

Centered Stage

She's "just a smoothie-drinking, Nutella-eating yogi trying to find her balance in the world," but **Jessica Olie** is killing it, both in the online and offline world, with the release of her second fast-selling e-book and more dream collaborations than you can count. Meet the Instagram sensation that's lighting up the small screen. *By Yi-Hwa Hanna*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ETHAN MANN



*Cover
Exclusive*

It's dusty, windy, and *hot* outside, the sun blaring down mercilessly while four cars are parked in a convoy. We're waiting for the crowd of construction workers to walk away so we can hop out and take a photograph against a battered-looking wall, in not much more than a bodysuit, hoping for no overly-curious passers-by. The scene is hardly glamorous, and not at all what you'd expect when you think of the picture-perfect blue skies that act as the backdrop for many of Jessica Olie's now signature yoga posts on Instagram.

None of this is comfortable in the slightest, yet Jess takes it all in good stride, despite the fact that this is so far removed from her natural habitat, so to speak. In fact, in some ways, she seems more comfortable here than she did in our much more pristine studio that morning. Perhaps it's this ability to adapt to what works that's helped the 22-year-old get to where she is today. Yes, that's right—at just the age of 22, Jessica Olie has already managed to not only publish two e-books that have sold successfully all over the world, but she's also amassed a following of 166 thousand people (a figure that increases pretty much every week, it seems) on her Instagram

account alone. She's now also tearing it up on Snapchat, and in sum, has figured out exactly how to use social media to its best advantage. And we don't just mean by growing a wide spread fanbase: Her following isn't made up of just numbers, but rather, a solid community of loyal and dedicated women from their teenage years to their 30's and beyond—she has also managed to use it to build relationships, from a “soul sisterhood” friendship to business links with everything from fashion to fitness brands, that translate to real-life cash.

Born in South Africa to her South African father and British mother, Jess has lived in Greece, Turkey, the UK, Denmark and Dubai. “We've

moved a lot more than we've lived in places,” she says. When it came time to rest, Dubai was where her family called home. “It's where we were happiest,” Jess explains. Her younger sister, who is 18 and boasts the same mermaid-like hair and seafoam eyes, is ready to head off to college in Canada, and, believe it or not, isn't a yogi: “She bakes, that's her passion. My mum always jokes that you can't say we're not a balanced family—we have one daughter that will make you fat, and one that will make you fit!” Jess laughs. This open-minded and down-to-earth approach as a family is probably where Jess gets her surprisingly mature attitude towards life. Indeed, with her sweet voice and the looks of an American teenage rom-com's star cheerleader, it would be easy to mistake her for just an average young girl who loves to do yoga, but she's anything but.

A former athlete, Jessica's destiny was once to become a competitive swimmer—or so she thought. Always naturally gifted at sports, she became a national level swimmer in the UK, training 10 times a week. Even in high school, she would wake at 5am to train before her day began. If you'd told Jessica

The development of body awareness in *yoga is so valuable not just on your mat but in everything else that you do too*



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back then that she'd wind up inspiring thousands of women all over the world to find their souls in yoga, she'd never have believed you. It was when she was at university in the UK (Loughborough, in case you're interested) that she had her very first encounter with yoga. Questioning whether she wanted to continue with her sports science degree and her chosen path of competitive swimming, homesick and in a generally bad state of mind, she found herself increasingly unhappy. Add to that a group of "not very nice girls" that she had to interact with regularly, and she needed to find some kind of release. So a friend of hers suggested she try out a yoga class. At first, she scoffed at the idea—"I couldn't even touch my toes," she says; "I was used to lifting weights, going running, doing high intensity training—anything that would get my heart rate up. That's

Going For The Glow

When it comes to beauty, Jessica celebrates what's natural with an approach that's just as holistic as pretty much everything else she takes on. Read on for the secrets to her flawless skin, flowing locks and year-round glowing skin.

Nails: "I usually tend to do Vinylux on my nails; it lasts but it's less harsh than Gelish."

Hair: "I don't dye my hair, and I generally try to avoid heat tools and don't straighten it often."

Skin: "I use aloe vera to treat any spots, and I only use La Mer products on my face. I know they're expensive, but I've tried everything and they just really work for me. With beauty I believe less is more, and good skin is such an important base—I don't wear makeup very often and only tend to when I'm going out. And the products I use all have SPF in them!"

Brows: "If there was only one product I'd take somewhere with me, it's my eyebrow pencil. I currently love the Anastasia Beverly Hills one."

what I felt that I needed, and I never believed yoga would be able to give me that. To be honest, I didn't even know what it was about—and I hated stretching! I'd do everything in my power to avoid stretching when I was an athlete, so I wasn't about to go and do it willingly." Still, her friend convinced her by saying it was only an hour of her life and if she hated it, she'd never have to do it again. It wasn't love at first try: "I wasn't hooked from the first class—I was actually a bit skeptical. I didn't like the people in the class, it was too slow, and I felt like I was doing things wrong and nobody was correcting me, and that was frustrating. I'm a perfectionist, and I needed to do something about it," she says.

Surprisingly, turning to the

fitness people that will inspire you, and you can follow them," she says, continuing: "I'd search for hashtags like 'yoga' and 'fitspiration' and all these amazing things came up on my feed. And I thought, 'Wait, that's yoga?' I saw that many of these people's bios said that they were self-taught, so I messaged them and asked what that meant. They said they usually just did things themselves at home, and I said, 'Wait, so I don't have to go to classes to do this?'. I'd always had pretty good body awareness, of the body and the muscles and joints, from my degree and being an athlete, so I started doing it in my room. I'd go onto YouTube and look up sun salutations. And in my tiny university room, in my pyjamas, not even on a yoga

crap that was going on outside, and focus on myself for however long I needed to. It gave me a release and if I hadn't done it, I don't know how I would have finished my degree," she says. It's been a long time since then, and how far Jess has come. That friend who introduced her to yoga is still a good friend now: In fact, he's coming to her wedding next year. "I just saw him when I went to London to buy my wedding dress. He took some pictures of me for Instagram, and said, 'You've improved so much!'" she smiles. When I ask if that friend of hers does yoga, she says no: She never tries to force anyone in her life to take it on. To Jess, journeys like this should come from the heart, and that is, in essence, the secret to her success.

I'd go onto YouTube and in my tiny room, in my pyjamas, not even on a yoga mat—I used a towel!—I just stretched and flowed /

internet wasn't her first reaction: "I'd always been against social media, since I had a very bad experience with it when I was in high school—I was bullied through Facebook. Then my friend said, 'You know there's all these awesome

mat—I used a towel!—I just stretched and flowed, trying headstands and that sort of thing. Then I'd do it in the gym when I got more confident, and it grew from there. It was just 10, 20, 50 minutes that I could switch off from all the

"[Since] I came from an athletic background, there was that kind of harsh mentality of 'Go hard or go home' and I think that can push you to a point where you stop enjoying [something]. That's why I found so much peace in yoga. I could still challenge and push myself to the full extent, but in a place where I would grow from it," she says. Since Jess doesn't like to do things by halves, as soon as she returned to the UAE, she began to look up yoga courses. "It was July 1st, and there was one starting on July 7th—the next one wasn't for another year, so I thought, it's either now or never," and she went for it. She mainly did it for herself: "I did it to understand what yoga was, the philosophy behind everything, and I didn't really have the intention of teaching anyone," she says. But then the messages started to come in. People from all over the city,

and even across the world, would ask her if she would teach them. At first she said no, but the emails kept pouring in, and she began to teach close friends and family members. "They were improving, and it just felt really good. People no longer had this perception that they had to be doing yoga for years to reach a certain level and try certain poses, and one thing I realised is that we're all capable of so much more than we think. My personal dream was to do the splits, and people said I wasn't flexible enough. I was too old, and don't have a background in gymnastics, so it wasn't going to happen, they said. When I started achieving them, I thought if I can do it there's no reason anyone else can't. I think if my mum wanted to split then she could! So I began teaching more people," she says. Her followers across the globe clamored for online classes, "but I didn't have enough of me to give around, so that's where the e-book came from. They could have a piece of me and the way I guide people. My clients often use it when I travel, and they say the way I explain things in it is just how I do it in class," she says.

Jess adamantly refuses to advise people on matters she feels she isn't ready for, and she takes the responsibility seriously. "People often ask me to do a blog post about what I eat, but I say no, because what I'm putting in my body isn't necessarily what you need to be putting in your body. I'm not qualified in nutrition, so I don't feel like I have the grounds to advise people on what they should be eating,"



Turn It Up

Music, like the rest of Jess's life, has its yin and yang: Upbeat pop hits for her more intensive workouts, and soulful tunes for yoga, which she largely chooses based on her mood.

Here are some of her current favourites tunes to set the scene when she's working up a sweat.

WORK IT OUT

Jess's current workout favourites...

SIA - Cheap Thrills

IGGY AZALEA - Team

MIKE POSNER - I Took A Pill In Ibiza

STRETCH IT OUT

...and her current yoga go-tos

BIRDY - Deep End

ADELE - Remedy

ED SHEERAN - Give Me Love



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■ Cover Exclusive

she says. It's the same with yoga disciplines that aren't her speciality of Hatha or Vinyasa: "People ask me all the time if I'll teach them when they're pregnant, but I tell them I may be a yoga instructor but I'm not qualified in prenatal yoga. They say, 'Isn't that the same thing?', and I say I couldn't live with myself if it harmed you or your baby, because I didn't know exactly what postures you should be avoiding and what you should be doing," Jess explains. "There are so many people on Instagram who are now bringing out e-books or teaching classes and hosting events—even in Dubai you have unqualified yogis leading huge classes of people when really, all they do is do yoga for themselves. There's a difference between doing yoga for *your* body and being able to deliver a class for hundreds of people who all have different bodies. Unless I have the tools, information and experience to deal with other people, I can't give them a session that's going to be safe. And that, for me, is important—I don't want to put anyone in danger, or hurt anyone. And I would never feel comfortable telling someone what to do if I had no grounds to stand on. I think it also paves the way for the community that you're influencing—if people start to think that it's ok for those who are not qualified to give advice, then qualifications themselves start to lose their place on the pedestal," she says, adding that yoga is more than the positions you do: "There's a method to the madness. [In training], you learn a lot more about the practice than just doing a backbend," she adds. "I think the key is learning to listen to your body. The development of body awareness in yoga is so valuable not just on your mat but in everything that you do too—you start to become aware of everything else that you do. Your thought process, how you interact with people, or deal with stress and certain



certain situations... if you allow the practice to be more than just the pose, then you start to develop a lot more than just a bendy body," she says. It is ironic, then, that Instagram yogis are now gaining such a notorious reputation among the social media set for being what some might describe as the "Regina Georges" of today: Beautiful and popular, yet

cruelly superior to those who can't physically do what they do. "I was speaking to a lady who owns a brand in Dubai, who said it's ironic that some of the yogis on Instagram are some of the most harsh and judgmental people she's ever worked with," Jess laments. "I think there's a superiority that comes with having a certain number of followers, and it

doesn't matter what discipline you follow, unfortunately many people now base their self-worth on how many followers they have online and seem to think they're entitled to something or more qualified to give advice as a result of that, or that they're better than other people," she says. "There is a lot of competition on Instagram. But with the online

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community, like in life, you can choose to surround yourself with the kind of people you want, so if you don't like it, unfollow it. Unfortunately in real life you can't always avoid the people you don't want to interact with—the negative people—but at least online, if you really don't want to see something, you don't have to.”

Authenticity is extremely important to Jess, particularly since she feels that that's one of the greatest advantages of social media, if you choose to use it that way: “I don't want to post a picture-perfect moment all the time, and I think it's important to show that I don't always have everything together. If I did anything differently, it would be a lie—it just wouldn't be a true representation of my life. Yes, there are some that ruin it for others, but for the most part, [one of the things I love about it the most is that] there's this community of women that have all their walls taken down and genuinely want other people to succeed. It's nice that you can approach people without worrying that they have an ulterior motive, or that they'd secretly be happy if you're not doing well, that kind of thing. I'm tired of that high school attitude, and just don't have time for it anymore.”

One link to high school that Jess is very happy to retain, to her surprise, is the love of her life. Her now fiancé, Velimir, proposed to her on the eve of their fourth anniversary last September. A competitive swimmer, he's on the road to Rio, training to represent Serbia in his second Olympics. Although Jess doesn't swim anymore herself, that's actually how they met: After swimming on opposing teams throughout her school years in Dubai, Jess and her family returned to Dubai for a second round when she was 18. She needed a place to train, and reluctantly got in touch with Velimir's training squad. “We didn't really like or know each

other—there was club rivalry, and we never really interacted because of that mentality!” she laughs. “[But] I put my ego aside and asked his coach if I could come train with them. He said sure, no problem, and one day I needed a ride home. I said I'd get the metro, and his coach said ‘No don't be silly, Velimir will take you!’. I died inside and said no, but when I came home, my mum asked me how it was, I said ‘I think I owe him an apology—he's actually a really nice guy.’ Mum said, ‘I never thought I'd hear you say that!’. Turns out he was just shy. He started taking me home regularly, and one day we went out for Nutella pancakes, and it all started from there” she says. Jessica and Velimir are planning their wedding for next January (in Dubai, of course), and in yet another fairytale-worthy turn of events, among Jess's best friends and bridesmaids will be her friend Morgan. A fellow Instagram yogi who goes by the moniker “The Southern Yogi,” Jess and Morgan had followed each other from afar, commenting on each other's photos until an online yoga

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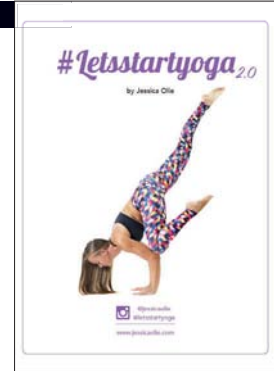
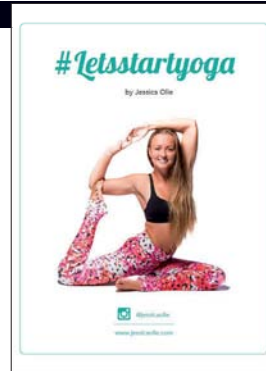
challenge saw them exchange phone numbers and begin chatting over WhatsApp. One conversation led to another and, before they knew it, Jess was on a plane to the USA to meet her. Morgan has since been to visit Jess in Dubai, and she describes her as a true soul sister. With so much achieved by such a young age, we can only wait to see where Jess will

be in a few years: Right now, she just wants to focus on her wedding, perhaps creating more e-books, and continuing in her journey, and she dreams of maybe releasing a clothing collaboration with some of her favourite activewear brands down the line. Whatever she chooses to do, one thing is for certain: For Jessica Olie, the future is going to be bright. ■



Find Your Flow

“What I love about yoga is that it uses your own body weight to sculpt and shape your body. It will make you strong and flexible,” says Jess in her first e-book, #LetsStartYoga. The book, which is designed for all levels from beginners to those simply looking to deepen their yoga practice, aims to help you no matter where you are in your yoga journey and, ultimately, help you to find your flow. Here’s one of our favourite routines from the e-book. Once you’ve “graduated” from her first book, Jess recommends following up with her second e-book, #LetsStartYoga 2.0, which was released this year and aims to take you to the next level. Both are available at her website, JessicaOlie.com as a downloadable PDF guide that can be used on up to 3 devices, for US \$29.99 and US \$39.99 respectively.



HANDY TIPS

- > Don't forget to warm up your joints first!
- > If it doesn't feel good, then don't do it. Always listen to your body.
- > Practice makes perfect. Don't rush to achieve a pose—let your body take as long as it needs to get there, although the more

frequently you practice, the sooner that will likely be.

- > Jess likes to take pictures of her progress, and she encourages you to do the same. Hashtag your pics with #LetsStartYoga to share your progress with others following the guide—and don't forget to tag us at @womenshealthme so we can see it too!

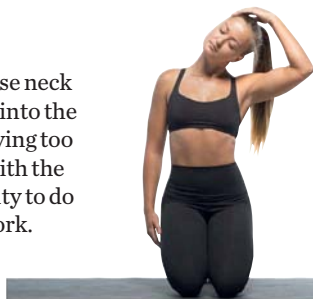
Just Joints

“No matter where I am in my practice, I always take the time to warm up my joints. The reason for this is to stimulate the synovial fluid in the joints, reducing the chances of injury. Oh, and don't be too concerned if anything clicks, it's completely normal. Here are a few suggested movements, which I include in my practice, and which you can do before you start yours,” says Jess. For a variety of flows you can do after warming up, check out her e-book, #LetsStartYoga.



Neck

Flow between these neck stretches to warm into the joints. Avoid applying too much pressure with the hands. Allow gravity to do most of the work.



Scorpion Stretch

Scorpion Stretch is one of my favourite twists to decompress the spine. Try doing the stretch 3 times each side. Make sure that you are facing the opposite direction to where your foot is going.





Shoulders/Wrists

This stretch looks awkward because it is. Aside from that, it's my favourite. You can do it in your yogi squat or seated. Either way, bring the back of your hands to your waist and feed your arms in between your legs. From here, push your legs towards each other. You will feel an intense stretch along the back of the shoulder. The arrows indicate where you need to move or direct your body. First, start with warming up the shoulders by rotating your arms clockwise and anticlockwise at least 5 times. Then do the same rotations for the wrists as well as moving them from left to right as many times as you feel you need.

Hips

You are going to have a love/hate relationship with this yogi squat but I promise you it is so good for working into the hips. If your heels don't touch the floor make sure you are wide enough and if that doesn't work place a towel under your heels. Lift your chest and push your knees away from the body using your elbows.



Butterfly Pose You can rock from side to side or stay still in this pose. Don't focus too much on getting your legs flat on the floor, rather concentrate on opening up and feeling a stretch in the inner thighs. Tip: For a deeper stretch, try lowering your head towards your feet or open up your feet like a book and lower your chest towards your feet while you look in front.



Rock the baby Sitting up straight, cradle your leg and gently rock from left to right bringing your leg close to your chest. Flex the foot here to protect the knee.



Plough Pose and Forward Fold

Flow between Plough Pose and Forward Fold at least 5 or 6 times to open up your hamstrings, back and neck. This will also activate your abdominal muscles which you will be needing for your practice.



Ankles

This may not seem like much, try staying in this position for 2 minutes. A great way to stretch out the feet and ankles. It also can be used as a detoxing method; releasing toxins stored in your feet. A counter pose after the last one. Make sure not to put too much weight on your ankles during this pose. You want to feel a stretch in the front of the ankles.



Excerpt from #LetsStartYoga by Jessica Olie taken with permission, and noting the following: "I strongly recommend that you consult with your physician before beginning any exercise programme. You should be in good physical condition and be able to participate in the exercise. You should understand that when participating in any exercise or exercise programme there is the possibility of physical injury. If you engage in this programme you agree that you do so at your own risk, of voluntarily participating in these activities, assume all risk of injury to yourself, and agree to release and discharge Jessica Olie from any and all claims or causes of action, known or unknown arising out of my negligence. This e-book [excerpt] is not individually tailored, rather a guideline to help you begin your yoga journey."