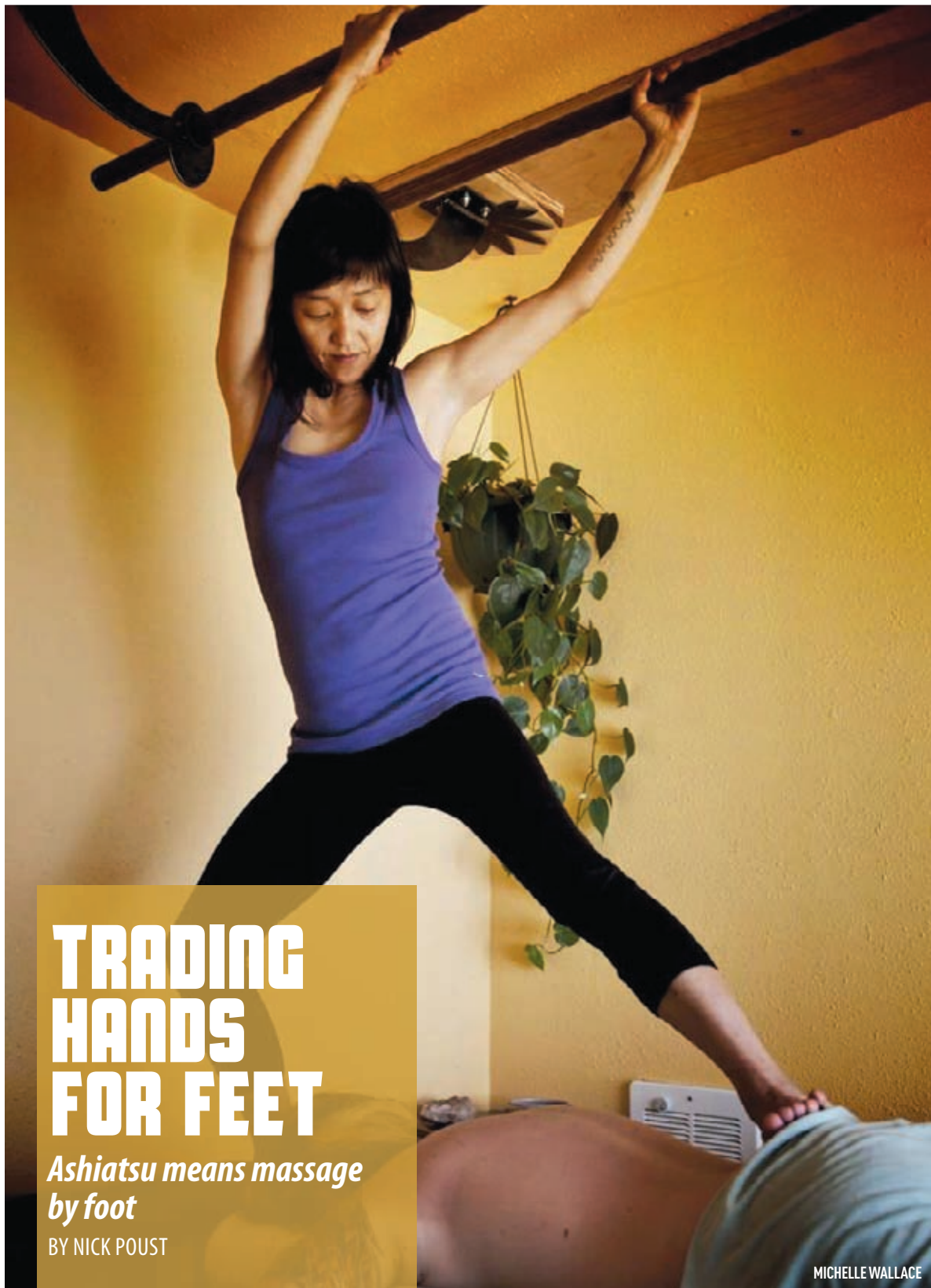


MINDING YOUR BODY

"Digressions, objections, delight in mockery, carefree mistrust are signs of health; everything unconditional belongs in pathology." So wrote Friedrich Nietzsche in *Beyond Good and Evil*. There are perkier aphorisms and quotes when it comes to health: An apple a day keeps the doctor away; a sound mind in a sound body; health is wealth. But as flu season departs and the sunny outdoor (allergy) season hits, you have to pull body and mind together to be healthy. Massage, mediation, working out, whatever it takes, good luck.



Hands are often an integral part of massage therapy, but not for those who practice ashatsu. Feet are their main instrument, used to smoothly work out all muscles of the body that are sore. Michelle Wallace practices ashatsu, a form of barefoot massage therapy, through her massage studio, Feet First!, and welcomes anyone who wants to experience what she calls "bodysurfing."

"It feels like a big wave of pressure that is moving down your spine and up your spine," Wallace says. "It's a broad, deep pressure that is relaxing."

Ashiatsu, originally founded by Ruthie Piper Hardee and meaning "foot pressure" in Japanese, requires strong feet, reliance on gravity and a deft touch to administer deep tissue massage. Wallace has bars attached to the ceiling, bracing herself as she puts just the right amount of pressure on all areas of the back and legs. It's not just feet that clients feel; sometimes, it's the weight of her body — all 90 pounds.

"The most unique part is that I'm able to use my whole body," Wallace says. "I feel like a monkey, kind of."

Ashiatsu, properly practiced, is slow and requires intuitive, versatile feet. This means being able to use different parts of the foot for different parts of the back and legs.

"I can do a lot with the heel of my foot in places like the glutes and the hamstrings," Wallace says. "And the ball of my foot and the toes can be used like hands to get into the shoulder blades. Then I will smooth out the whole body with the foot. So I can get in there and get really local like people do with their hands, but I can do the same thing with my foot."

Wallace has had ashatsu described to her as "a big squeeze." "Like I'm giving everybody a hug," she says, "pushing out the tense areas of the body."

Ashiatsu can be methodical, sometimes requiring prolonged pressure on a specific area. If a certain spot feels tense, Wallace won't move her foot, determined to work out the kinks. From her perspective, relying on gravity for pressure rather than exerted energy is key. From a client's perspective, letting the therapist's weight sink in is crucial to getting the most out of this experience.

As a result ashatsu is far more interactive than traditional massage, not necessarily through verbal communication, but through what the body is saying. Massage therapists who practice ashatsu can easily find where clients are holding tension. And with Eugene being Track Town USA, Wallace wants some of those clients to be athletes. She believes this method would be very beneficial to them.

"It's good for all types of body types, but especially for athletes," she says. "It's very effective for getting into their tight muscles without it being painful." ■

To experience ashatsu from Michelle Wallace, check out her Facebook page: [wklysw1fy](https://www.facebook.com/wklysw1fy). You can learn more about this barefoot massage therapy by visiting Deep Feet Bar Therapy, an organization through which Wallace did her training: deepfeet.com

PHOTO COURTESY OF MICHELLE WALLACE

MICHELLE WALLACE

TRADING HANDS FOR FEET

Ashiatsu means massage by foot

BY NICK POUST

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