

# Moving on UP

**B**Y THE time I arrive at Liz Chukwu's fitness studio first thing in the morning (well, 10am), her declaration: "I've been up since 4am" leaves me feeling slightly giddy.

As it goes, Liz practises what she preaches. She has chosen a lifestyle that involves an hour's meditation in the morning, promptly followed by "a little yoga", some dance and a healthy breakfast of fruit.

Year-old Passion 4 Life, the dance and fitness studio at Liz's flat in picturesque Sydenham Hill, was born from the 41-year-old's passion for dance. The former intensive care nurse left the profession some years back to pursue her love of dance.

She is now a trained dancer, a certified Pilates teacher (Kane School of Core Integration in New York) and offers her services as a "movement specialist" teaching classes for all ages.

As Liz guides me around I'm struck by the scents of lavender and the candles. Lulled, we sweep through rooms that have been converted into the perfect space for a holistic experience.

Free from most signs of modernity (Liz does not own a TV), Pilates equipment fills the wooden floors, as light floods through the large windows.

Pilates is a popular way to get trim fast. **NATALIE LI** visits South London-based movement specialist Liz Chukwu to discover ways to increase fitness through pilates and movement, while learning to relax

"In this economic climate, with all the stresses and strains, there is a pressure to look after the body and I feel this will become even more poignant," Liz says.

"I work in my own style, it is quite an organic fusion. I was very nervous about becoming pigeon-holed and so, combining my skills, I have managed to create a fusion of classes."

Already I can sense the free-flowing energy and instantly feel at home. Warming up with a hot spiced apple drink to boost the system, I begin my class on the "Cadillac" - a table that resembles a massage bed. Here I lie on a heated lavender-scented pillow as Liz helps me to relax, teaching me how to control my breathing through a number of exercises.

Then there are the science bits, where Liz

wheels out a skeleton to demonstrate how the muscles work.

With her amalgamation of skills, I feel confident in her presence. Her calm, reassuring voice checks I'm comfortable. I am.

As I begin to feel relaxed, Liz asks if I suffer from any particular ailments, complaints or injuries.

Concentrating on my left foot - the poor victim of fashionable high heels and charity runs - Liz uses a ball to strengthen and relax the foot, flexing the toes and stretching the muscles.

This is followed by some time on the Reformer, a gliding platform much like a rowing machine, used to tone and strengthen core muscles. I am beginning to feel rejuvenated.

Time for some more movement and it is here that Liz's passion for dance springs in as we practise ballet pliés followed by African-inspired dance moves.

But it's not all about hard work, and adhering to her "love your body and treat it as it deserves" motto, we focus on cooling down to the sound of Limon music. I drift off into a light slumber, the hazy scent of lavender swirling and swooshing above my head.

Fifteen minutes later, as I awake from my near slumber, Liz places a bowl of fruit and more hot spiced apple juice in front of me, instructing in mother-like tones to "eat up".

The session is over and the gentle awakening soon turns into an abrupt noisy crash back to the bustle of the city. But it was not just an exercise class, more an awakening on how the body really is a temple.

**Passion 4 Life is at 7 Breakspeare Court, 94 College Road, Dulwich, SE21 7NB. Open Mon-Thurs, 5.30am-9.30pm. Visit [www.passion-4-life.co.uk](http://www.passion-4-life.co.uk) or call 020 8693 7931. Private and group sessions available.**

## pilatesfacts

German-born Joseph Pilates brought his exercise regime to the USA in the 1920s, opening a body-conditioning studio with his wife. His time as a hospital orderly during the First World War saw him working with patients unable to walk. Pilates became popular with dancers for improving technique and recovery from injury.

Benefits of regular pilates sessions include:

- ❑ Improved posture
- ❑ Increased stability of pelvis and shoulders
- ❑ Muscle tone and flexibility
- ❑ Relief of aches and pains
- ❑ Improved bone density
- ❑ Relief of stress and tension



## fitnessvenues

❑ Pilates Performance, 36 Battersea Square SW11 3RA. Email [info@pilatesperformance.co.uk](mailto:info@pilatesperformance.co.uk) or call 020 7228 1040.

❑ Lamberti Pilates, The Vitality Centre, 155-159 Merton Road, Wandsworth, SW18 5EQ. Email [lisa@lambertipilates.co.uk](mailto:lisa@lambertipilates.co.uk) or call 07984 920 232.

❑ Surya Yoga Centre, 3B 9 Park Hill, Clapham SW4 9NS. Email [info@suryayoga.co.uk](mailto:info@suryayoga.co.uk) or call 020 7622 7274 or 07950 665 830.

❑ Verve Pilates, Wimbledon. Email [info@vervepilates.co.uk](mailto:info@vervepilates.co.uk) or call 07786 925 881.

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