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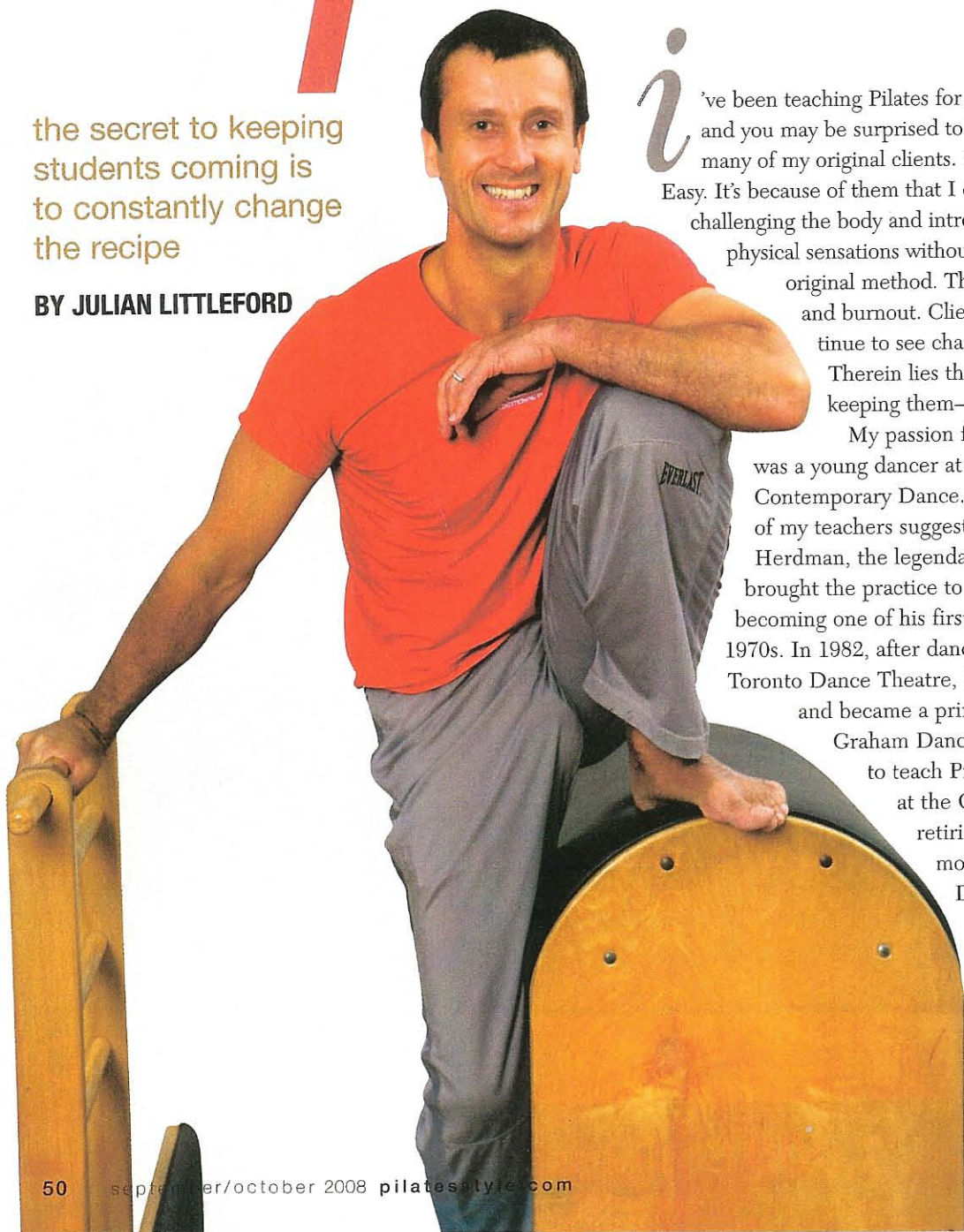


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a dash of SPRICE

the secret to keeping students coming is to constantly change the recipe

BY JULIAN LITTLEFORD



i've been teaching Pilates for more than three decades, and you may be surprised to learn that I still work with many of my original clients. How do I keep them?

Easy. It's because of them that I continue to explore ways of challenging the body and introducing students to new physical sensations without losing the essence of the original method. This also prevents boredom and burnout. Clients who work this way continue to see change and feel challenged.

Therein lies the secret ingredient to keeping them—and you—involved.

My passion for Pilates began when I was a young dancer at the London School of Contemporary Dance. To treat a hip issue, one of my teachers suggested I seek out Alan Herdman, the legendary Pilates instructor who brought the practice to England. I ended up becoming one of his first instructors, in the late 1970s. In 1982, after dancing in Canada with the Toronto Dance Theatre, I moved to New York City and became a principal in the Martha

Graham Dance Company and continued to teach Pilates with Deborah Lessen at the Greene Street Studio. After retiring from dance in 1990, I moved north of San Diego, to Del Mar, and opened my own studio, J.L. Body Conditioning.

Confession: I just told you a little white lie. It's not really easy to keep students coming or even to stay motivated yourself.

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It takes careful thought and inventiveness to continually challenge the body. If you keep in mind that the work is like a Pandora's box—as one group of muscles becomes stronger, you'll expose another group that needs attention—you'll realize you have to find new ways of working the muscles to see steady improvement.

The exercises I chose to do here are not done on the more familiar Reformer or Cadillac but on two pieces of apparatus that truly challenge the user: the Wunda Chair and the Ladder Barrel. Neither has straps or a carriage to assist or support the body. The absence of both makes you responsible for resistance, eccentric (the muscle contracts while lengthening) and concentric (the muscle shortens while maintaining tension through range of motion) movement and balance. But most important, I picked these exercises because they're fun to do.

Do them as often as you like. The Ladder Barrel moves challenge all the muscle groups of the buttocks, legs, abdominals, back and shoulders. The ones on the Wunda Chair target the torso, arms, shoulders and spine in flexion and extension as

well as balance. As with any Pilates exercise, the intrinsic muscles are supporting the skeleton. Try to create sensation and activity within them by mentally directing energy there. To create this feeling, think of energy flowing out through the extremities during the exercise. A muscle that has little or no attention and sensation within it can make the exercise less effective, as one will often rely on momentum rather than muscle activity and control to move the body. I believe you should develop an awareness of every body part on each exercise, from the soles of the feet to the crown of the head.

When you first attempt the exercises, you can use more resistance. Once you become familiar with them, reduce the resistance for a greater challenge. These exercises are not designed to replace the original work. I believe you should know the classic exercises before you change or play with choreography. These variations are designed to add a little spice to the meat and potatoes of the method. Who knows? They may help prevent boredom and muscle burnout in your clients—and motivate you to go the distance.

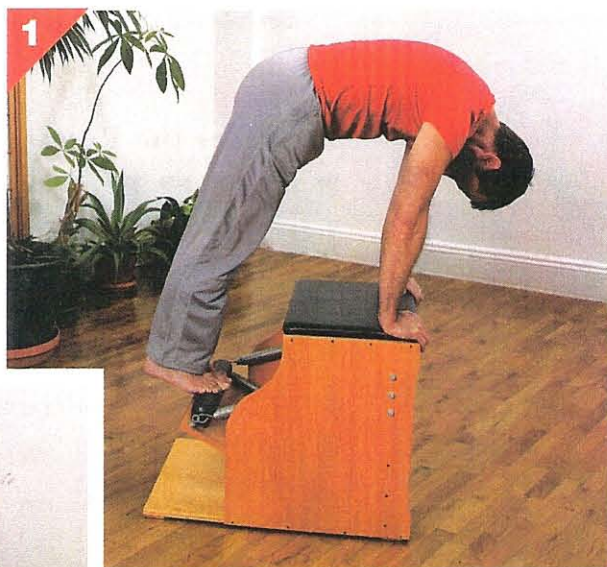
wunda chair

pull-up/push-up

targeted areas: arms, chest, abdominals

springs: 1 heavy/high, 1 medium

1. Stand on the footbar, lean forward and place your hands on the corner of the far edge of the seat. Keep your legs straight and try to drop your heels below the bar, increasing the challenge to the abdominals. Exhale and pull up to the classic position. As you curl your shoulders over your hands, keep your arms straight, and with your abs, lift the bar off the floor.



2. Inhale and bend your knees, keeping them behind the seat (your shoulders might move back a little).

3. Exhale and, with control, bend your elbows. Inhale and straighten your elbows, then exhale while bending them. Repeat 10 times.



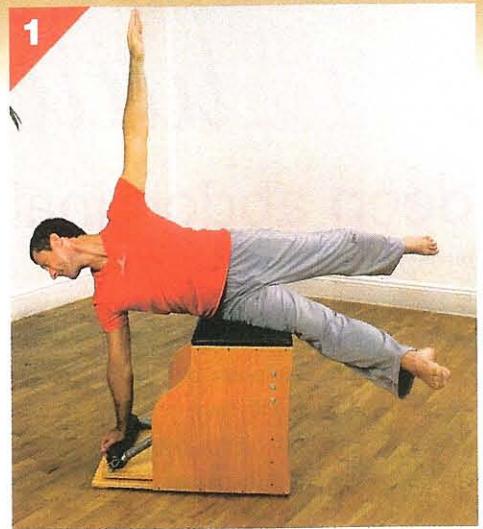
seated external obliques

targeted areas: external obliques, all muscles for pelvic stabilization
no springs

1. Lie on your right side with your right hand on the footbar in line with your shoulder. Split your legs evenly at 45 degrees, with your top leg behind. Make sure that your hips are stacked one on top of the other and that they do not move during the exercise. Try to curve the left side of your rib cage laterally toward the ceiling. Extend your left arm to the ceiling.

2. Exhale and pull the right side of the rib cage laterally down toward the floor. Holding this shape, lift the bar off the floor as high as you can without changing the hip or leg position.

3. Inhale and pull the left side of your ribs up toward the ceiling, causing a lateral extension on the left side. Make sure your legs remain in place and your hips are stacked. Holding this shape, push the bar down to the floor. Repeat 6 times on each side.



climb a tree with thoracic extension

targeted areas: all abdominal muscles, spine in forward flexion, hamstring of the lifted leg

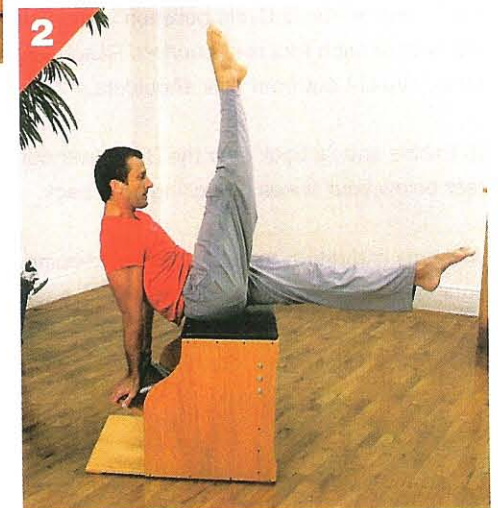
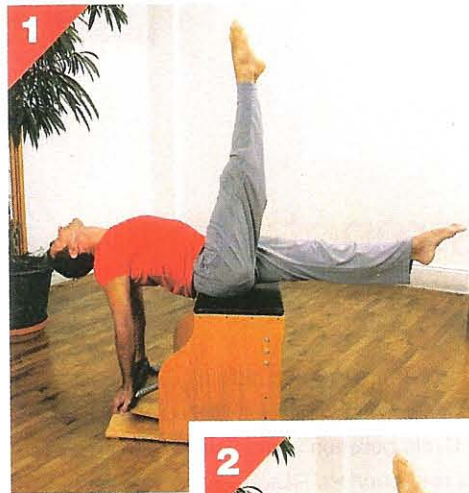
springs: 1 heavy/high

1. Lie down, reach behind you and grasp the footbar with both hands, thumbs facing out, fingers facing back. Extend your right leg up toward the ceiling and the left straight out, in line with your hips.

2. Inhale and round your head forward toward your right knee, lifting the footbar with straight arms but not lowering your left leg.

3. Exhale and arch your back while pushing the bar back to the floor, keeping your left leg extended. (Your chest remains in a high lift.)

4. Inhale, lifting the bar off the floor and rounding your back to the start position: leg up, forehead on your knee, if possible. Repeat 10 times, alternating legs.



ladder barrel

deep abdominals

targeted areas: abdominals, psoas

1. Lie face up on the Barrel, head toward the ladder and supporting your low spine on the arch. Keep your shoulders and head level with your pubic bone and legs extended straight out. Reach behind you with bent elbows and grab the top rung of the ladder with both hands, palms facing down and shoulder blades stabilized.

2. Exhale and lower your right leg toward the floor while keeping your left leg extended. Keep both legs straight.

3. Inhale and lengthen your right leg while lifting it back to the start position. Repeat with the left leg to complete one set. Perform 10 sets.

advanced: Lower both legs at the same time, anchoring your spine so that it never leaves the Barrel or changes shape.



skiing strengthener

targeted areas: quadriceps, glutes

prop: yoga block, ball or pad

1. Squat in front of the Barrel with your spine against it and your knees bent and in line with your hips. Place a yoga block, ball or Magic Circle between your knees. Make sure the arch of each foot is supported. Reach your arms overhead, straight out from your shoulders.

2. Exhale and lie back over the Barrel without dropping your rear below your knees or arching your back.

3. Inhale and return to start position, keeping the base of your spine still. Repeat 10 times.

advanced: Circle your torso keeping your hips, knees and base of your spine in place.



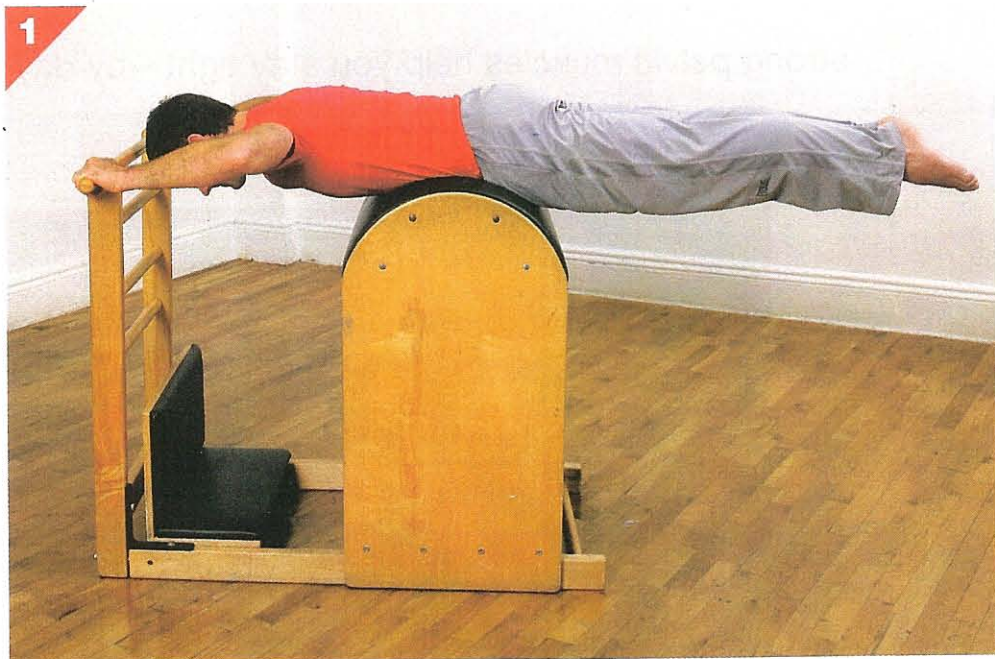
hamstring locator

targeted areas: hamstrings, all the muscles for shoulder stabilization

1. Lie facedown on the Barrel, head toward the ladder and spine straight from the crown of your head to your tailbone without tucking your pelvis. Hold on to the outside top rung of the ladder, palms facing down, elbows in line with your ears, and shoulder blades stabilized. Legs should be straight and together.

2. Exhale and lower your legs toward the floor, maintaining the shape in your lower back but keeping your hip bones anchored to the Barrel. Squeeze your inner thighs and calves together and lengthen your legs as you lower them.

3. Inhale, continuing to squeeze and lengthen as you lift both legs back to start position, level with your hips. (Do not activate your glutes too much: You are trying to activate and locate the hamstrings.) Repeat 10 times. 🌀



tip: If you feel your low back working, your abdominals aren't supporting the spine properly.