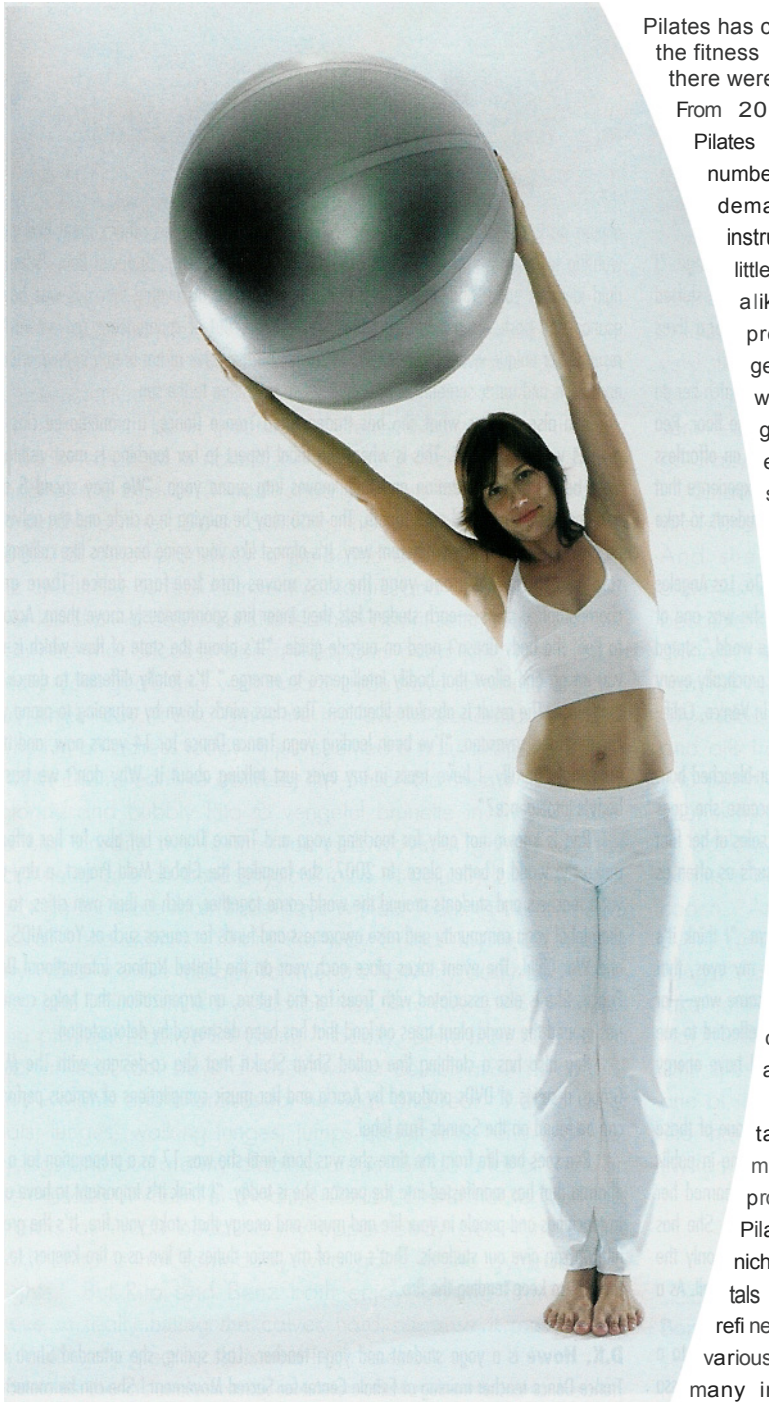


# Hybrids and Niches

## How Pilates has diversified over the years

BY LEIGH CREWS



Pilates has come to be accepted as one of the hot trends in the fitness industry. It's hard to imagine that as late as 1984 there were fewer than 10 Pilates studios in the entire world! From 2000 (when data was first compiled) to 2006, Pilates saw an amazing 500 percent increase in the number of participants attracted to The Method. As demand increased, so did the number of Pilates instructors and the depth of their education. There is little wonder that instructors and program directors alike are now looking at ways to diversify Pilates programs in order to keep current clients from getting bored and to attract new clients, many of whom seem to be searching for more targeted, goal-oriented workouts. Take a look at a group exercise schedule today and instead of seeing a single generic listing for "Pilates" you may see "Pilates for Golfers," "PiYo" or "Prenatal Pilates" among the offerings.

"It is clear that Pilates has matured from an unusual corner market and has entered the mainstream of fitness programs," said Elizabeth Larkam, program director for Balanced Body Pilates. New fitness facilities are now built with space allocated for Pilates reformers -- a sure sign that club owners view Pilates as a safe long-term investment. Moira Merrithew, founder of Stott Pilates®, agrees. "As Pilates has become more mainstream, instructors have looked for ways to set themselves apart in their markets," she said. "Having specialty training in Pilates for Breast Cancer Patients or Pilates for Sports Conditioning allows instructors to remain competitive. Niche markets create a pathway for a career."

Larkam and Merrithew agree that the trend has taken two paths -- hybrid classes and niche markets. Hybrids are two types of exercise programming grafted together, such as yoga and Pilates, to create something like PiYo or Yogolates. A niche market, however, remains true to the fundamentals of one exercise modality, such as Pilates, yet refines the program to accommodate the needs of various niches, or special populations. These niches are many indeed, but can be roughly categorized into

"medical" niches and "sports" niches, Merrithew points out that while there is nothing wrong with fusing two exercise modalities into one program, the instructor needs a vast knowledge of both programs in order to deliver a safe and effective new hybrid.

According to Larkam, when Joseph Pilates passed away in 1967, he left no stipulations about how his work should be carried forward. This left the gate open for the myriad of Pilates innovations and variations we see today. Even the first generation of Pilates instructors -- those who studied under Joseph Pilates himself -- began to interpret his work in their own way.

Program-specific niches in Pilates initially appeared in the rehab arena with James G. Garrick, MD, who was the first orthopedist to bring Pilates into the clinical setting at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital's Sports Medicine Clinic in San Francisco. Dancers had been using Pilates for many years as a way to rehab from dance injuries, so moving into the clinical setting was a logical and natural progression of that path. As other patients with different needs came into the clinic to rehab from various sports injuries, sports-specific niches also began to take root and prosper.

Today the options for specialty training are seemingly endless. Take a look at the Stott Pilates product catalog and you will find DVD titles such as *Pilates for Weight Loss*, *Kid's Pilates*, *Pilates on the Stability Ball* and *Be Kind to Your Spine*, just to mention a few. Given that Joseph Pilates created a finite body of work in his lifetime, it is reasonable to wonder if these varied and contemporary topics remain true to his philosophies. According to Merrithew, it all comes down to the basics. "The basics are about working from the inside out, stabilization and the six principles that Joseph Pilates put into place when creating his method of training. Evolve the client but go back to those basics of centering, concentration, control, precision, breath and flow for each exercise. It's about fluid movement."

Pilates education and product manufacturers are aggressively expanding their market beyond Pilates instructors and are reaching out to personal fitness trainers and group fitness instructors by offering products and educational opportunities targeted to their particular needs. According to Larkam, the new Pilates chairs such as the MVe™, EX0™ and V2Max are excellent examples of cross-over pieces that appeal to personal fitness trainers as well as Pilates instructors. The chairs provide a more effective environment for full weight-bearing exercise than the traditional Pilates reformer, which was designed to be a very good apparatus for partial weight-bearing and nonweight-bearing movements. Cross-over equipment has tremendous appeal to the PFTs who need to include weight-bearing exercise options for their clients. This is especially true for trainers of clients with osteoporosis or osteopenia and other conditions where weight-bearing exercise is an important element of programming. Cross-overs also open up a whole new market for educational workshops, DVDs and consumer workouts utilizing these new pieces of equipment.

In the future, the reformer will be the product of choice for

special populations such as the deconditioned, those suffering from obesity, diabetes, fibromyalgia, chronic pain and metabolic syndrome due to its superiority in partial and nonweight-bearing exercise options. As Larkam pointed out, "Pilates has always been associated with the lean, slender, dancer's body. The trend will be that the Pilates environment will begin to be looked at as a supportive environment where the overweight person can feel comfortable."

So where are these trends leading? According to Larkam and Merrithew, the dual paths of medical and sports conditioning will each continue to grow and evolve. On the medical side, the focus may well move in the direction of rehab from specific surgeries, such as hip and knee replacements. These programs are becoming particularly marketable as the boomers move into their 50s and 60s and want to continue active lifestyles, including an active recovery after surgeries -- many of which are the result of years of overuse.

On the sports side, expect to see even more Pilates programs designed specifically for golfers, tennis players, hikers, soccer players and a wide ranging assortment of other sports and recreational activities, targeting every imaginable active individual from weekend warriors to Olympic athletes. Also increasing in popularity are niche programs that apply Pilates principles to already popular products such as tubing, stability balls and small, lightweight toning balls. "These are basic, fun videos that add variety to mot programs using a reasonably priced product," said Merrithew. Instructors and consumers with or without a Pilates background can find interesting new ways to apply aspects of The Method with the devices and products they already have in their gyms and homes.

Thanks to Joseph Pilates' thoughtful construction of The Method, his founding principles continue to serve professional fitness instructors, clients and consumers, often in ways that no one might have dreamed of even 30 years ago. Certainly, Pilates has proven to be a program with legs. **AF**

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