



In AcroYoga, as in life, the transitions can be the trickiest part. The mount and dismount require intense focus and attention. Once we actually hit the pose, there can be glorious moments of enjoying the quiet, subtle experience of being in the “sweet spot.” This place of effortless effort is the confirmation of acrobatics done well. JENNY SAUER-KLEIN

Jenny Sauer-Klein (flier)  
Jason Nemer (base)



AcroYogis balance more than each other. They play with **communication**, **connection**, and **trust** to get their practice off the ground.

Watching two AcroYogis transitioning together from pose to pose is awe inspiring. It's a mostly silent yoga *pas de deux*, with the "base" and the "flier" flowing seamlessly from one gravity-defying move to the next, then the next. The advanced moves take practice, determination, and skill. But if you look deeper, you'll see something else: You'll notice trust between partners, cooperation, and rock-solid communication. Beyond the fancy shapes and poses, those are the qualities that AcroYoga co-founders Jason Nemer and Jenny Sauer-Klein hope to instill in their students. Put simply: AcroYoga is not just about the poses. It's about the virtues these yoga innovators hold dear: trust, communication, and playfulness.

**trust** You don't have to be a bendy pretzel or be willing to balance on the side of a cliff (*see page 105*) to do AcroYoga. You only need to be open to trying something new. Sauer-Klein and Nemer have created a structured system with a series of manageable moves so that there's an accessible starting place for everyone. Sauer-Klein says that the clear structure and rules of their system

tend to make adults feel more comfortable letting go and being playful. "When we're kids, we see something amazing and we want to do it because there's no limitation in our mind," she says. "We encourage people to have that kind of positive curiosity about the form."

### **communication**

In class, AcroYogis work in groups of three, with a base (the person on the ground who acts as the support), a flier (the person in the air), and a spotter (who gives verbal and physical cues to both partners to ensure that everyone is safe). Working with a spotter instills confidence in the base and flier, and it requires that all three people communicate clearly with each other. "There's always someone there whose job is the safety of the flier, and that person acts as the cheerleader and the coach," says Sauer-Klein. "They're really there giving you encouragement. And there's something really powerful about having someone who is just there to support



you.” Nemer sees the group of three as a microcosmic community of its own—if you can learn to communicate well and navigate the challenges of being in this small group, you can take those skills to other group situations.

**playfulness** AcroYogis are conscious about cultivating an atmosphere of playfulness. In fact, it’s so important to them that it’s the central theme of their mission statement: “We bring people together through divine play.” The co-founders noticed early on that although play doesn’t always come naturally, it helps people connect in a way that’s noncompetitive, which they believe is key. Playfulness also creates a sense of inner liberation that we don’t often experience in daily life. “For some reason, we see that adult humans have lost the ability to play and connect with other adults,” says Nemer. But a few minutes into an Acro practice, he and Sauer-Klein witness a transformation: Nervous adults turn into kids having fun while they support and encourage each other.

It’s taken years of exploration (the practice was founded in 2003), but what becomes clear from talking to Sauer-Klein and Nemer is that their system is process oriented, not outcome oriented. They want students to enjoy what they’re doing and to learn to work together harmoniously in spite of the challenges they face. They remind you that AcroYoga is not about “getting” a Handstand or any other pose, because there are an infinite number of other variations. It’s about learning, trying new things, and having fun. This philosophy of staying present and attending to what’s actually happening is part of what distinguishes

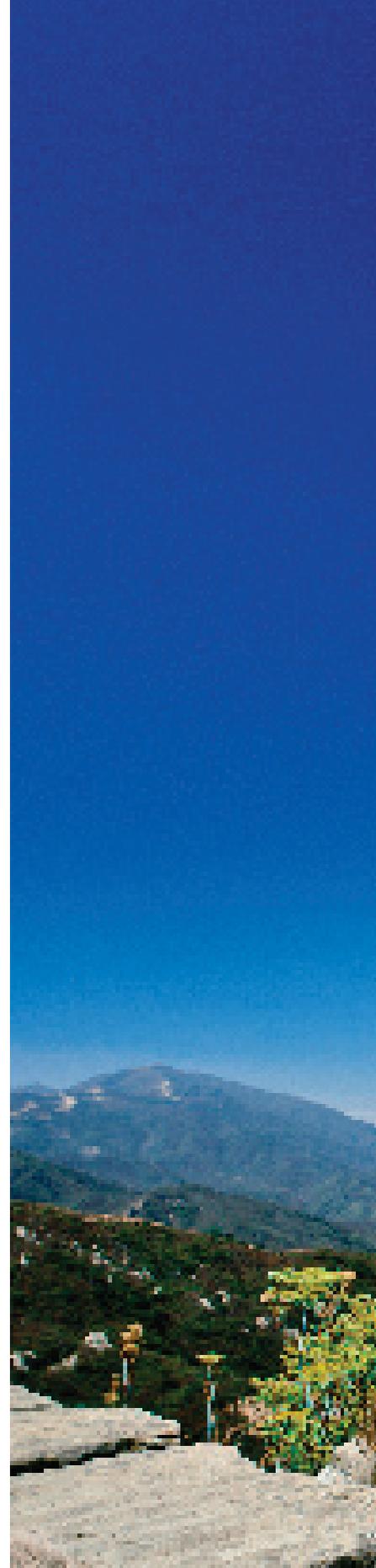
AcroYoga from pure acrobatics and establishes it as a yogic practice.

And yet, there’s no denying that the poses themselves hold a special alchemy. The biggest shift in AcroYoga students is the sense of empowerment they gain from doing things that they never could’ve imagined, says Nemer. “People have shut down in their mind what is possible in their body, but when a skillful teacher takes them through the steps and gives them the support they need to do a difficult-looking posture, students come back with more openness and more belief in what’s truly possible for them.”

In the nine years since they introduced the practice to their first group of fledgling students in San Francisco, Sauer-Klein and Nemer have grown a community of AcroYogis that spans the globe. With 180 teachers in North America, Europe, Australia, Asia, and South America, they’ve created a powerful, perhaps even essential, way to counteract the sense of separation so many people experience in the digital age. “One of the main drawbacks of our amazing technical advances is that there’s a lot of virtual connection and fewer places to come together,” says Sauer-Klein. “AcroYoga gives people a safe place in which to trust and to love and to feel connected.”

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*Andrea Ferretti is a senior editor at Yoga Journal. She hopes to take flight someday in a hand-to-hand AcroYoga pose.*



**free bird** In Bird, even when the fliers are two feet off the ground, they feel like they are on top of the world. Not only was this the perfect pose to capture the grandeur of the surrounding mountains, but as we were doing Bird, we saw birds dancing through the sky at our eye level because we were so high up. LISA MOLINARO

From left: Katie Capano (first flier), Lisa Molinaro (first base); Angelika Eisele (second flier), Brian Yuen (second base); Aubree Saia (third flier), Justin Bench (third base)





Jonny and I will often jump into poses like this one in random places without any warm-up. Once he comes down, he'll look at me, and with a very straight face, he'll shake my hand like nothing ever happened. JASON NEMER



I felt safe and at peace playing with Laura in the middle of an Amsterdam street. You can concentrate on your own breathing and that of the base. You move with your breath, creating a rhythm in movement, trusting each other. You can close the eyes for a simultaneous meditation, even when you are surrounded by people walking and cycling by. ESTHER HERTOEG



Ultimately, we are always looking for ease in the balance, and this can be tricky to find. As a flier, you want to be tight and trust the base completely. As a base, you need to be stable and focus on balancing your strength and receptivity. When everything aligns, it feels so light and amazing. In the moment, it feels like you could hold it forever.

JEREMY SIMON



clockwise from top left: Jonny Nobleza (flier), Jason Nemer (base)  
Elizabeth Williams (flier), Jeremy Simon (base)  
Esther Hertog (flier), Laura Bernasconi (base)