

FITNESS WITH FLAIR

Gyrotonic may sound like a flying device or a drink, but it's the hottest trend in fitness.

BY CINDY HEROUX, RD • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHARLES WELLS

I've always admired the way dancers look, even when they aren't dancing. Their perfect posture, strong graceful lines, perfectly proportioned muscles and fluid movements remind me of works of art. They're also in great condition, able to perform for hours at a time. So when I heard that Gyrotonic – a hot trend in fitness created by a dancer – had come to town, I paid a visit to MatWorkz in Winter Park to check it out.

Gyrotonic is the brainchild of Juliu Horvath, a professional dancer from Romania who spent years developing a system of equipment and exercises to heal his injuries and improve health and performance. Incorporating elements of sports, yoga and Tai Chi, Gyrotonic helps you move with the grace of a dancer while developing the strength and flexibility of a gymnast. A unique workout, it's designed to be safe and effective, regardless of your fitness level, and under the expert and supportive watch of MatWorkz owner Deborah Watson, can accommodate most physical limitations.

Several things differentiate Gyrotonic from other fitness systems. Most exercises are linear and two-dimensional. You lift, pull or push in a straight line, making an effort to keep your body stable, avoiding twisting or turning. Gyrotonic is three-dimensional. True to its dance roots and its name, it embraces rotation and circular motion done in a balanced and controlled way. Using a specially designed system of pulleys and weights, Gyrotonic allows you to move with fluid motions through a variety of positions





that simultaneously stretch and strengthen your muscles and connective tissue while working your joints to increase flexibility and range of motion. Unlike exercise equipment that can be jarring at the beginning and end of exercises, the Gyrotonic Expansion System maintains even and constant resistance at all times, which makes it ideal for training with minimal risk of injury.

I first visited MatWorkz in Winter Park a few years ago to explore Pilates – not the imitation classes that abound in the area, but the real deal developed by Joseph Pilates himself that requires years of training to teach. Though the equipment was a bit intimidating and had more than a vague resemblance to a torture chamber, the workout was amazing, and Watson was able to work

with me using core strengthening exercises and engaging every muscle group in my body even though I was recovering from a serious skiing accident. From my previous experience, I knew that she wouldn't consider expanding her studio to accommodate a new form of exercise unless it held great promise, so I headed to see her with confident anticipation and with my athletic daughter, Kristin, just in case.

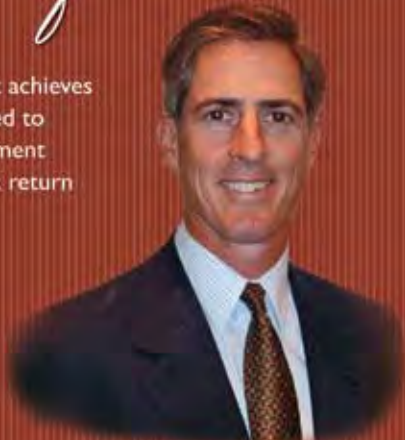
Gyrotonic lived up to my expectations. Though the equipment appeared foreboding, the exercises were more fluid than Pilates; they focused more on motion rather than stability. It felt a bit like, well, dancing, which I personally found more enjoyable and easier. With youth and extreme flexibility on her side, Kristin was able to do more advanced

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moves than me, but the equipment and exercises easily adapted to meet our widely different abilities, giving us both a great workout. As with Pilates, maintaining proper form and position are critical, which is why you always train with a qualified instructor and start with the basics. Before working with the equipment, Watson had us first practice positioning our bodies and the correct paths of movement in all three dimensions. The “arch and curl,” resembling sitting versions of the yoga poses “cat” and “cow,” got our spines moving. The “twist” represented the second plane of motion, rotation, and the third, lateral movement, was introduced via the side bend.

“Because Juliu Horvath continues to study, Gyrotonic continues to evolve,”

Watson says. “As he gets deeper into the work, he sees the layers, the possibilities and he tweaks the system.” That’s why MatWorkz has both an original pulley tower and the new Cobra model with the latest modifications, and why Watson believes Gyrotonic will continue to grow in popularity. “In New York and California, it’s everywhere,” she says. “It’s where Pilates was 15 or 20 years ago.”

Also available at MatWorkz are Gyrokinesis classes, which are offered Sunday mornings at 10 am. Somewhat like a cross between Kundalini yoga and a modern dance class, Gyrokinesis uses rhythmic, undulating movements to work the spine, muscles and joints and stimulate internal organs. Like yoga, breathing and maintaining proper form are key to both Gyrotonic and Gyrokine-

sis, so class sizes are limited to allow the instructor to provide personalized attention to every student.

MatWorkz offers private lessons for both Pilates and Gyrotonic, which can be purchased individually or in series of 4, 8 or 12 lessons. Duet and semi-private lessons are also available, along with the Sunday morning classes.

MatWorkz is located at 1331 Palmetto Ave. Ste. 202, Winter Park. For more information, call 407-628-4888 or visit matworkz.com.

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