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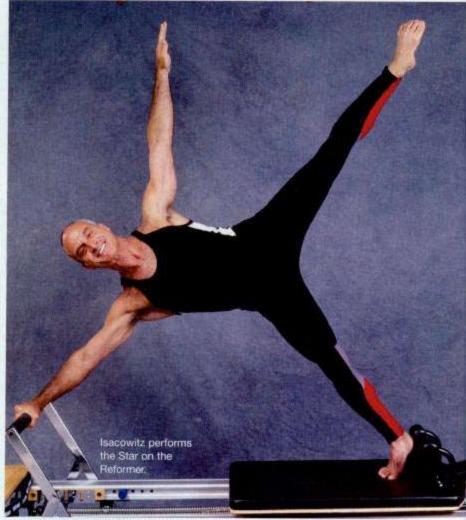
## Rael Isacowitz brings a fresh, international perspective to the method

ow many people can call five continents home? Pilates instructor and educator Rael Isacowitz can: He's lived in Africa, Asia, Europe, Australia and now North America. Isacowitz is the founder of Body Arts and Science International (BASI), a teacher-training program active in 10 countries around the world. He has written a series of movement analysis workbooks and recently released a DVD series, Rael Pilates. With the success of BASI, which is headquartered at his studio, On Center Conditioning in Costa Mesa, California, he's now happy to call the United States home.

Isacowitz's thoughtful, thorough approach to Pilates sprung from his innate affinity for movement. As a child growing up in South Africa, he was impressed by local tribal dances, and went on to train as a dancer after moving with his family to Israel. Already a serious swimmer, he added yoga, Tai Chi and the Brazilian martial art Capoeira to his repertoire when he was still

in his teens. He was first introduced to Pilates in the late 1970s in Israel, through a program designed by English Pilates pioneer Alan Herdman. "It intrigued me because it was like a meeting ground between the mind and the body. I loved every aspect of it," Isacowitz recalls.

It was the hows and whys of movement that led Isacowitz to investigate Pilates so fully and to carve out his unique place on the education scene. After studying exercise physiology and biomechanics in college, he went on to pursue a master's degree in dance in England, While living in London, he studied with various Pilates teachers and began teaching Pilates himself.



Isacowitz was struck by the need for a structured, curriculum-based teacher-training program in the late 1980s, when he moved to Australia and began working as the director of a college dance department. Professional athletes, dancers, actors and doctors began seeking out his small studio to learn Pilates; some were interested in becoming teachers themselves. His

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method built upon the traditional apprenticeship training model, adding lectures on anatomy and physiology, plus visits from guest teachers.

On a trip to the United States, Isacowitz gave a few lectures on his approach to Pilates and was invited by an orthopedic surgeon in Southern California to set up a Pilates-based rehab program there. "I was very stimulated by the vibrance of California and the United' States, and felt that if I really wanted to be at the epicenter of the development of this industry, I should take him up on his offer," he explains. In 1992, one year after moving to the U.S., he opened On Center Conditioning and officially launched BASL

As its name suggests, Body Arts and Science International takes both a scientific approach incorporating the latest research in the fieldand an artistic one, which appreciates the aesthetic value of the repertoire. "I spent 10 or 12 years just trying to explore the original work before starting to go out and delve into my own approach," he recalls. "When I felt I had reached a certain level of mastery, I felt comfortable in starting to introduce some of my own thoughts and concepts." The BASI course is both academically rigorous and open-minded. "I feel it is one of the few methods that both recognizes the purist approach and recognizes an evolutionary process," he explains.

One of the pinnacles of his career came in December 2003, when he was invited by a Chinese fitness organization to give a series of presentations to professionals in the field. At the time, he says, there was not one piece of Pilates apparatus in the whole country. Of the hundreds of people he taught there, many had heard of the

method, but their only exposure to it was through DVDs and videos. His hosts arranged for him to meet the secretary general of the China Aerobic Association, who invited him to work with the Chinese Olympic gymnastic team. Although he wasn't able to accept the offer, Isacowitz greatly valued this interaction.

"I had very little time off, but I did take a walk one day and stood at Tiananmen Square. And I thought to myself, 'I am bringing Pilates to this vast land with this enormous population." And I felt so honored to be making that step and being part of the legacy." Now his challenge is to figure out how to keep up with the tremendous demand for BASI courses in China.

Pilates can be subject to cultural differences, Isacowitz has found. While for him, going to China was like a homecoming-being the source of so many mind-body practices he is drawn to-he found his Chinese students equally fascinated by Western fitness practices such as bodybuilding and weightlifting. The authentic mindbody connection that he values so deeply in Pilates runs counter to U.S. fitness culture, too. He notes the presence of TV screens, bright colors and pounding music in a conventional gym. "Everything is being done to separate your mind from your body," he comments.

Isacowitz's next international destination is Moscow, where he will give the keynote presentation at a fitness conference on April 16th, which happens to be his 50th birthday. After a half-century of globetrotting, he isn't slowing down his travel schedule, but he's happy to call the U.S. home. "Being that my wife is from the States and we've got our four-year-old son here, I think I'm here for good." DS



# Q&A with a seasoned teacher

Pilates?

A: For many years I was a real minority out there. I found it frustrating that there weren't more men relating to it and doing it, because I knew how much I was benefiting from it.

A: I require of myself a minimum of at least three Pilates sessions a week, Most times, it's almost every day.

# people who want to introduce

A: One of the great things I've seen over the years is parents and children coming in. It may start because the child is an athlete or a dancer, and the parent brings them in and gets intrigued and then gets involved. And that's just a wonderful sharing of time. I can't wait to have a Pilates session with my son!

### the field?

A: I went to all the teachers who could give me insight [into the Pilates method]. And that included Romana Kryzanowska, Kathy Grant, Ron Fletcher, Eve Gentry and Bruce King. I would regard Kathy as the closest I have to a mentor. She really set my path of teaching on a different tangent at a crossroads in my career.

### O: What would you like to see

A: I would like to see more focus on the fact that Pilates is for everyone and anybody, not just celebrities.