

THE VOICE OF PILATES

Longtime teacher Darien Gold is now sharing her deep knowledge of the method with a wider audience via a radio show and podcast.

by Anne Marie O'Connor

PILATES STYLE Tell us about your childhood.

DARIEN GOLD I was born in San Bernardino, CA, then when I was 10, my family moved north to Capitola, which at the time was a very small town outside of Santa Cruz. At age 12, I watched a girl practicing gymnastics. I instinctively knew I could master the sport, so I started taking gymnastics at school. By the time I graduated from Capitola Intermediate a year later, I had won the trophy for Best Girl Athlete.

This accolade was followed by two different high school coaches asking me to join their varsity teams—track and field and softball. It was a huge compliment for a 9th grader, but my love was gymnastics. I trained at the Santa Cruz Gymnastics Club for up to four hours a day, came home, ate dinner, went to bed, then back to school the next day until it was time to train again. As a quick and strong gymnast, I competed at a level that could have led to a college gymnastics scholarship, but the universe had other plans.

As an adjunct to my gymnastics training, I studied ballet and jazz to help refine my floor exercise routines. But in dance class, I could make mistakes and not be ridiculed. Eventually, my allegiance shifted and when I was 18, I sat my parents down and told them I wanted to study dance in New York City.

PS So you moved to New York?

DARIEN Yes, but I soon learned that dance in New York was on a completely different level. It was clear I needed to continue with ballet to work on my technique, so I studied it with Finis Jhung and Liane Plane. Then I discovered the Horton technique and the Alvin Ailey Dance Center, where I studied for a number of years.

To support myself throughout the 1980s, I rented studio space and taught dance and even choreographed for an all-male strip group.

Meanwhile, I performed with many small modern dance companies. There were lots of rehearsals for performances that didn't pay much. Then one of my dance teachers, who was choreographing a show in Miami in the late 1980s, asked if I wanted to play a part in it. I said, yes—it was a substantial role and it paid a lot more than what I would have made in New York. Also, I really needed a break from the city

OPPOSITE PAGE: DOING TEASER ON THE SPINE CORRECTOR AT ALDER LANE FARM IN SONOMA COUNTY IN 2019.

PHOTO BY CLAIRE LICHTWARDT

that literally never slept. I ended up living in South Beach across from the ocean. It was quite a change from NYC.

PS How did you end up in Los Angeles?

DARIEN That Miami gig led to a choreographing opportunity in Los Angeles, and I ended up staying there, dancing with a modern dance company. Later, I worked as a stunt woman in the Robin Williams' film, *What Dreams May Come*.

PS How did you discover Pilates?

DARIEN In 1992, a fellow dancer asked if I wanted to be her partner in a semi-private Pilates class. As most people did back then, I asked, "What's Pilates?" She replied, "Just come with me, you're going to love it!"

PS What was your first impression?

DARIEN Thinking we would have our lesson at a dance studio, I was very surprised to meet her at a Beverly Hills home. We entered through a side door into the kitchen, then into a hallway that led to a large living room with a number of people swinging, balancing and stretching on equipment that was similar to the apparatus at the gymnastics club. It felt like I'd come home. That first experience was life-changing.

PS Where did you do your teacher training?

DARIEN I started Romana Kryzanowska's program in 1994. It was held at Performing Arts Physical Therapy in Los Angeles. It took me over two years to complete because there wasn't a place to practice

and do our hours back then. Finally, Zoe Hagler agreed to let us apprentice at her Pasadena studio. I visited New York to work with Romana a number of times, and in 1997, on one of those visits, I tested out with her.

PS What was Romana like?

DARIEN She reminded me of my gymnastics coaches, only nicer. She commanded the room as my coaches did, but never made me feel like I wasn't good enough. She just kept encouraging me to work harder and I did—for her and myself. Romana would return annually to LA to teach the continuing education workshops for her certified teachers. One time in 2007, Romana approached me and quietly said, "You're doing real Joe now." Those five words lit me up and gave me the confidence to keep moving forward on my Pilates path.

PS Do you remember any of her words of wisdom?

DARIEN Romana stressed safety at all times. I learned practically from the first day that my foot must always be either on the Reformer footbar or anywhere else a student needed my support. Safety truly is the first thing to learn as a Pilates instructor.

PS When did you first start teaching Pilates?

DARIEN After I bought my first used Reformer in 1994, I began teaching out of my Hollywood apartment. When I later moved to a larger home in North Hollywood and then to an even larger home in Glendale, I bought more apparatus and acquired more clientele. Actually, I'd been teaching

since I was 14 years old (my first student was a 7-year-old budding gymnast whom I taught how to be safe while practicing various tricks). Teaching movement is as natural as breathing to me and Pilates was the next level to perfect my overall teaching style and technique.

PS Why did you decide to open a studio in a commercial space?

DARIEN As my clientele grew, I knew I needed an even larger space. In 1999, there were few Pilates studios in Hollywood, so I found a place to rent on Sunset Boulevard. The area still had an unsavory element then that I witnessed every Saturday morning. Arriving early before class, I was met by street walkers near my Gardner Street studio door. Occasionally, I'd have to stare down a pimp because his scantily dressed ladies stood near the very door my clients had to walk through. I had a fantasy of saving these prostitutes by teaching them Pilates and then encouraging them to become Pilates professionals instead!

PS What made you decide to move to Sonoma County?

DARIEN After 23 years in Los Angeles, spending too much time in my car, I stopped growing professionally and lost interest in city life. Not to mention, at least in the classical Pilates world, there were too many chefs in the kitchen and a lack of camaraderie and mutual support that I longed for.

So in 2013, I moved to Petaluma in Sonoma County in Northern California, which was one of

my smartest decisions. My spirit felt more peaceful, and my practice opened up in ways not possible in Los Angeles!

PS Where do you teach now?

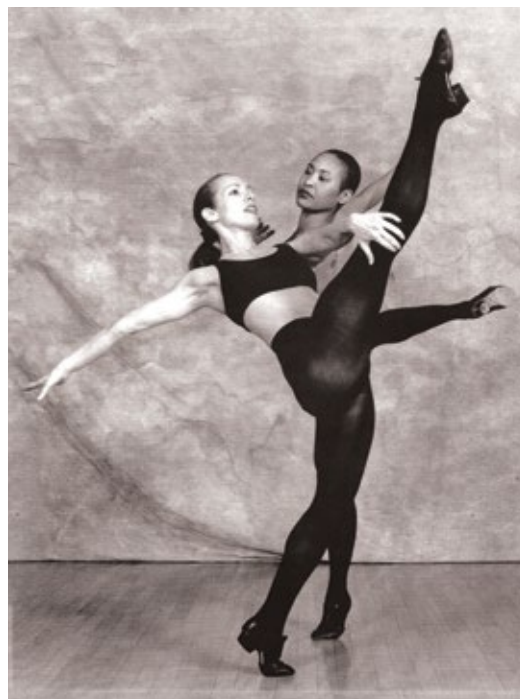
DARIEN A month after arriving in Petaluma, I started teaching at a yoga studio where no one had ever heard of classical Pilates and had no idea how demanding it was. But as a few brave students took my class and felt the results, my class gained many converts from yoga. A year later, I built a studio on my property, took all of my apparatus out of storage and created a very peaceful studio where I've been ever since. Currently, I also teach at Internal Fire Pilates in Mill Valley and at Soulstice Mind + Body Spa in Santa Rosa.

PS How did you start doing your radio show, *All Things Pilates*?

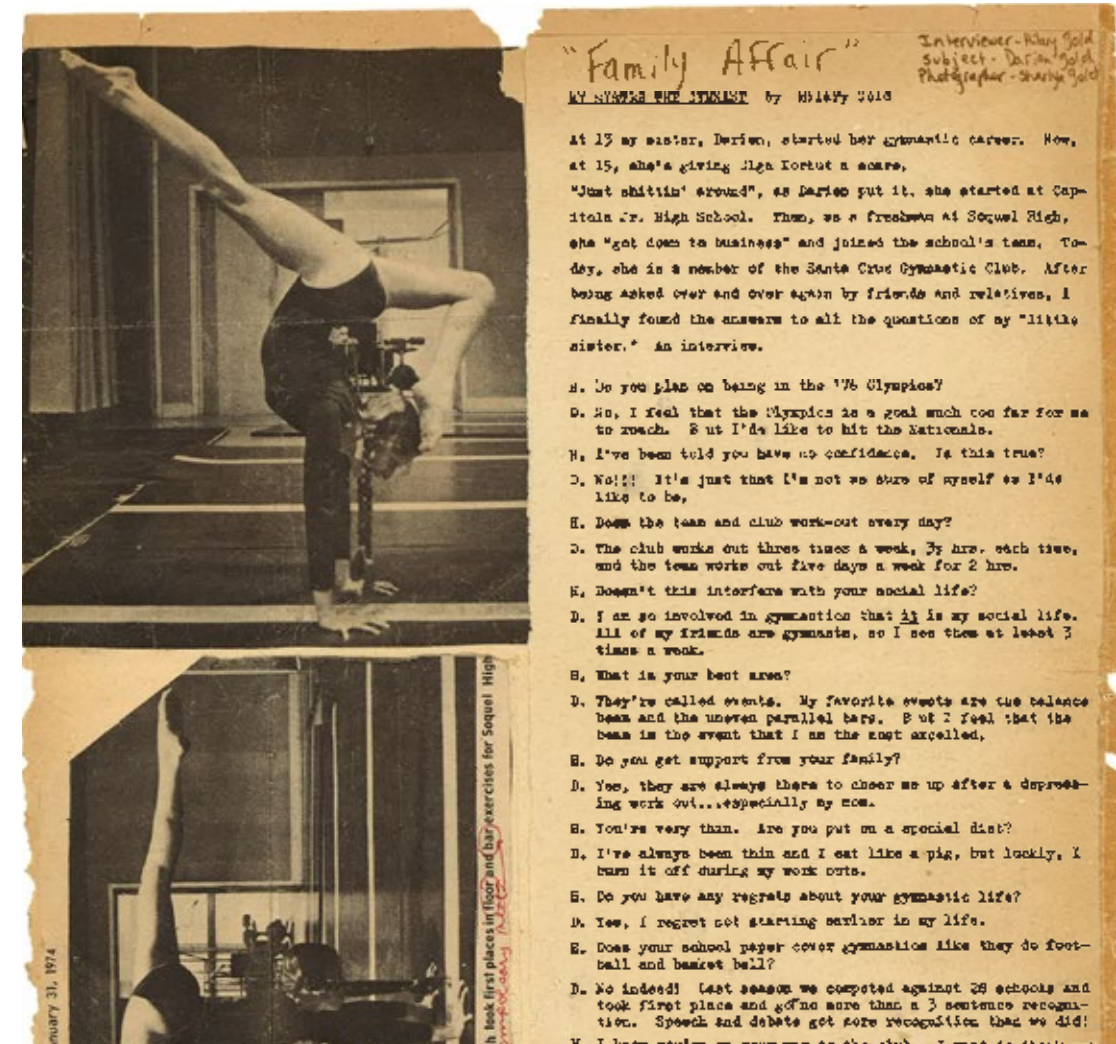
DARIEN When I moved to Petaluma, I was the only classically trained instructor in town; other instructors only offered contemporary Pilates. I hoped that one day I'd have the opportunity to educate the public about what is and isn't Pilates. That opportunity came in 2017 during a local business mixer, when I met John Bertucci, who at the time was the executive director of KPCA Petaluma, a local radio station. But I was also interested in developing my voiceover skills and so inquired about becoming the station's voice for its PSAs. John instead suggested I develop a radio show about Pilates, which led to a program on which I interview various Pilates experts and health-care practitioners.

OPPOSITE PAGE, LEFT TO RIGHT: PERFORMING WITH MIKO DOI-SMITH AND THE JAZZANTIQUA DANCE ENSEMBLE CIRCA 1992; DOING CONTROL PUSH-UP BACK ON THE REFORMER IN 2005.

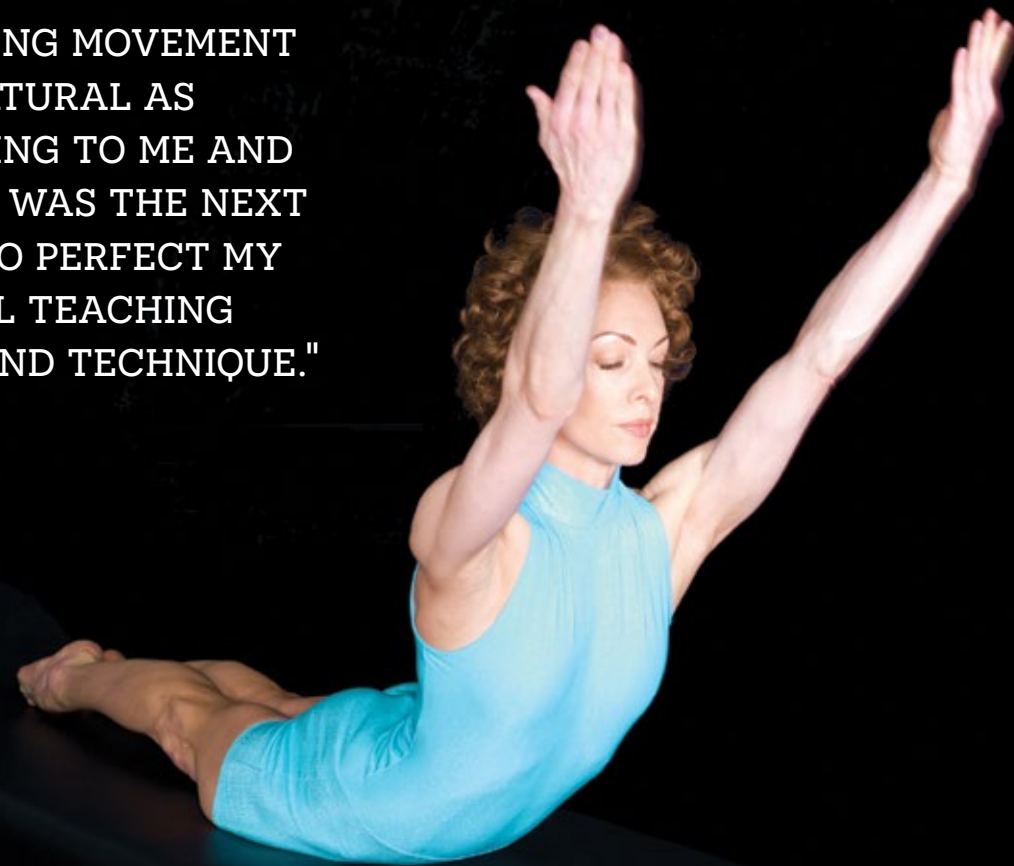
BELOW: GOLD'S SISTER INTERVIEWED HER FOR A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH WRITING CLASS MAGAZINE PROJECT IN 1975.



MIKO PHOTO BY CHRISTOPHER PARKER; REFORMER PHOTO BY JON MCKEE



"TEACHING MOVEMENT IS AS NATURAL AS BREATHING TO ME AND PILATES WAS THE NEXT LEVEL TO PERFECT MY OVERALL TEACHING STYLE AND TECHNIQUE."



PS What is the focus?

DARIEN Besides highlighting the various approaches to Pilates, my guests talk about the apparatus, books they've written and what it takes to be a studio owner or teacher trainer. Another goal is to showcase lesser-known teachers who are equally qualified and skilled as those featured online or at Pilates conferences.

PS Where is it broadcast?

DARIEN *All Things Pilates* broadcasts from KPCA in Petaluma; you can also listen to it online at kpca.fm and on local Sonoma County radio, 103.3 FM.

PS Why did you decide to do a podcast?

DARIEN A friend of mine, Sonia Lopez, the owner of Body Evolutions Fitness, said the world needed to know about me, my show, and that I had such a great voice that I needed to "repurpose" my radio show. At first, I was resistant because it meant another learning curve as I was still trying to develop my interviewing style and writing and audio-editing skills. But Sonia kept chipping away at my resistance and with her nonstop encouragement, I jumped in.

PS Who are some of your favorite guests so far?

DARIEN I've had many, like Roberta Gratz who spoke about her late husband, Donald, and how early on their friends encouraged him to sell Gratz Industries' Pilates business because "Pilates would never take off."

Jack Lanham, the owner of Studio Jacks in Seattle, talked about teaching Pilates from the male perspective. Howard Sichel, DC, the founder of Power Pilates, was a fun interview not only because of his chiropractic and Pilates knowledge, but he's someone I could have a beer with! And I can't leave out Amanda Altman, *Pilates Style's* exercise editor, whose enthusiasm I loved!

PS Anything interesting you learned that you didn't know before?

DARIEN I learned that although Mr. Pilates taught his method to the first-generation teachers, they had their own interpretation and those interpretations were not all the same.

PS I heard that you've been working with the Santa Rosa police and fire departments.

DARIEN Yes, I had sent a proposal to Jim Jarvis, the wellness director for the Santa Rosa police and fire departments. I outlined the benefits of Pilates for first responders, who endure tremendous mental and physical stress. It led to my teaching a one-hour mat class for police and firefighters, all of whom had back issues. Jim told me everyone felt so much better by participating and some even downloaded my apps!

PS Tell us about your personal life.

DARIEN I have one hunter/killer panther looking cat. I love hiking, Pickle Ball, cooking and partner dancing. **PS**

FIVE MINUTES WITH DARIEN GOLD



HER FAVORITE APPARATUS It's a tossup between the Cadillac and the Wunda chair; both appeal to the gymnast in me. The Caddy is the ultimate for stretching and strengthening, while the Wunda chair requires amazing balance and control. But I also love using the Jumpboard on the Reformer—it's one of the best ways to strengthen the feet!

HARDEST MOVE FOR HER TO MASTER I'm not sure I've mastered any of the repertoire because I'm too much of a perfectionist, so I continue to practice and learn. Horseback on the Reformer was particularly challenging, however, especially trying to remain in a high C curve and creating a lot of "daylight."

THE MOVE SHE REALLY HATES Hate is a strong word, but there are a few super-advanced exercises I can't do on my own. Yet. But Pilates is a lifelong discipline so I still have time.

WHO INSPIRES HER AS A TEACHER Other teachers who love what they do and are generous with their knowledge inspire me. One of those teachers is Sonje Mayo, whom I watch on Pilatesology. I'm drawn to her cueing, timing and rhythm—it's a dance thing.

FAVORITE BRAND OF CLOTHING FOR PILATES I like the feel of Athleta leggings and tops and wear them often. But because I have a Reformer and Chair in my home, sometimes I wake up with an idea and I try it out in my PJs!

HER MOST SATISFYING MOMENT AS A TEACHER I had a client who was a 19-year old stripper. She was in constant pain due to a severe case of scoliosis which began in her childhood and had only worsened with her job. At the end of her first lesson, she said in a stunned voice, "I've had back pain every day of my life, and right now I have no pain." It was a powerful moment for me and when she left, I couldn't hold back my tears. It emphasized again how much I believe in this work.

SWAN DIVE PHOTO BY JASON MADDOX; LIFT PHOTO BY CLAIRE LICHTWARDT



OPPOSITE PAGE: DOING SWAN DIVE IN 2012.

AT LEFT: "I DON'T KNOW IF WHAT I'M DOING HAS A NAME—LIFTED TUCK?" SAYS GOLD OF THIS MOVE ON THE PUSH-UP DEVICE SHE DID AT ALDER LANE FARM IN 2019.