

# My Career

AUGUST 15 2001

## DREAM JOB PILATES TEACHER

# Flexible approach



Bend and stretch: Instructor Alan Menezes uses Pilates to help people avoid surgery.

Photo: George Felling

### the point

*Pilates promotes strength and flexibility, making it excellent for rehabilitation and improving general health.*

By Matt Buchanan

"In the 20-odd years I've been teaching Pilates," says Alan Menezes, one of Australia's foremost Pilates (pronounced "Pill-arties") teachers, "I've never found any other activity that will help you do Pilates better. But I have found that Pilates helps you do anything else better, whether it's yoga, tennis, swimming, horse riding or ice hockey."

The technique is named after its inventor, Joseph Pilates. "Joseph Pilates was a very, very ill child," says Menezes, "and he suffered from lots of childhood problems which were very prevalent around the turn of the century - lack of good diet, that sort of thing - which affected his body. And what he wanted to do was to create a system of exercise that helped his muscles and joints to maintain flexibility and strength."

The ability to maintain flexibility and strength would be the key to the unique exercise system Pilates engineered. He had noticed that Eastern exercise such as yoga and tai chi emphasised flexibility alone, whereas Western gymnasium techniques centred exclusively on strength. Pilates's breakthrough was to consider the benefits of combining them, especially for those requiring rehabilitation from injury or chronic malaise.

The system he created, which he called "Contrology" (a made-up name that referred to the control over the

precision of movement required for the part of the body being exercised) evidently worked. By the age of 14 his once sickly frame had become an exemplar of lithe muscularity. But it was a few years later that Contrology's efficacy was tested and proven in a more demanding arena.

When World War I broke out, the German-born Pilates was teaching fitness to the Lancashire police force in the north of England. As an "enemy alien" he was immediately interned in a camp on the Isle of Man.

"He requested to be put into the hospital," says Menezes, "and he noticed that all the wounded just lay there with no exercise, their muscles wasting."

According to Menezes, Pilates removed pairs of bedsprings from beneath his patients' mattresses. Then he mounted them on the wall behind their beds. This meant the wounded soldiers could pull on the springs and use the resistance in the coils to exercise their arms.

"They got a full range of movement," says Menezes, "so that they could keep the mobility in their joints."

"Pilates used to be described as yoga with machines but, in general yoga, you hold your position for several minutes. In Pilates you're never holding position. You're constantly moving, which keeps the blood flowing. It's more like tai chi on machines, because with tai chi you're always moving."

Now, after 20 years of teaching, Menezes presides over a thriving business, attending to a roster of private clients and a burgeoning side business constructing and exporting the multi-pulley Pilates machines.

### how he got there

**Name** Alan Menezes.

**Age** 45.

**Job** Master Pilates Teacher.

**Qualifications** Only NSW registered teacher trainer with US-based Institute for the Pilates Method. Trained by Alan Hardman in London, who popularised Pilates in Europe.

**Salary Potential** is up to the professionalism of the instructor. Can easily be \$50,000+ with initial hard work in establishing the business.

**Highs** Helping people avoid surgery. Getting the former number one triathlete, Marc Dragan, back on his feet to win the Nepean Triathlon when others wrote him off. Writing a book that is an international Pilates bestseller. Training others and listening to their stories of how people have felt better than they have in years.

**Lows** Making a decision to close a profitable studio (in order to focus on the expanding area of training).

**Life tip** Never say die, especially when others, who don't have the same faith, determination and enthusiasm, tell you to!