



WHAT IS REFORMER PILATES? WHAT IS A PILATES STUDIO?

Pilates is a holistic exercise system designed to elongate, strengthen and restore the body to balance; so much more than just building a 'strong core' or 'perfect posture'. Exercises involve the whole body and are performed on spring-assisted apparatus or a mat sometimes utilising small equipment.

I've been teaching Pilates for over 25 years and practicing it for more than 30. When I trained with Alan Herdman in 1995 there was only one kind of Pilates and that took place in a Pilates Studio.

Soon after Pilates sprung up in popularity and in order for gyms to participate in the boom, the 'mat work' element of a Pilates studio session was extracted and 'mat work Pilates' was born. I remember having to help people understand the difference between mat work Pilates and a Pilates Studio.

Times have changed again, this time it's Reformer Pilates that's all the rage. I now find it necessary to help people distinguish between Reformer Pilates and a Pilates studio.

If you go out and order a roast dinner what do you expect to get? Meat, roast potatoes, vegetables and hopefully even gravy, yorkshire puddings and stuffing, right? Well, a proper Pilates class should comprise of a mixture of exercises performed on the mat as well as on the Reformer and Cadillac and if you're lucky also the barrel and Wunda chair.

So Reformer Pilates is a bit like just having roast potatoes . . . it's a component of Pilates but not the real deal.

That's fine, but we need to be clear what we are getting in order to meet expectations.

Another big difference is that in a Pilates Studio, exercises are tailored to the client's needs. The exercises given to a client are not necessarily defined by age, but more according to their physical capabilities, taking into consideration injury, posture and achievable goals. The aim is to bring balance to the mind and body whilst stretching and lengthening muscles to improve posture thereby restoring functional movement patterns. So a 'mature' or 'senior' reformer Pilates session isn't always going to be right. There is no one-size-fits-all in a Pilates Studio.

WHAT IS A PILATES STUDIO

A Pilates Studio, as started by Joseph Pilates in New York in 1926, houses the equipment designed by him. The Reformer, Cadillac, Barrel and Wunda Chair.

The equipment has two purposes. Firstly it can assist the body, giving support after injury, helping to re-awaken lost neurological pathways and build strength and balance in a controlled environment. Secondly it can challenge the body by gradually removing the support, lightening springs or creating unstable surfaces. The equipment provides the teacher with the opportunity to create exercises that help to re balance asymmetries in the body. After all its these imbalances that when left to grow can potentially cause injury and discomfort.

Each client will receive a postural assessment to work out which exercises will most benefit the individual. A thorough medical history will also take place to ensure that the exercises chosen are suitable.

Even If there is more than one person present in the class, each client will be instructed in their own individual workout under the careful guidance of the instructor. Each session is designed to be motivating and challenging but is always client focused.

WHAT IS A REFORMER?

A Reformer is just one of the specialised pieces of Pilates equipment you will find in a Pilates Studio. All sorts of exercises can be performed on the Reformer. It can be used to assist a client who needs to re-train muscles, but also to challenge those ready for it. In a Studio a client will often be familiar with the Pilates principles having been taught these on a mat first. Otherwise a warm up will take place to prepare the muscles we are going to use on the Reformer.

HOW LONG DOES A STUDIO (COMPREHENSIVE) PILATES TEACHER TRAIN FOR?

In order to be able to learn the Pilates repertoire, utilizing the mat as well as all the Studio equipment, learn about modifying exercises for remedial purposes, during pregnancy or post-operative, a teacher will usually train for a min of 18 months. They must also take part in an Anatomy and Physiology course and first aid too. Not all Pilates exercises are suitable for everyone and so they must learn about contraindications and be able to adapt exercises to help everyone. They will also learn about how to set up and use all pieces of equipment safely. Many trainings take place in a working studio for first hand experience

HOW LONG DOES A REFORMER PILATES TEACHER TRAIN FOR?

Well that's partly my point . . . amongst well known reputable Pilates training centres there is no Reformer Pilates course. It may be available as a module but this will usually follow a mat work course. Originally the only way to train was as an apprentice in a Pilates Studio where you learnt everything, on everything, for everyone. This is what a 'comprehensive' Pilates Studio teacher is. Unfortunately many Reformer Pilates classes are being led by personal trainers who have taken a weekend course in Pilates. I'm sure they are more than competent but my question is, is it Pilates?

IS THE REFORMER BEING USED AS A DIFFERENT PIECE OF 'GYM EQUIPMENT'?

One of the first centres I know to have introduced Reformer Pilates to the UK was Ten Pilates. They provide in-house training for their teachers and eventually recognised that whilst they were using a piece of Pilates equipment, using Pilates principles and teaching some Pilates exercises, they were also designing their own workouts, mainly focused on building strength and power. They therefore changed their brand name to Ten Health and Fitness, thereby removing themselves somewhat from misleading people.

20 years ago I struggled to get Physiotherapists, Osteopaths and Chiropractors to recommend Pilates. Now it's being recommended to everyone but are the public educated into how to find true Pilates? For most of these people a Reformer Pilates class will not resolve their issues and may even result in injury.

If you are looking for a 'power' workout, to build strength, workout with your friends, have a change to the gym, Reformer Pilates may well be for you. However, let's not mistake it for the original Pilates method that can be found in a Pilates Studio.

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