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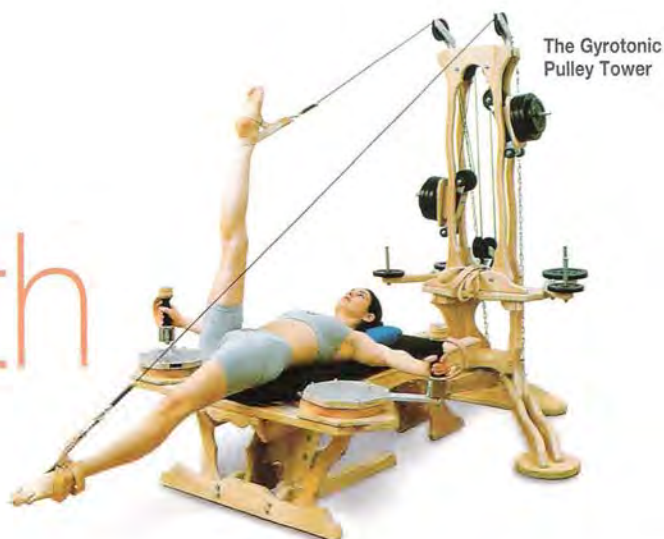
BY LEQA FRANKLIN

Like Pilates, Gyrokinesis is a relatively new form of physical fitness that emphasizes the mind-body connection. And while some of its movements and breathing patterns may seem similar to Pilates, each system evolved independently, drawing from

very different sets of influences.

Gyrokinesis, the matwork developed in the 1970s by Juliu Horvath, a Romanian-born dancer, and Gyrotonic, his work on weighted machines, are both based on Horvath's method of working the body

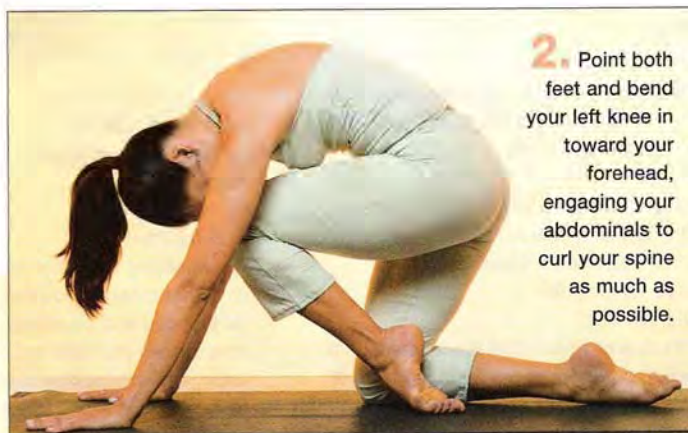
in the path of its natural energy flow and using the breath to open restricted areas of the body. It's a three-dimensional, circular system that is based on his experience with yoga, swimming, tai chi and dance. All of the movements are designed to open



The Gyrotonic Pulley Tower

Slow Cat Extensions

1. Start on your hands and knees with your palms on the ground below the shoulders, the knees on the ground below your hips and your feet flexed. Keep your spine neutral (there will be a slight curve in your lower back) and lift your chin so your face points forward. (Not pictured.)



2. Point both feet and bend your left knee in toward your forehead, engaging your abdominals to curl your spine as much as possible.

3. Straighten and extend your left leg to the back, toes skimming the mat, as you lengthen and arch your spine and flex your right foot.



TOP IMAGE PROVIDED BY BALANCED BODY; WORKOUT PHOTOGRAPHY BY EDUARDO PATINCO; MODEL: CRISTIANE SANTOS

up the joints, tendons, muscles and ligaments to a greater degree of flexibility and strength.

Until recently, the audience for these movement methods was largely made up of dancers, but today Gyrokinesis and Gyrotonic are gaining popularity in the general public. Pilates instructors especially are becoming interested in learning and teaching this method, and studios that offer both are becoming more and more common.

For many Pilates fans, Gyrotonic feels like the next step in movement evolution. Both focus on strengthening the center, called the "powerhouse" or "core" in Pilates and the "seed

center" in Gyrotonic, but most Pilates movements are linear, working within just one plane, while Gyrotonic adds twisting and spiraling movements. A deeper use of the breath is also emphasized in Gyrotonic, where breathing evolves into a tool meant to release blockages in the body, stimulate the nervous system and boost overall stamina.

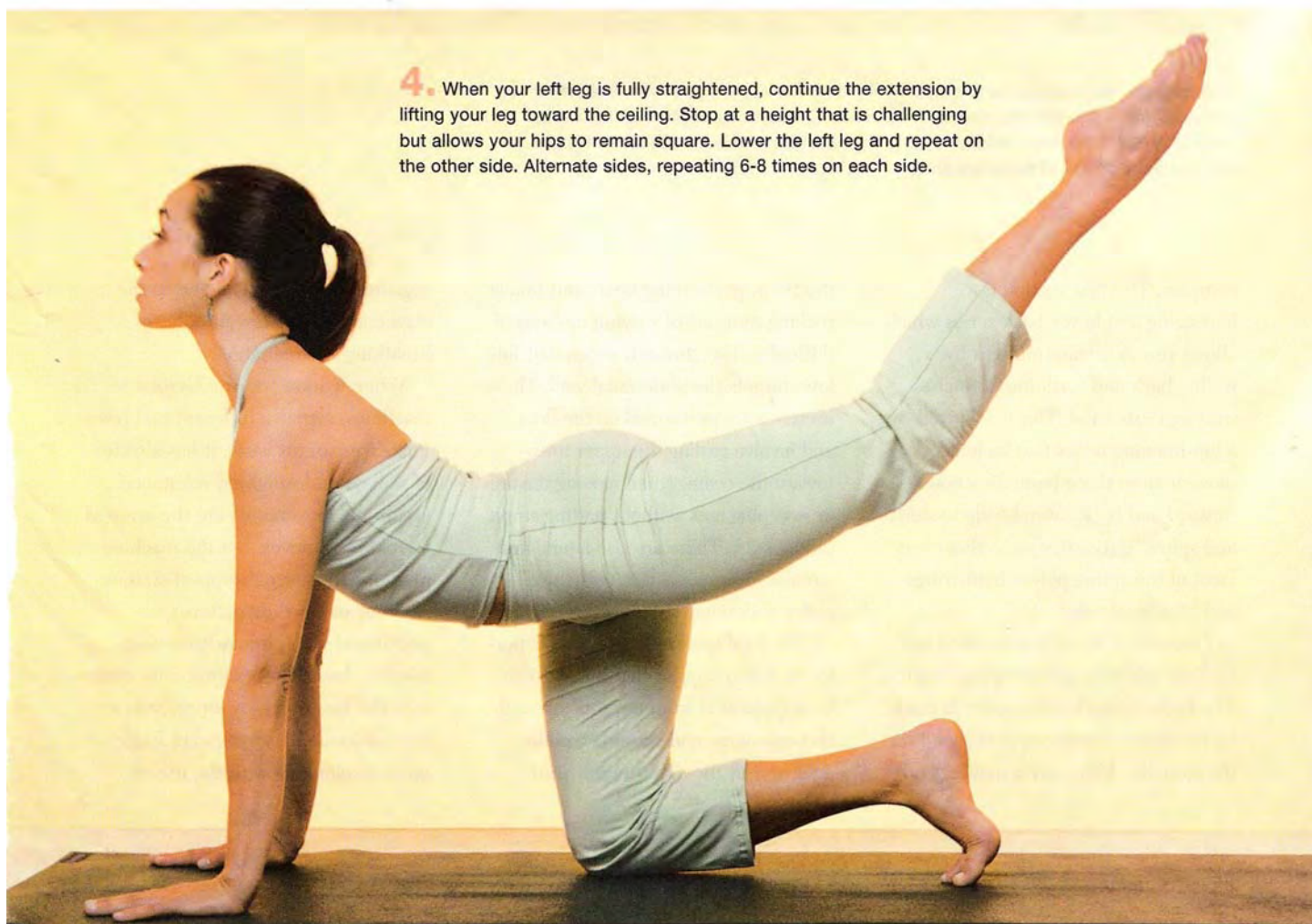
One of the most notable differences between Pilates and Gyrotonic is that Juliu Horvath is still alive, while Joseph Pilates passed away in 1967. Because of this, there is only one codified Gyrotonic Expansion System being taught today, though it

is often updated as Horvath, now in his 60s, continues to work.

What to Expect

Typically, the first 20 minutes of a Gyrokinesis class consists of a warm-up that releases tight muscles using self-massage, rhythmical rocking, twisting and spiraling movements, and exhalation-focused breathing techniques designed to clear the body of toxic and stagnant energies. These movements are performed on a stool or chair, which allows the hips and spine to move freely.

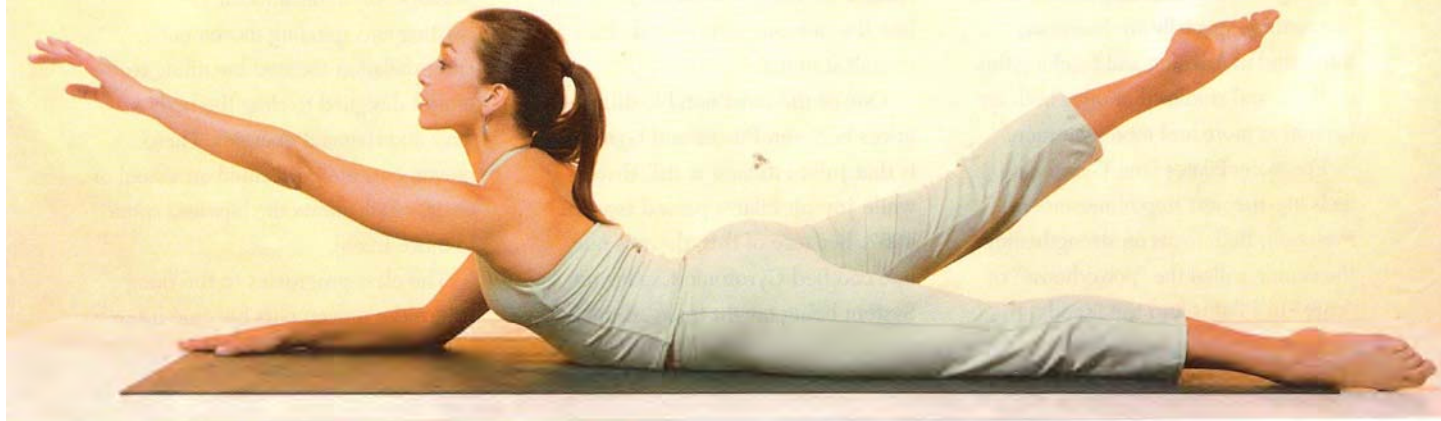
The class progresses to the floor, where the movements become more



4. When your left leg is fully straightened, continue the extension by lifting your leg toward the ceiling. Stop at a height that is challenging but allows your hips to remain square. Lower the left leg and repeat on the other side. Alternate sides, repeating 6-8 times on each side.

Reverse Reaches

1. Lie face down with your hands and feet extended and reaching in opposition.



2. Engage your abdominals to support your lower back. Look up toward the ceiling as you slowly raise your left arm and right leg, reaching away in opposite directions. Your chest may lift off the floor. Hold for 3 seconds, then lower to starting position. Repeat on the other side. Do 10 complete sets.

complex. The first section is a hamstring and lower-back series which allows you to release muscles by rolling back and forth into stretches with legs extended. This is followed by a hip-opening series that includes movement in three basic directions—forward and back, lateral (side to side) and spiraling (twisting)—so that every facet of the spine, pelvis, hamstrings and hips is released.

Once the body is fully opened and flexible, real strengthening can begin. The back-strengthening series is made up of rigorous exercises performed on the stomach, lifting arms and legs off

the floor, performing beats and finally rocking motions of varying degrees of difficulty. The stomach series that follows targets the abdominal wall. These exercises are performed on the floor and involve curling the upper torso toward the ceiling, then moving the legs in sweeping arcs, without putting strain on the back. There are also lateral and circular movements that target the entire abdominal structure.

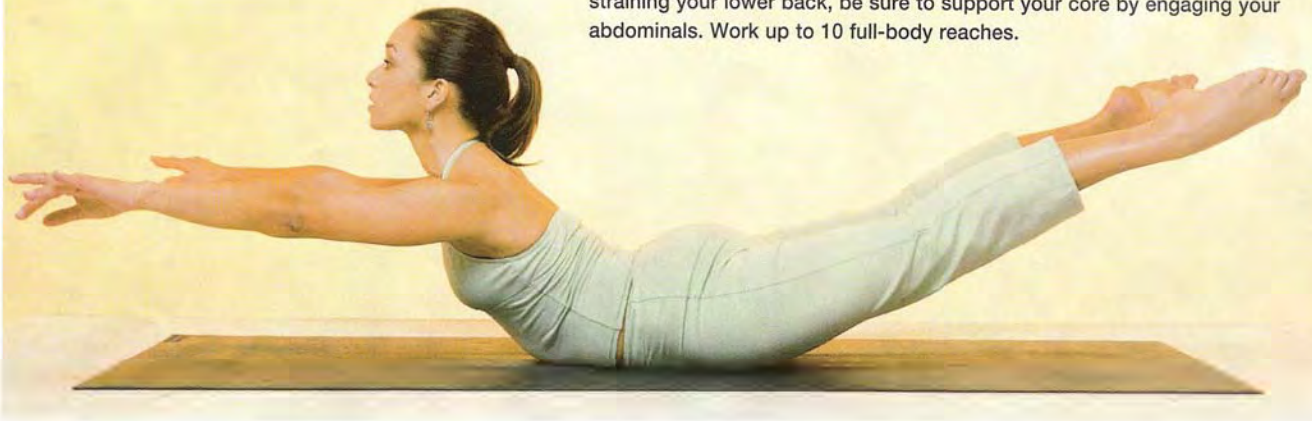
The final section of the class is performed standing, so that balance can be approached from internal strength and calmness, and stamina can be achieved by moving through your

regained flexibility. The end of the class consists of a few minutes of breathing or meditation.

When working on the Gyrotonic machines, expect a different feel from Pilates apparatus work: it has a series of pulleys and weighted resistance. Gyrotonic movements are the same as Gyrokinesis moves, but the machine provides an external support system. Arching and curling patterns are performed with circularly moving handles, hamstring exercises are done with the feet in straps for resistance, core abdominal exercises are made more challenging with the use of

Advanced Reverse Reaches


As your strength increases, try raising both arms and both legs off the ground at the same time, holding the position for three seconds. To avoid straining your lower back, be sure to support your core by engaging your abdominals. Work up to 10 full-body reaches.



pulleys, and opening and releasing the chest is done with a back support. Mat and machine work can be practiced together or separately within a single session.

Gyrotonic and Gyrokinesis are both systems evolved from Juliu Horvath's

theories, and the same principles of breath, fluid movement, lengthening and moving from one's core. While the look and feel of Pilates differ somewhat from Gyrotonic, the philosophies are the same in principle—to lead the body to its greatest potential in strength,

flexibility and overall health, creating a body in balance. 

Leda Franklin began training in the Gyrotonic Expansion System in 1985. She owns Studio Riverside in New York City.