

# pure classical pilates

Peter Fiasca's new book defines what Joseph Pilates' traditional method is—and what it isn't

PHOTOGRAPHY BY I.C. RAPOPORT

Joseph Pilates' traditional method of body conditioning provides optimal strength, flexibility, energetic vitality and balanced muscular precision for everyday movement and athletic activity, whereas the mutations of his work now flooding the marketplace do not. The following excerpt from my book explains why we must preserve the historically accurate Pilates method before it becomes so watered-down that it is in danger of being forever lost.

For starters, people often ask, Why use the term *Pure Classical Pilates*? Because modern deviations from Joseph Pilates' traditional method run rampant throughout the profession, and sometimes they are incorrectly—or falsely—labeled “classical Pilates.” It is therefore

important to make a clear distinction between these counterfeit approaches and Joseph Pilates' traditional technique. Here are the three watermarks:

- There is only one Pure Classical Pilates—Joseph Pilates' traditional technique.
- There are many derivative approaches incorrectly or called Pilates.
- “Contemporary Pilates” is a contradiction in terms.

## classical, inside & out

Pure Classical Pilates address the wellness of the individual as a whole. Joseph Pilates designed his traditional system as a form of holistic movement to improve the mental alertness, carriage, coordination, responsiveness and precision of

one's movement through the strengthening of the core muscle groups. At a deeper level, the master's intention was to improve our chances of survival. He also created unique and cohesive collections of exercises, which are sufficiently complex to study for a lifetime without inserting incompatible methodologies or movement techniques.

Historically accurate Pilates is based upon an ordered sequence of exercises, characterized by flowing movement, technical clarity, rhythm and dynamics. Within the traditional syllabus, there is a wide range of appropriate modifications designed to address various symptoms or limitations. While it may be tempting for some people, it is simply not necessary to include random simplifications



or insert aspects of other movement modalities. Ultimately, these intrusions detract from the complexity, intelligence and cohesiveness of Joseph Pilates' traditional method.

That work is both intriguing and beneficial because it is a full-body movement system, utilizing full mental engagement or concentration. We actively stabilize certain muscle groups as others move in a coordinated fashion. To achieve proper form and full muscular exertion, we must sustain as much mental concentration as possible because we are always in motion, we're aiming for proper alignment, and we initiate movement from the correct muscle groups. The traditional method is a constellation of stable placement positions and mobility patterns. Pure Classical Pilates also has a wide range of movement vocabulary, yet the basic-intermediate levels are accessible to almost everyone.

It is important to remember that the traditional method is a unique and indivisible system. There is intelligence and order to the exercises, each resonating with others and none working against others. The progression of exercises form an epigenetic sequence: Each exercise must build upon the proper placement, articulation, energy, flow and shape of the preceding exercise.

## **pilates is a workout!**

The traditional Pilates method is, first and foremost, a vigorous workout that challenges the mind and body in novel and creative ways. Joseph Pilates' distinguished protégé (and my teacher) Romana Kryzanowska said there should be a sign over every studio entrance that reads, *PILATES IS A WORKOUT!* Joseph Pilates drew greatly from his background in gymnastics and calisthenics. The intended energy-impetus and muscularity of his method should be strong, definitive and flowing while taking into consideration a student's current aptitudes and limitations.

Joseph Pilates' lasting contribution

was to create his own rendering of body conditioning and, as he described it, "corrective exercise." His precise exercises, goals and qualities of movement were certainly based on other disciplines practiced throughout the ages, but his qualitatively distinct system simultaneously aims toward improvement of mental, physical and spiritual health.

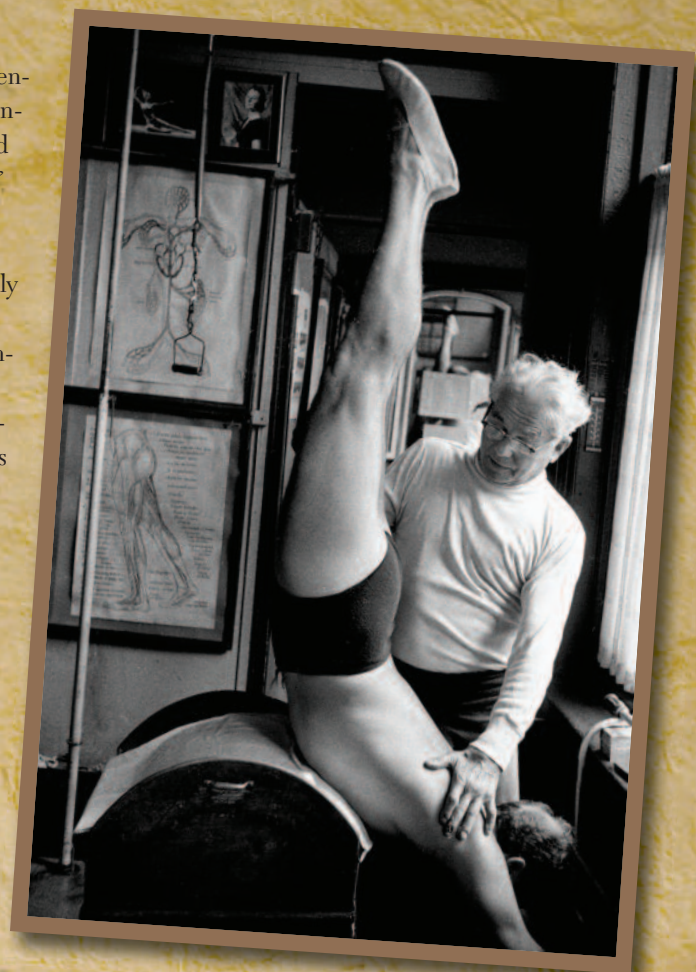
Today Joseph Pilates' indivisible method is practiced and preserved by only a small percentage of instructors in the profession. This is due in part to elevated educational standards of traditional teacher-training programs, which are extremely comprehensive, especially in comparison to derivative and piecemeal training programs.

There are, however, other factors that contribute to the limited number of traditionalists. To train as a traditional instructor requires a significant commitment of time, finances and devotion. In contrast, large international training corporations do not—and cannot—screen applicants for passion, talent or devotion, as this would require a time-consuming selection process. Besides, corporate business profit formulas are based primarily on attracting high numbers of apprentices, with lower educational standards.

## **for your greater good**

And yet, applying the knowledge gained in the traditional studio to our daily lives is beneficial in many ways, to wit:

- When we walk down the street, we maintain good carriage by lifting and lengthening up through the abdominals.
- When we throw a football or hit a



tennis ball, we enjoy enhanced coordination and mental awareness by establishing movement in the center and directing effort through our limbs.

- When riding a bike or skiing down a mountain slope, we scoop the abdominals and allow relative suppleness in the torso and limbs.
- When we walk down a staircase, we negotiate improved relations with gravity by stimulating our abdominals inward and upward.
- When we are in the kitchen reaching into the refrigerator, washing dishes, lifting a heavy cooking pot or gently grasping a Champagne glass, all the core muscles are working in concert to provide balance and grace. ▶

*For more information on Pure Classical Pilates or to order a copy of this book, visit [ClassicPilates.net](http://ClassicPilates.net) or call (215) 205-8004.*



## THE IDEAL-WORLD CHECKLIST:

### Pure Classical Pilates DOs and DON'Ts

#### DO:

- Obtain proper education and certification (at least 600 to 1,000 apprenticeship hours) through training programs listed in the Pure Classical Pilates Academy (*ClassicalPilates.net*).
- Seek continuing education through lessons and workshops.
- Respect the original values, principles and technique developed by Joseph Pilates.
- Refer students to an appropriate medical specialist if their condition or symptoms warrant a second opinion or treatment.
- Use only traditional Pilates apparatus.
- Promote the values, principles and techniques of Joseph Pilates' traditional method through one or more avenues, such as teaching, writing, speaking, publishing, advertising and organizing workshops.
- Use common sense with regard to safety and teaching.

#### DO NOT:

- Offer single-apparatus certification, including mat certification, nor recommend derivative distortions.
- Significantly alter traditional technique and standard modifications to satisfy misplaced outlets for creativity, or out of boredom or unwarranted student requests.
- Practice or create derivative, hybrid, commercialized Pilates techniques.



## sailing the 7c's

Though Joseph Pilates himself did not define the commonly accepted six principles underlying his method, a majority of today's professionals still embrace them as fundamental to the work: Centering, Concentration, Control, Correctness (Precision), Core Strength, Cadence (Flowing Movement) and my own addition, Cardiovascular Conditioning.

To honor the 7 C's of Pure Classical Pilates in your workout is to honor the method Joseph Pilates created. The tried-and-true arrangement of his traditional technique is a timeless concerto that sounds as good now as it did upon conception.

## other modalities, different benefits

Having made a point for retaining the distinctiveness of Joseph Pilates' traditional system does not negate certain benefits that come from training in another physical discipline. For example, when people have a background in gymnastics, sports or dance, they tend to possess mental and physical skills that facilitate learning traditional Pilates—or a variety of other disciplines. They also can draw from their physical knowledge of coordination, balance, precision, stamina and the ability to translate a teacher's verbal instructions into specific movement.

To the degree one's other movement

techniques do not detract from Pure Classical Pilates technique, they can facilitate the learning of Pilates. Yet movement "styles" gained from other disciplines should remain implied so they do not detract from the classical technique. If outside nuances or movement styles become pronounced or if people simply change Joseph Pilates' traditional technique, the method becomes compromised; it can't provide optimal core stability, flexible strength, alignment, coordination, responsiveness and mental skill that it promises.

Combining conflicting intentions, philosophies and techniques into the traditional system results in an attendant loss of integration, cohesiveness and effectiveness. While it is possible to slow or alter dynamics in the Pure Classical Pilates system to resemble yoga or to insert dance technique to make long aesthetic lines, these independently praiseworthy disciplines should not be incorporated.

## pilates is not physical therapy

The activity of physical therapy relies upon evaluation and treatment of a patient's physical problem or injury, as well as the assessment of dysfunction that can lead to injury in the future. Physical therapy is a discipline of medical treatment, not a form of holistic body conditioning, sport or athletic art form. Yet physical therapy is especially worthwhile in the case of injury or



atrophy, because it incorporates manual techniques and exercises to reestablish normal mobility of joint, muscle strength and flexibility. Additionally, physical therapists instruct, educate and guide their patients to establish or reestablish normal movement patterns that have been lost due to compensatory mechanisms.

## pilates is not yoga

While yoga and traditional Pilates both aim toward developing a healthy connection among body, mind and spirit, the two originate from distinct pedagogical models. The two have distinct descriptive languages as well as divergent goals, intentions, philosophies, methodologies and outcomes. Although we could debate subtleties of the following general differences, it is clear yoga and Pure Classical Pilates are distinct.

Stating the obvious, Pilates is less than 100 years old and yoga is more than 5,000 years old. The physical exercise component (*asana*) is only one of the “eight limbs” of yoga. Traditional Pilates seeks to improve our physical and mental capabilities for survival, strength and preparedness for action; yoga aims toward achieving diving enlightenment and God consciousness.

Pilates encourages self-sufficiency and independence of the individual; yoga emphasizes a guru system of organization and connectedness. Yoga’s goal is to unite the mind, body and spirit; meanwhile, its style and emphasis can vary greatly. Pure Classical Pilates aims to strengthen the mind, body and spirit connection while consistently emphasizing control, precision and concentration. And though a particular exercise may appear the same in both disciplines, looks are often deceiving.

## pilates is not dance

As with yoga and Pilates, there are nuanced similarities between dance and traditional Pilates. Yet they are limited, notably, as regards to the energy impetus and movement qualities.

Dance is a visual art, a physical craft intended for entertainment purposes



and driven by the experience of the viewing public. The shapes and movements exist only in so much as they are pleasing to the eye. The physical conditioning that results from years of dance training is simply a byproduct of the work and by no means the intent. Dance technique has various movement styles with performance as the primary goal.

By comparison, Pure Classical Pilates is intended for the practitioner only. The

is superficial at best. As any dancer can attest, after years of honing their craft, the body is left much worse for the wear. It’s quite the opposite with the traditional Pilates method, with which students gain increasing physical benefit the longer they continue their training.

As we look forward, we should understand that the future of Pure Classical Pilates rests in the hands of loyal tradition-

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technique has its own collection of elemental movements, but the purpose is for body conditioning, general health, as well as skilled applicability in everyday movement or athletic arts. Often times the aim of performance is to explicitly convey a story while producing attractive aesthetic lines. In contrast, Pure Classical Pilates is a nonperforming educational activity through which students learn body conditioning, although it secondarily emphasizes establishing clear aesthetic lines of the body.

Pilates and dance employ similar strategies for goal-setting and improving technique. The dancer strives for a higher leg, a loftier jump and more exquisite pirouettes. But these improvements do little to benefit the dancer’s anatomy. The perfection of such moves

alists who teach the classical method with love and skillfulness. We are the inheritors of Joseph Pilates’ hallowed tradition because we work for it, we preserve it, and we share it with the world. Let us continue to enjoy living the movement as we share the responsibility for carrying Pure Classical Pilates forward to future generations with strength and grace. As Romana says, “If you are true to Pilates, Pilates will be true to you.” ☉

*Joe Pilates was photographed in his Eighth Avenue New York studio by I.C. Rapoport for a Sports Illustrated article in October, 1961. See more of Rapoport’s images (and own your own) by visiting [rapo.com](http://rapo.com).*