

# you need schoolin'

there's always room to learn more with pilates

BY KATE ROPE



education

**T**alk to any master Pilates instructor about the importance of continuing education and you might think you were talking to a student rather than to an old pro. Even teachers with decades of experience, such as Jillian Hessel, recall moments that changed the way they practice and teach.

The red-haired owner of Jillian Hessel Pilates in Los Angeles has been teaching for 20 years when she took her first class with first-generation teacher Ron Fletcher. “We stood for 20 minutes and talked about standing,” she recalls. “It was striking. Even

though we were static on the outside, there was so much activity inside. What that taught me more than anything else is that Pilates is about movement and not standing still.”

Joe Pilates honed his method over 80 years, and he meant it to be a lifelong learning process for everyone, so that at any level—beginner, apprentice, instructor—you can deepen your practice by learning more. “I was at a PMA conference in 2005,” recounts Arlene Bass, founder of Body Evolve Pilates Studios in Chicago, “and Kathy Grant and Lolita San

Miguel were sitting and *listening*. That was a pivotal point for me, and I remember thinking, *If our elders, who have been doing this for 50-plus years, are in a position to sit in and learn, then all of us, at every stage, have potential for growth.*”

But with courses, conferences, studios and training programs mushrooming up across the country and around the world, it's hard to know where to start. We talked to the teachers who train other teachers to create this guide to taking *your* next step, whether you took your first mat class yesterday or studied under the man himself.

## best education resources for students

"The first thing that interested students can do to learn more about Pilates is to start taking regular classes with a certified instructor," says Stefania Della Pia, master instructor trainer and program director of education at STOTT PILATES® in Toronto. Whether it's a group or private setting, this will improve their fitness level and help them learn from a highly trained, knowledgeable instructor.

Once you feel grounded in your practice, you can take simple steps to deepen it, such as moving from a group class to privates with the same instructor and asking for specific things to practice. "If you work with an instructor one-on-one, they can help you change everything you are doing in a mat class," notes Bass. "You look the same, but internally you're working much harder." A word of caution: You should be fully versed in one element before moving on to the next. "You should probably do well over 100 matwork sessions before you introduce props and accessories," says Rael Isacowitz, founder and director of Body Art Science

International (BASI) Pilates in Southern California.

Brent Anderson, president of Polestar Pilates, recommends that students begin at the very beginning, with Joe Pilates' two books, *Your Health: A Corrective System of Exercising That Revolutionizes the Entire Field of Physical Education*, and *Pilates' Return to Life through Contrology*. (There are additional contemporary works that illuminate the system, notably Isacowitz's *Pilates*, Peter Fiasca's *Discovering Pure Classical Pilates*, Alycea Ungaro's *Pilates: Bodies in Motion* and Brooke Siler's *The Pilates Body*.)

"At this early stage, studying technical manuals, reading fitness and industry-specific magazines, and watching DVDs are three other great ways to continue learning," adds Della Pia. "While technical manuals are great for an anatomy review or to detail a challenging workout, magazines will give readers the scoop, so to speak, on the latest trends and help to develop their fitness career. Both professional and at-home DVDs will help create well-rounded programs while

giving great cueing advice."

Of course, professionals need to take continuing-ed courses, but sometimes the choices can be overwhelming. So rather than throw darts at a board, "Create an annual plan," advises Zoey Trap, a master-level trainer for Peak Pilates and director of its MVe program. "First, identify what it is you want to learn. Think about clients you feel at a loss to deal with, ones you may have referred out or would like to appeal to. Search for CECs at conventions to get a taste of the presenters' knowledge and style, but know that due to the limitations of shorter time blocks at conventions, you often do not get to go as in-depth on a topic as you would at a hosted CEC. To find local CEC courses, search the web, contact major educational companies and/or presenters you have met and enjoyed. Get on the mailing list of area Pilates studios that host educational events, or host something at your own studio."

These days there are also plenty of ways to expand your educational horizons without ever leaving home. Online offerings are expanding daily, and the category is poised to explode, Anderson adds. (A Google search turns up pages of online courses.) As with all Pilates education, it's important to go with established names and organizations. Anderson and Polestar are currently working on a comprehensive online teaching program, one of many in the pipeline. Isacowitz has already released *Pilates Interactive*, which, though geared toward professionals, can also benefit the student. Phi Pilates and Power Pilates also offer reputable continuing-education courses online.

When you're ready to make an even bigger commitment, "Conferences are your biggest bang for your buck," says Anderson. "Whether you're doing [Balanced Body's] Pilates on Tour, PMA or a Polestar Pilates conference, you pay for one weekend and get introduced to six or 10 people you may want to work with." The intense focus of these conferences also can help take your practice to the next level.

## how to find good teachers

Master instructors such as Jillian Hessel recommend looking for teachers with "at least a dozen years in the profession." Siri Galliano agrees: "Joe Pilates' studio in New York City was open for 40 years, and teachers were not allowed to teach until they had been practicing for 10 years."

"With the Internet, it's easier than ever now to research instructors," says Hessel. "Everyone has a website with their philosophy, but the best way to find someone is still word of mouth." She recommends looking for a ne-student package that gives you a good amount of time (an hour and a half, say) with the instructor, so you have time to explain your goals and to get a feel for the teacher.

STOTT PILATES' online Instructor Finder can help you locate a well-qualified instructor in your area. Look for an "instructor who keeps you engaged not just physically but psychologically and continues to bring your awareness to parts or places of your body that you haven't thought about before," says Bass.

"The greatest teachers are the ones that listen to their clients and help them achieve a level that is meaningful to them," says Brent Anderson. He recommends investigating not just how full a teacher's classes are, but what their retention rate is. Plenty of people can attract new students, he argues, but it takes a gifted teacher to keep them.

## best education resources for apprentices

Apprenticeship programs take many different forms—from straight assistant teaching in a studio for a required number of hours to comprehensive programs, such as that offered by Romana's Pilates, Peak Pilates and Power Pilates, which combine apprenticeship with observation, hands-on learning and mentoring. (For a guide to the most established U.S. certification programs, see box on page 114).

Take the time to pick an apprenticeship program that will not only meet your needs practically, but one that will infuse you with enthusiasm for and commitment to teaching. "I always tell people to meet the program director," says Hessel. "If it isn't somebody you adore, who makes you want to be a sponge and learn from him or her, keep shopping."

Being an apprentice is not just about completing a set number of hours. It's a vital time to discover where your passions lie and where you want to go as an instructor. That's when workshops play an important role and why you should start attending them before you sign up for a full-fledged certification program. Larger conferences, such as Pilates on Tour and Body Mind Spirit, serve as a sampler for teachers in training, observes Hessel. "You can get a taste for what and whom you like before you spend thousands of dollars on certification courses." To find workshops in your area, ask at local Pilates studios or check out our monthly e-newsletter. (Not registered? Sign up free at [pilatesstyle.com](http://pilatesstyle.com).)

## best education resources for instructors

The top master instructors of Pilates live by the motto "The more you know, the more you realize you don't know." As they work with diverse student groups and come to know instructors around the globe, they keep up-to-date on trends, discover new teaching techniques and reinvigorate their passion for the practice. "I have been teaching for 30 years and still consider

## how to fund your education

There is no doubt that the work of Pilates requires real commitment, and not just of time but of resources. The cost of certification courses, workshops and private classes adds up quickly. Here are a few ideas to keep it affordable.

"You may be able to barter office time for training sessions," suggests Arlene Bass. "Our front-desk person for eight years was a client who had two sessions a week in exchange for 12 hours of desk work." Other money-saving options include teaching instructors with your apprentice hours (that way, you will get an education as you fulfill your apprenticeship requirements), looking for full or partial scholarships such as those

offered by BASI Pilates and Romana's Pilates, getting a job in the health-care industry to fund your Pilates education while you learn more about health and wellness, and looking for programs such as Pilates for Dancers or Balanced Body University's pay-as-you-go module training.

Stott Pilates' Stefania Della Pia offers three more resources for those planning on a career in the practice. Spouses of Army recruits may be eligible for funding from the U.S. Army if the spouse has been deployed; dancers can apply for grants from Career Transition for Dancers ([careertransition.org](http://careertransition.org)), and any American citizen may benefit from government grants or loans through the stimulus package ([recovery.gov](http://recovery.gov)).

myself a student of the method," says Kathy Corey, founder of Kathy Corey Pilates. "Pilates is a lifelong process that keeps our work interesting and alive."

As Nora St. John, director of educational programming for Balanced Body, puts it, "For Pilates instructors, nothing is more critical than continuing education. It keeps our programs fresh and interesting, which is vital for retaining and recruiting clients. And, maybe just as important, it can rejuvenate and revitalize our own Pilates journey. That's why we launched Balanced Body University [BBU] in 2004 with Pilates on Tour, our continuing-education conferences, which will enjoy its largest-ever schedule in 2010. We've also created Passing the Torch, a 12- to 18-month mentorship program with a master teacher that was inspired by Lolita San Miguel to help shape the next generation of leaders in the Pilates community. It was designed for Pilates instructors who have been teaching for many years and long for a deepening of their work."

Keeping pace with changes in the industry, including new equipment trends, is another goal of

continuing education. "A great instructor without current credentials and skills can fall behind the pack if he or she doesn't learn and practice the new equipment repertoire," says Della Pia. She advises instructors to inquire about training and workshop opportunities on any new piece of equipment. Her favorite continuing-ed workshops for instructors include FAMI Workshop: Functional Anatomy for Movement & Injuries (led by husband and wife duo Matt McCulloch and Carrie McCulloch, MD), Tom Myers' Anatomy Trains and Stott Pilates' Athletic Conditioning Series.

Conferences are also great, because you don't stop learning once they're over, Bass points out. "If you attend even one conference every two years, it will usually fulfill most of your continuing-ed credits for whatever organization you're a part of and will introduce you to a half dozen presenters. Then you can follow up with whoever best suits your way of teaching, because a lot of those people do ongoing continuing education."

Don't resist thinking beyond Pilates, adds Siri Dharma Galliano, founder of Live Art Pilates in Los

Angeles. “Take lessons in something you have never done. Recently I started taking private ice-skating lessons. It humbles me to feel how a beginner feels—embarrassed, uncoordinated, trying so hard to get control and please the teacher and find the time to practice.” Galliano further recommends volunteering with an entirely different student population. Working with an undisci-

plined, rowdy group of kids in juvenile hall forced her to grow as a teacher. “I had to develop a sense of humor and a sense of authority and find new ways within me, like storytelling and anecdotes, to get the results I was looking for.”

From attending continuing-ed programs and conferences to participating in blogs and online symposiums to conducting research

and publishing papers, there is no end to the avenues for advanced teacher education. “Nothing irks me more than hearing someone say they have nothing more to learn,” says Isacowitz. On the contrary, he says, “The more experienced you are, the more equipped you are to take on more information.” ☺

**Kate Rope is a freelance health writer who lives in Brooklyn, NY.**

## find the perfect pilates program for you

*Education choices abound, but here's some get-you-started information about the top organizations. Read more comprehensive info by accessing last year's Resource Guide: Education article on our web site, pilatesstyle.com.*

### Balanced Body University/ Pilates on Tour

Sacramento, CA • (800) 745-2837  
pilates.com • pilatesontour.com

**history:** Affiliated with Balanced Body equipment. Founded in 2003 by Balanced Body and Nora St. John from Turning Point Studios in Walnut Creek, CA. **school strength:** Emphasis on program diversity and flexibility that allows students to work at their own pace.

### Body Arts and Sciences International (BASI)

Costa Mesa, CA • (949) 574-1343  
basipilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1989 by Rael Isacowitz, who studied with Eve Gentry and has a master's degree in dance studies.

**school strength:** Includes Joseph Pilates' entire body of work. Emphasizes the art, science and mental components of why and how the body moves.

### Core Dynamics Pilates

Santa Fe, NM • (505) 988-5076  
coredynamicspilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1996 by dancer and choreographer Michele Larsson, who taught with Eve Gentry for 10 years.

**school strength:** Boutique program with small classes, personal attention and an emphasis on mentorship that helps students deal with individual clients.

### Embody Pilates

New York, NY • (212) 247-9603  
rolates.com

**history:** Founded by Dixie Shulman and Roberta Kirschenbaum, both trained by first- and second-generation teachers. More than 20 years teaching experience and strong

dance backgrounds.

**school strength:** Rooted in the classical approach to Pilates while embracing its evolution, the school emphasizes seeing the body clearly in front of you. Notable guest masters: Irene Dowd, Jillian Hessel, Jennifer Stacey and Madeline Black.

### Long Beach Dance Conditioning

Long Beach, CA • (310) 821-7200  
pilatesinspiration.com

**history:** Founded in 1991 by Marie-José Blom-Lawrence, a former ballet dancer who used to teach anatomy/kinesiology and physiology at Loyola Marymount University. Influenced by English Pilates master Alan Herdman. **school strength:** Emphasis on biomechanical aspects of Pilates, with tips for running a business.

### Peak Pilates

Boulder, CO • (800) 925-3674  
peakpilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1996 as a Pilates equipment company by Julie Lobdell. Instructor education classes began in 2002.

**school strength:** Offers everything from mat to comprehensive certification, allowing students to progress in a modular format.

### The Pilates Center

Boulder, CO • (303) 494-3400  
thepilatescenter.com

**history:** Founded in 1990 by sisters Amy Taylor Alpers and Rachel Taylor Segel; both trained in ballet and studied with Romana Kryzanowska.

**school strength:** Called the Harvard of Pilates teacher programs. Emphasizes “teaching the art of teaching,” with a focus on maintaining health through Joseph Pilates' original program.

### PhysicalMind Institute

New York, NY • (800) 505-1990  
themethodpilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1991 in Santa Fe by Joan Breitbart, Michele Larsson and Eve Gentry, whose Pilates studio opened in 1968.

**school strength:** Teaches a method to

analyze any movement/exercise. Helps teachers “see” body types. Students learn about all apparatus brands, so they can teach anywhere. Clinical adviser Marika Molnar, PT, helps the company develop teaching techniques.

### The Pilates Academy International

New York, NY • (212) 687-3787  
pilatesacademyinternational.com

**history:** Founded in 2006 to bridge the gap between academic Pilates, practical Pilates and the real world wanting to benefit from Pilates.

**school strength:** Students learn the different ways people acquire movement skills and process information and cues, in addition to understanding anatomy, biomechanics and posture.

### Polestar Pilates

Coral Gables, FL • (800) 387-3651  
polestarpilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1992 by Brent Anderson, a physiotherapist and orthopedic-certified specialist.

**school strength:** Focuses on anatomy, physiology, biomechanics and motor control and integrates research in orthopedics, sports medicine and movement science. Flexible, interactive, competency-based curriculum.

### Power Pilates

New York, NY • (212) 627-5852  
powerpilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1989 by chiropractor Howard Sichel. Began teacher-certification programs in 1997.

**school strength:** A classical, systematic and integrative approach to Pilates that simplifies teaching for the instructor and clarifies communication for the client.

### Romana's Pilates

(affiliated with True Pilates NY)

New York, NY • (212) 765-2166  
romanaspilates.com

**history:** Romana Kryzanowska trained with Joseph Pilates and has been teaching Pilates for nearly six decades. Her daughter, Sari Mejia Santo—also trained by Pilates—and

granddaughter, Dari Pace, work with her.

**school strength:** Time-tested program. Romana is believed to have certified more instructors than anyone else. Personal attention, often from Romana and Sari.

### The Ron Fletcher Company

Tucson, AZ • (888) 732-8884  
fletcherpilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1971 by Elder Ron Fletcher, a choreographer and dancer with the Martha Graham Company who trained with Joseph Pilates; began teacher certification in 1983.

**school strength:** Preserves the documented work of Joseph Pilates with Fletcher's emphasis on choreography in a synchronistic manner and on audible breathing and its integration with movement.

### STOTT PILATES®

Toronto, Ontario,  
Canada • (800) 910-0001  
stottpilates.com

**history:** Founded in 1988 by Lindsay G. Merrithew and Moira Merrithew, the company provides students with the depth of knowledge and practical programming options needed to teach effective group or personal training programs.

**school strength:** All courses are taught by certified instructor trainers at corporate training centers around the world. Empowers students to motivate, challenge and retain clients long-term.

### United States Pilates Association, LLC®

Ft Lauderdale, FL • (888) 484-USPA  
pilatesri.com

**history:** The New York Pilates Studio® Teacher Certification Program is the oldest Pilates certification program and the only one to teach Authentic Pilates †m globally.

**school strength:** Comprehensive program (600 hours minimum) offering a Personalized Bridge Program for certified teachers electing to become recognized as Authentic Pilates (tm) instructors.