

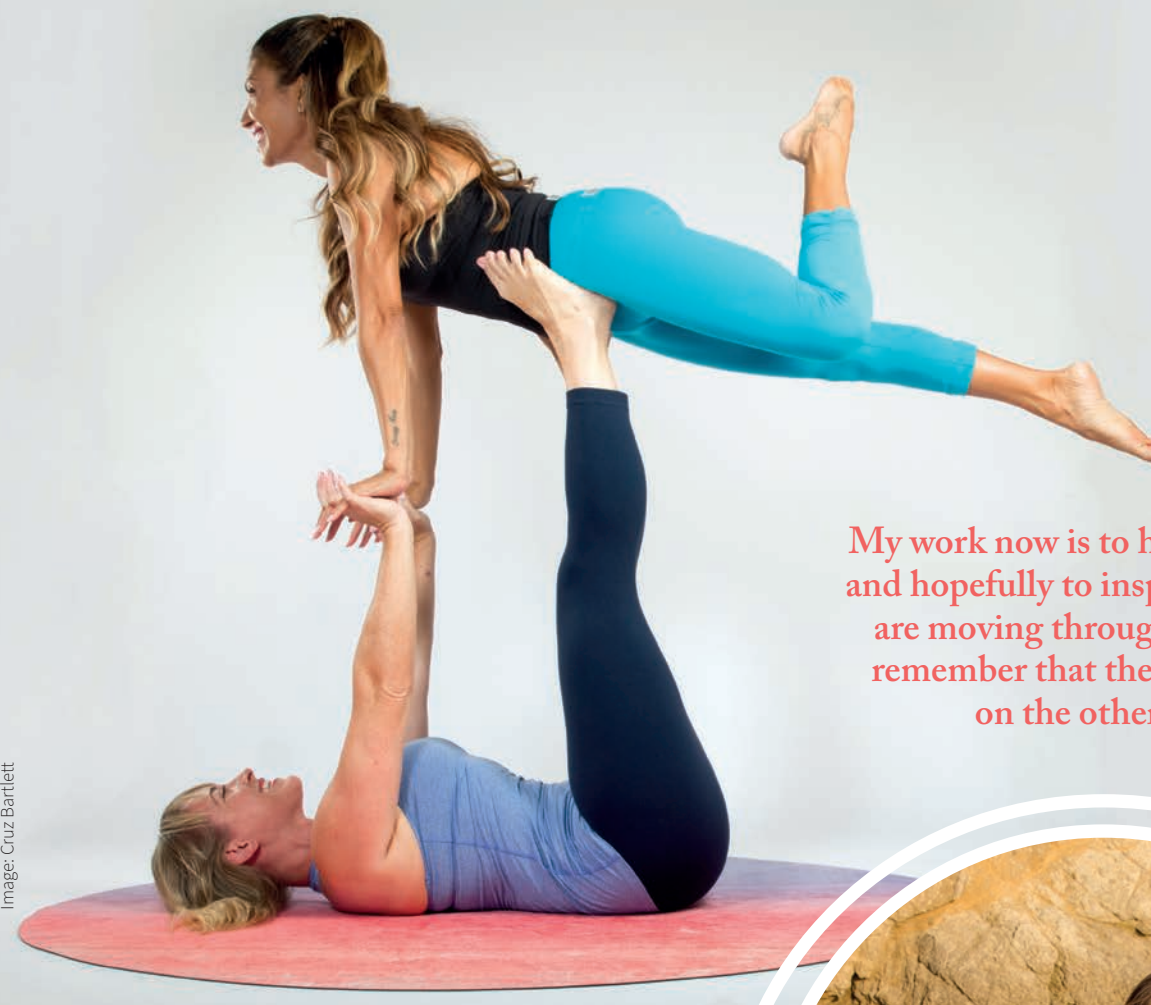


OM meets...

DESI BARTLETT

Meet this month's cover model Desi Bartlett, the US-based instructor who has been teaching yoga, health and wellness for over 25 years, including to some of Hollywood's most famous stars. Interview and images by Dr Natiya Guin

Image: Cruz Bartlett



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Our first of many OM magazine collaborations was 10 years ago (I photographed Desi for the cover of the May 2013 issue...also OM's first Instagram post!), but our story begins two years earlier in 2010 when she taught my prenatal yoga class in Venice, California. I was expecting my first child and Desi's joyful instruction left me so inspired that I adjusted my work schedule to attend her every class. She would go on to be my yoga guide through all three of my pregnancies and I even appeared in one of her prenatal DVDs. Over a decade later, Desi is a guiding light in the wellness world and to mums everywhere. Our friendship and collaborations have led to yoga articles and books that celebrate and support women in every stage of life. As we welcome in the spring months, let's see what she has blooming next...

How did you first get into yoga?

My mother was a disciple of Goswami Kriyananda at the Temple of Kriya Yoga in Chicago. I received my first mantra at six years old, and yoga has been in my life ever since. Asana came into my life in my early 20's and I fell in love with the physical practice.

What inspired you to become a yoga teacher?

After I completed my master's degree, I

moved from my hometown of Chicago to Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. My father was Mexican but I didn't grow up with him and wanted to learn about my culture. In Mexico, I opened a small fitness studio called Cabo Health and Fitness in the late 90's. During that time, an amazing yoga teacher from Mexico City visited my studio and asked if he could teach a class. After the initial meditation and pranayama practice that were very familiar to me, he segued into a gentle vinyasa practice that felt really comfortable and natural in my body. From there, I found myself travelling frequently to California and Costa Rica for teacher trainings, retreats, and any/all opportunities to steep myself in the physical practice. Teaching asana felt like I was teaching another expression of the language of movement, and in the same way I speak both English and Spanish, my body speaks yoga and strength training.

How has being a mother informed your practice?

In the yogic tradition, the path of family life is called being a 'householder'. Goswami Kriyananda taught that it is important to be present for your family

and not use the spiritual path as an excuse to not be present, for example, "I need to go meditate". Presence is the path. Wisdom is the path. For me, family is the path.

Any personal challenges that led to your current success?

I left home at 17. Unfortunately, there was substance abuse in my home and it was not a safe place for me to be and I had to grow up very quickly. I know how to set goals, take action, and move forward. My work now is to have more fun, and hopefully to inspire those who are moving through change, to remember that there can be joy on the other side.

How did you create your own yoga brand?

During my first pregnancy, I couldn't find the right practice for me. Some classes were too easy, and others were too hard, and still others did not use the word 'baby'. I knew that there was a better way, and with two degrees, 10 certifications, and a passion for learning, I knew I could design practices for pregnancy and new motherhood. It was during this time that I started to get more serious about creating a brand, a unique voice to communicate from my heart to the heart of all mothers, everywhere.

Tell us about some of your career highs so far?

Some of the highlights of my career so far have been: 10 DVD's in English and Spanish, and two books that are sold all over the world. I am also the co-creator of the round yoga mat with Manduka. I have a new prenatal yoga and meditation series with iFit, and the opportunity to work with many people, which inspires me tremendously. Grateful would be an understatement for my career!

You have a new book, *Total Body Beautiful* that sold out on the opening day (and that I had the honour of photographing). Can you share more about this accomplishment and working with your co-authors?

I am passionate about helping people through major life transitions, including pregnancy, parenthood, menopause, new jobs, and healing journeys. When I was pregnant I could not find the right book or yoga practice for my body, and felt passionate about creating it. Now that I am a woman of a certain age (51), I am having a bit of déjà vu. In looking for a comprehensive lifestyle book that addressed changes in hormones, emotions, mental health, cross training, and this new chapter of life, I could not find what I was looking for. I could see the need for a system that addresses a woman's emotional, mental, and physical changes over 35, and I knew just who to call to partner with.

Human Kinetics is the publisher for my first book, and when I called them with the idea for the second book, Michelle Earle, the acquisitions editor was incredibly receptive. My next calls were to Nicole Stuart, an amazing Pilates expert that I have shared clients with, and Andrea Orbeck, an athlete and talented personal trainer who I have also collaborated with. Writing this book as a team allowed us to each share our passion and expertise. Additionally, we each feel very grateful that actress Kate Hudson wrote the foreword.



Kate is someone who embodies strength from the inside out, and that is what we hope to inspire in women everywhere.

What do you say to people who feel they can't do yoga because they're not in shape, or think they're too old or too inflexible?

You do not have to be flexible to do yoga, yoga will help you become more flexible. And, more importantly, it is a direct route to having a relationship with your higher self. The part of you that connects to the entire universe, the part of you that knows the right answer, the part that speaks quietly yet persistently, that part is revealed through the practice of yoga. Flexibility is important and interesting, but I am far more interested in your relationship with your soul's path and purpose.

What are your yoga plans going forward?

Yoga has been a gift in my life and I am excited to share that. I have more plans in the works to share yoga with even more people around the world. To that end, I am working on a product and will be very keen



QUICK Q&A

Favourite yoga or spiritual book?

I have two. Autobiography of a Yogi by Paramahansa Yogananda and Women Who Run with Wolves by Clarissa Pinkola Estes.

Favourite go-to health products?

Deep Living Healing Massage Oil. The best for dry skin!

Most inspiring quote?

"If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them." — Henry David Thoreau

Favourite yoga pose and why?

Pigeon pose because there is no hiding.

If you could take a class as a student with any teacher from anywhere and from any period of time (now or in the distant past) who would it be with and why?

Indra Devi. She was a pioneer in the world of yoga and she was Marilyn Monroe's yoga teacher.

to share the idea when it moves forward. For now, I will share that I think globally, and love to help women, so the dream is big and being pursued with the intention of lifting all women.

What do you do when you're not doing yoga?

I love weight training, swimming in the ocean, and spending time with my friends and family. I'm also a big nerd and love being back in school — the goal is to be Dr. Desi Bartlett by the end of 2024.

Any tips for incorporating yoga into daily activities?

Diaphragmatic breathing is something that we can all enjoy, anytime, anywhere. This type of breathing feels like a salve for the nervous system. Remember that the physical aspect of yoga, while beautiful, is not the only important aspect of yoga.

Any life hacks for building inner resilience in our crazy world?

I love listening to podcasts in the morning. I listen to a wide array of motivational speakers, from Mooji the spiritual teacher from Jamaica, to David Goggins, the ultra-marathoner, author, and speaker. I learn from many different voices each day. Recently, I had the joy of meeting

Australian athlete, author, and speaker Turia Pitt. Turia is a burn survivor that uses her platform to motivate others, and I am enjoying her new series entitled, 'Self-Love Notes'. Having met her, I can tell you that she embodies strength, resilience, and compassion.

What can we learn from nature as we enter into spring?

The Spanish word 'girasol' means 'sunflower' in English. I love this word because 'gira' means 'to turn', and 'sol', is 'sun' — the flower turns to the sunshine. In the practice of yoga, we begin physical practice with surya namaskar, or sun salutation. Everything in nature is nourished and inspired by the warmth and radiance of the sun. After two and half years of a global pandemic, it feels like we are emerging from a dark period, and it is a wonderful opportunity to turn to the light. This is the time to connect to the light that each of us carries within, and to share our voices and grow together. In the words of Robin Williams: "Spring is the time when nature says, let's party!" 🌻

Find out more about Desi Bartlett at: desibartlett.com or connect via Instagram @mothersintolivingfit

TOTAL BODY BEAUTIFUL: SECRETS TO LOOKING AND FEELING YOUR BEST AFTER AGE 35

The new book by Desi Bartlett, Andrea Orbeck and Nicole Stuart is out now. Published by Human Kinetics.

