

Lord Howe Island

A 120-year-old family-run lodge, twice-daily yoga, a self-pour bar and no snakes. KELLIE HUSH discovers Australia's paradise next door

NOVEMBER 27, 1966. Newlyweds John and Leonie arrive at Sydney's Rose Bay at high tide to board a seaplane bound for Lord Howe Island. John is wearing a grey suit with a tie and tie clip. Leonie is in a cute navy-and-pink polka-dot day dress, her hair perfectly coiffured. Lord Howe is the honeymoon destination of the '60s, for its pristine landscape, beautiful beaches and exclusiveness (only a limited number of tourists are allowed on the island at any time) — so they are joined onboard by other newlyweds.

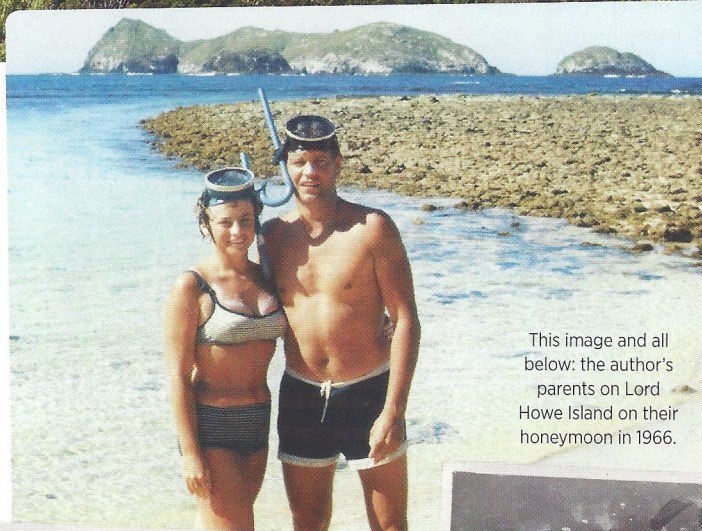
John and Leonie Hush are my parents. I have always loved looking at the honeymoon photos my mum has kept safe for 52 years. Dad snorkelling at Ned's Beach, Mum looking incredible in a bikini, the two of them sitting on bikes about to ride around the small subtropical island.

For this nostalgic reason, Lord Howe Island has been on my bucket list for a long time, so I jumped at the chance to visit when Pinetrees Lodge invited me for its Wellness Yoga Retreat hosted by yoga guru Charlotte Dodson. Dodson is also Kit Willow's instructor — the designer has been waxing lyrical about her for years. Another bucket-list tick.

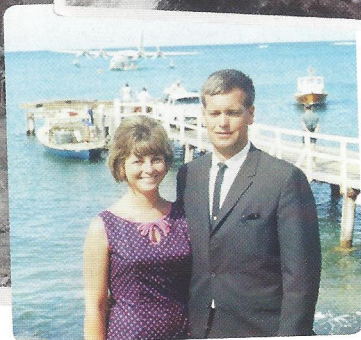
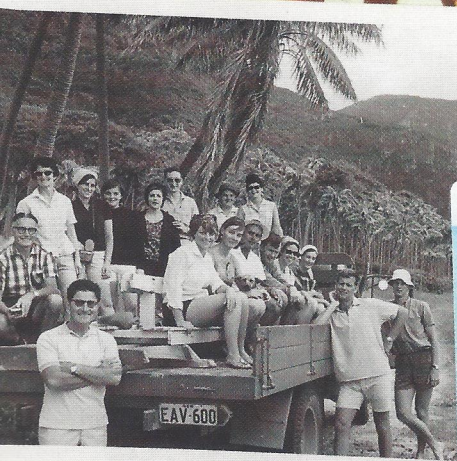
Lord Howe Island, technically part of New South Wales, lies 600 kilometres east of Port Macquarie, a two-hour flight from Sydney. (Qantaslink flies direct, so seaplanes and tide charts are no longer required.) As we pop through the low clouds, I catch my breath: the island is a paradise of azure water and lush green volcanic mountains. The island may be small — about 10 kilometres end to end — but it is big on impact. The loud exclamations of "wow" did not go silent after we got off that small Qantas plane.

So, Lord Howe. How do I love thee? Let me count the ways ...

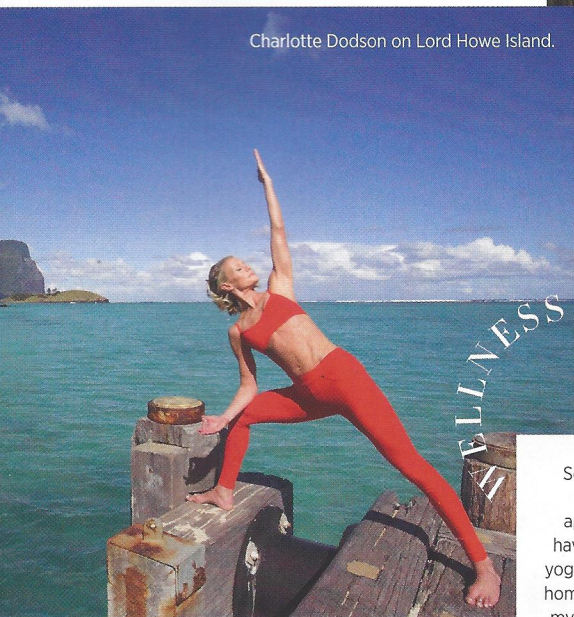
Pinetrees Lodge is run by Dani Rourke and her husband, Luke Hanson. Rourke's family has been hosting guests on the



This image and all below: the author's parents on Lord Howe Island on their honeymoon in 1966.



Charlotte Dodson on Lord Howe Island.



Morning yoga at the foot of Mount Lidgbird.

Some women dream of handbags, shoes, diamonds or maybe an apartment in Paris. My dream is to have Charlotte Dodson as my private yoga instructor. She would arrive at my home every sunrise to take me through my vinyasa and help me achieve a set of perfectly toned yoga arms.

I've heard the legend of Dodson over the years from friends and women I've interviewed, such as supermodel and yogi Miranda Kerr, but I haven't met the pocket rocket until I land on Lord Howe Island for Pinetrees' Wellness Week.

Now, I too am a devoted fan.

A new convert to yoga, I don't naturally fall into a pose without a little adjustment, and Dodson is the queen of a little adjustment — with a dash of humour. She has practised yoga for more than 10 years and is a certified teacher of hatha, ashtanga and Kundalini styles, and is brilliant at teaching all levels. So even if you aren't a yogi yet, Wellness Week is still for you. Dodson's twice-daily classes at Pinetrees are based on ashtanga, and by the end of my six classes, I am able to lift myself into a peak pose headstand (with Dodson standing close by in case I wobble). Woo-hoo!

Chat to Dodson and you soon realise a yoga devotee never stops learning. Each morning during Wellness Week, she is up at 3am to practise her own yoga before walking down to the boatshed to meet the Pinetrees crew. She'll tell us about the (crazy) peak pose she's been working on and explain how some take years to achieve it. Her incredible physique is a testament to the hard work she puts in.

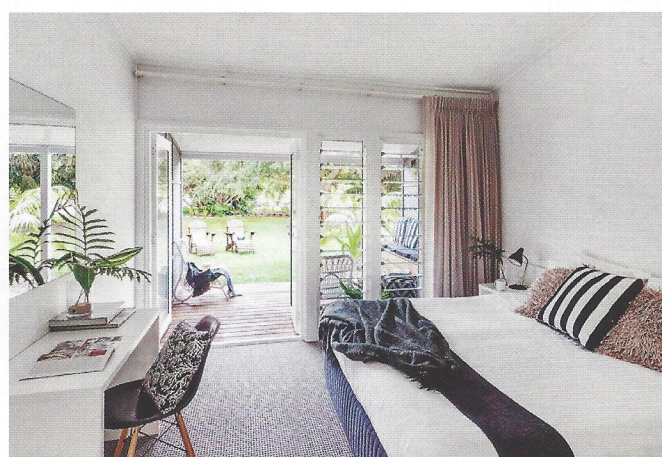
Dodson has also co-founded Flywell, an interactive and comprehensive inflight wellness program — breathing exercises, guided meditation and gentle yoga sequences — for frequent flyers looking to keep moving at 30,000 feet and feel good on arrival. People do sometimes look twice when Dodson does her moves with her seatbelt on, but arriving fresh after a long-haul flight is worth every raised eyebrow.

charlottedodson.com.

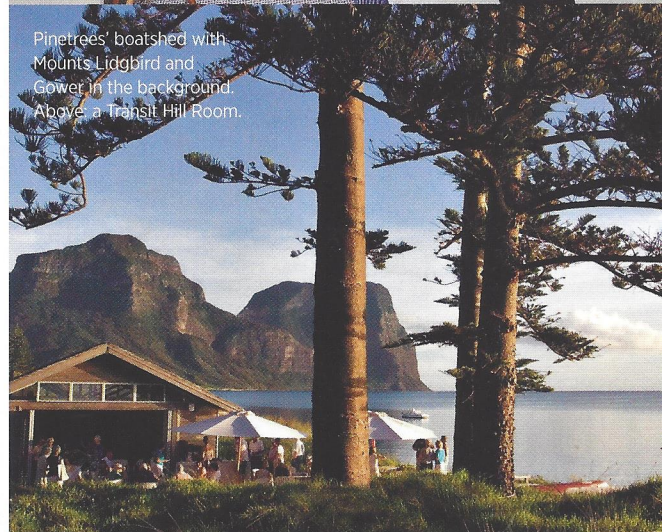
island for more than 120 years, so she is a Lord Howe encyclopaedia, as is Hanson. The lodge undergoes renovations every year, leaving it crisp and fresh, and my room is comfortable, with a fab private balcony that gets great morning sun. Lord Howe feels caught in time in the best possible way — I feel as if I'm in a scene from *Dirty Dancing*. You'll find no television here, and when they say there's no reception on the island, they mean no reception. I have to buy a phone card on arrival to let my husband know I have arrived safely. Digital detox: tick. A short walk across the road is the lodge's quaint boatshed where Dodson runs her twice-daily yoga classes. In the evening, the space transforms into an honesty bar where you can pour yourself a glass of wine and watch the sunset. And the food ... they will weigh you before boarding at the small airport, so be very careful because it's four mouthwatering courses every night.

My day at Pinetrees starts with yoga at 7am. Dodson is a phenomenal teacher, able to manage a class of yogis of all different abilities. Then it's breakfast (excellent, as is the coffee), during which Hanson lets all the retreaters know what the daily activity will be. As Lord Howe is hugely exposed in the Tasman Sea, most of the activities are weather dependent. I am lucky enough to have great weather, so we hike to Kim's Lookout, Malabar Hill, Mutton Bird Point and Goat House Cave, snorkel on the coral reef off Lagoon Beach and spend an afternoon walking across the island to Ned's Beach, where my parents swam half a century ago.

I quickly become addicted to Dodson's yoga, but also to my hikes with Hanson. Lord Howe is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and, honestly, I have never been anywhere so pristine. There is no litter. The island is home to a large number of rare plants and birds, and the *pièce de résistance* for me is the absence of snakes. (Also, Hanson promises me when I am snorkelling with a few reef sharks that the dangerous ones only come in from the deep Tasman at night.)



Pinetrees' boatshed with Mounts Lidgbird and Gower in the background. Above: a Transit Hill Room.



Back in the office, next to my computer is a picture of Mum and Dad on the back of a truck with a dozen other honeymooners. The snap is so fabulous as it is so '60s — the women all so chic in headscarfs and rockabilly sunglasses. But having gone to Lord Howe, what I now love more about this picture is the backdrop. The dirt road may be sealed today, but

there are still hundreds of palm trees, and Mount Gower still looms large over the island. Ah, Mount Gower. That full-day hike is still on my bucket list. It's a tough, fair-weather hike, and, being on a yoga retreat, I wasn't prepared to sacrifice my downward dogs for a muddy struggle. So, Lord Howe, I will be back.

pinetrees.com.au.