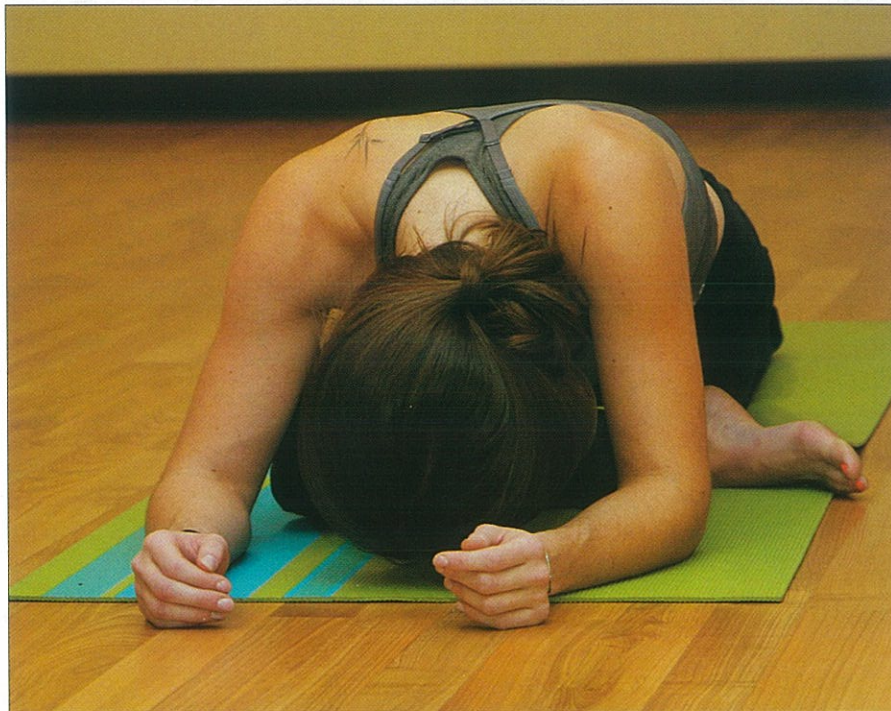


Photo by Angela Hawkaluk

The view from Down Dog's second-story windows highlights the Rattlesnake Wilderness and Mount Jumbo, and it gives the simple 650-square-foot studio a feeling of connectedness to its surroundings. This was all part of Squillante's plan when choosing his space, as was the choice of not having mirrors on the walls. "The only mirror in here," says Squillante, "is in the bathroom. Mirrors offer the opportunity to see what you don't like about yourself or your yoga." Squillante wants his students to feel their yoga, not see it. "Mirrors are a distraction," he adds, "because the head follows movement, and I've seen people practically fall over from a balance pose because their heads were following movement in a mirror."

"Down Dog is about safety and comfort," Squillante claims simply. "We teach yoga as a physical practice that leads to mental relaxation." Safety, comfort, and relaxation are attainable at Down Dog Missoula, especially given the high-quality yoga gear Squillante offers for use in his classes. Every item was chosen with meticulous care, right down to the yoga straps.

"Most people who come to Down Dog are trying to figure out what yoga is for them," explains Squillante, "and I'm giving them a studio that's large enough to create a supportive community and small enough to [offer] personal attention."

Squillante sees four points of view in American yoga, and he is striving to stay clear of the first three. The first is yoga as a "style fetish," where a particular style claims to be better than another and there is heavy focus on the rules of that style. The second is yoga as "just exercise." The third is yoga as a "mystery." And the last point of view is that yoga is an experience open to everyone, which is Squillante's message to his students.

"I like to compare yoga to skiing," says Squillante. "Everyone started skiing by falling over, and in yoga everyone starts by being stiff and holding their breath. With skiing, you don't see experienced skiers laughing at those on the bunny slopes. They all share the same mountain."

Down Dog Missoula's open-to-beginners policy, quaint studio space, and talented and diverse teachers make it friendly