

JAMIES HOUSTON

TEXT FELICITY LOUGHREY

CHRISTY TURLINGTON AND A HOST OF OTHER HEAVENLY BODIES STRIKE THE YOGIC POSE FOR AN AUSSIE PHOTOGRAPHER WHO'S MAKING BIG INROADS IN THE BIG APPLE.

"CONFIDENT?" says James Houston. The 40-year-old photographer squints his hazel eyes in New York's midday glare. "Yeah, you have to be. Shit, every artist has doubts about what they do. But you have to go back to your belief in yourself and what you're doing and realise you've got nothing to lose. It's all about giving it a go. That's one of the great things about being Australian. What America does is that it gives you confidence. Because in Australia, even if you feel like your work's good, you've got to battle your way through, and then you come to America and everyone's like, 'Oh my God! Your work is amazing! I love you! You're fantastic! Oh, you're incredible!' It really takes a few years to get your head around the American philosophy of support and confidence building. And eventually you think, you know what? I have worked my arse off. I have worked really hard to get to this point and when I look at my work now, it's great."

Sitting on dry, late-summer grass in a park in Chelsea, Houston points to the prototype cover of his third book, *One*. In his new monograph, Houston presents with his characteristic spare elegance 150 black-and-white photographs of famous and not-so famous nude bodies clinched in Ashtanga yoga poses. "Even though I wanted to

shoot it as naked as possible, I didn't want it to be about nudity," he explains. "I wanted it to be about yoga as art."

Houston said his first omms at Eileen Hall's YogaMoves Studio in Sydney in the late '90s. He was seduced by the practice and set about documenting it over six years. "The whole yoga movement has moved forward so quickly in so many different hybrids, [and yet] the imagery stays the same. It's still an Indian guy on a rock. So I wanted to take it further and make it more about art. It really is an incredible form."

In *One*, Houston captures young people, old people and the occasional supermodel in zen-like knots. When Houston approached supermodel in zen-like Christy Turlington to be in his book, she was coincidentally working on her own yoga title. "So she said, 'Can you photograph me for my book and you can shoot me for your book?' It was just a twist of fate. I've always wanted to work with her. She's been my favourite model for a long time. She's amazing."

It's not that Houston's lens is starved for famous faces. In the past year he has photographed Paris Hilton, Mandy Moore and Jessica Alba for American magazines. He picked up a thank you note from folk singer Jewel. He shot campaigns for Donna Karan, Hugo Boss and Givenchy. And he just snapped Australian country music sensation Keith Urban for a US-wide Gap campaign.

"The thing about photography that you have to remember is that it's a business and you are a product. It's about marketing that product. There are 30,000 photographers in this city," he says looking up at the Manhattan sky. "And if you don't think you're the best and you don't try to be the best, you're not going to be one of the top people." ●