

Classic Pilates

Keeping the Method as Joseph Pilates Intended

By Nando Garcia

In recent years, Classical Pilates has undergone a worrying transformation: it has gone from a demanding training method, based on student effort and discipline, to becoming a more diluted practice tailored to the comfort of the modern practitioner. This change has not only reduced the intensity of physical work, but has devalued the true purpose of the method: self-discovery through personal effort.

From Discipline to Conformity

Joseph Pilates designed his method as a demanding system that required the student to complete surrender. It was not about passively receiving a series of exercises, but about understanding movement, connecting body and mind and taking responsibility for the physical development itself. The teacher was neither an animator nor a facilitator of comfortable experiences, but a guide who directed the way, leaving in the hands of the student the will and commitment to progress.

Today, however, the teaching model has dramatically changed. Many students arrive looking for an effortless experience, an activity that requires no concentration or sacrifice, where they are given everything done. Pilates has become a “service”, rather than a learning in which the practitioner must be actively involved.

The Loss of Respect for Method and Instructor

This evolution is not exclusive to Pilates. In disciplines with a strong tradition, such as martial arts, a similar phenomenon has been experienced. In the past, the student respected the dojo, the teaching and the teacher. He trained rigorously and understood that improvement depended on one’s own effort. The figure of the sensei was not that of a complacent instructor, but that of a teacher who guided, but who did not gift achievements.

Today, the respect for teaching has decreased. Many learners arrive without a deep learning mindset and instead seek immediate results with as little effort as possible. They want to learn techniques without going through discipline, without accepting repetition and without respecting the process. In Pilates, the same thing happens: instead of focusing on control, precision and breath, they look for “easy”, “fun” or “relaxing” sessions, leaving aside the essence of the method.

A Diluted Method: Adaptations That Remain Valuable

To accommodate the demands of new students, many studies have reduced the intensity of classical Pilates. Exercises have been softened, physical challenges have been eliminated and more “accessible” versions have been opted for that, far from motivating the student, deprive him of the opportunity to exceed his own limits.

- Comfort is prioritized over improvement.
- Advanced exercises are eliminated for fear of the student “getting frustrated”.
- The technical requirement in favour of “free movement” is reduced.
- There is more emphasis on the customer experience than actual teaching.

The result is that many students never get to experience the real benefits of the method. They don’t develop the control, strength, or mental discipline that Pilates can offer because they have never been required enough to achieve it.

Recovering the Essence of Pilates

If we want to preserve the authenticity of the method, we must recover the demand, discipline and respect for teaching. Pilates is not a recreational activity; it’s a deep workout that requires attention, commitment, and personal effort. The teacher must return to his original role: not to give everything done, but to lead the way without depriving the student of responsibility.

How to make it happen?

- Return to the classic structure of the method, without removing its intensity.
- Require the student to take an active role in their learning.
- Reinforce discipline and concentration in class.
- Regain respect for teaching, avoiding unnecessary concessions.
- Encourage perseverance and effort as core values.

Ultimately, Classical Pilates doesn’t need to be reinvented, but revalued. Students must understand that it’s not about receiving, it’s about working. Only when we recover the essence of the method can we return it’s true meaning and help each practitioner find their own path through the effort.