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long live the legacy

pilates pros like Colleen Glenn are preserving the master's integrity for future generations

BY REGINA JOSEPH

Maintaining the integrity and furthering the beliefs of Joseph Pilates is a challenge for top companies that take the Pilates industry seriously. Colleen Glenn, senior development director and master trainer for Peak Pilates, wrestles with that responsibility daily.

Today, if you want to purchase high-quality Pilates equipment, finding a reputable manufacturer is easy. But less than 50 years ago, you had to contact Joseph Pilates himself. The method's founder was as much an inventor and craftsman as he was a fitness guru, and he personally designed and built all the program's exercise equipment.

But after Joe's death in 1967, a new manufacturer had to be found. His principle disciple, Romana Kryzanowska, was entrusted with running Pilates' studio, so she was the one who decided that his equipment would be made by Gratz Industries in New York City. ▶



PHOTOGRAPH BY ARTUR COHEN

Colleen set out to design a holistic education program for Peak, which, in her view, would eliminate the elitist edge that is sometimes mistakenly associated with Pilates. The days of rigidly disciplined balletomanes dominating the world of Pilates is over, a factor that Peak is promoting in the company's sexy new equipment line aimed at the masses, with a keen eye focused on the untapped male market.

In 2004, Peak took all-in-one Pilates equipment to a new level with the Peak Pilates System Deluxe (PPS), a sleek, portable Reformer/ Tower apparatus. Now the company is upping the ante with the introduction of the MVe, a stackable modified version of the Wunda Chair. With these slickly designed apparatuses, Colleen aims to merge her educational impetus with the technical aspects of the business.

"The PPS was designed for the health-club market, which motivated us to go further," she says. "We worked with the technical development team to craft a biomechanically exact education program with an emphasis on cueing, direct imaging, transitions—all the things that make the classical system work. Because the MVe is so portable, we can offer another way to reach people we couldn't reach before."

Colleen knows that the biggest growth opportunities continue to be in the fitness arena but also believes that the next arena will be in smaller places such as "community centers, corner health clubs, that sort of more intimate, local space," she says. She acknowledges that the technological opportunities—podcasts, etc.—remain largely underutilized, especially when

it comes to her business in long-distance learning.

TEACHER TRAINING

How do you get to the prospective teacher in Cyprus who wants to be certified but can't get to America?" asks Colleen. "As a teacher, I think when it comes to information, the more there is, the better. There aren't enough teachers to keep up with the demand in Pilates. So if we expect to develop quality teachers, we have to get quality teaching to the people out there who need it.

Technology can help us in that respect."

In the meantime, how does this master teacher advise potential practitioners seeking quality teachers in their area? "Always ask a teacher about their training," she suggests. "First, find out if they learned the classical system and find out how long they spent in training. They should have completed a minimum of 400 hours. I would also ask if they have experience with other modalities or somatics, such as massage, dance or other types of bodywork. Second, find out what their teaching philosophy is. What is their goal? Why is the instructor teaching Pilates? If they got into it because it was a better job than waitressing, maybe you need to reconsider that person as a teacher. There is a lot of good Pilates and a lot of bad Pilates out there. In the end, you get what you pay for."



Peak Pilates System (PPS) Home Reformer

Contributing editor Regina Joseph is a journalist and a certified Pilates instructor (with a studio in downtown Manhattan, Super Pilates; super-pilates.com). Her book, 'The Brazilian Bikini Body,' will be published by St. Martins Press in 2007.