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Workout Wednesday: Bar Method Brings The Ballet Body Back

Today's edition of LAist's Workout Wednesday series was submitted to us by Lori Allen.

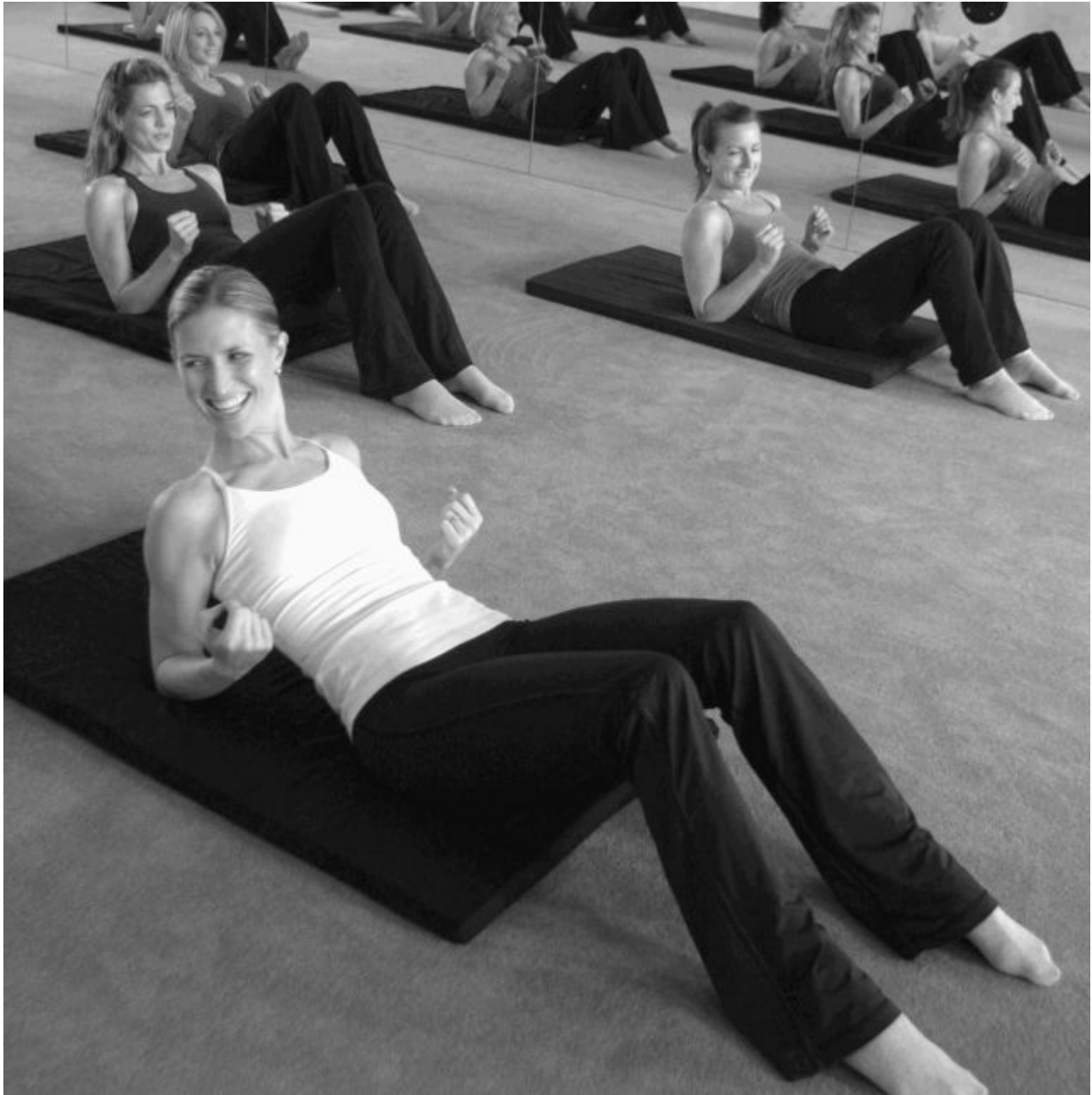


Need a fast fix to squeeze into those skinny jeans and show off a shapelier rear in time for summer? If so, sign up to take a class at the [Bar Method](#).

The exercise program, originated by San Francisco resident Burr Leonard, is based on [exercises developed](#) more than 50 years ago by the late German dancer Lotte Berk. The program includes a one-hour routine of yoga stretches, calisthenics and orthopedic back exercises done at a ballet bar and on the floor.

Celebrities and socialites would flock to Berk's former East Coast studios for some serious sculpting. Leonard was one of those regular Lotte Berk Method aficionados in the last millennium, rejecting most group exercise classes offered at gyms. Instead she opted for a workout routine requiring a deeper connection to muscle transformation.

Leonard and her family saw a lucrative business opportunity in revamping Berk's original method by bringing the exercise program beyond Madison Ave. Having begun with a few studios in Connecticut, Leonard opened up shops on the west coast in the earlier part of this decade. Due to popular demand, there are now 11 franchised Bar Method locations across the nation. (There are even DVDs for those who can't get to a class!)



With two locations already in West Hollywood and Los Angeles, now locals living in the South Bay can take advantage of the [new Hermosa Beach studio](#) which opens this month.

If the idea of leotard, tutus, and tights causes you to puke rather than plié, have no fear; Bar Method does not expect everyone to have any prior dance experience to reap the benefits. And if you did not inherit the body of a prima ballerina, this type of body sculpting class could be the next best thing to getting that lovely lithe look.

Write-ups on the Bar Method mention the instant attention Bar Method students gain from having a “Bar Butt.” Their signature tushy-toning moves isolate the gluteal muscles so specifically to allow the booty to stay tight. According to co-owner Carl Diehl, The Bar Method is unique in its ability to change the shape of the derriere. Bar Method students get prettier “seats” and also straighter, more elegant posture. Students actually become addicted to the increased comfort, vitality and pure beauty that comes from their strong, lifted seat muscles..

When arriving to the West LA studio make sure to bring enough quarters to feed the meter for street parking. If that does not work for you then park at the underground parking structure and make sure to have the parking ticket validated by the front desk. Street and metered parking is also required at the West Hollywood studio too.

Unlike yoga or Pilates, Bar Method does not make you bare your feet for all to see, however they do ask that you wear socks on their carpeted floors in the studio. Students who come to either studio without socks can borrow a clean pair.

Our class instructor, Jenny Lind, welcomed us all to stand up in the center of the room and start lifting our bent knees to the chest, raising our hands above the head a hundred times for a 2 minute warm-up. She reminded us to define gravity by continuing to always pull our abs into the spine throughout the whole class.

Immediately we put our hand weights to good use by strengthening our upper body. Working out the triceps is the hardest part of this series. In order to do the poses right, you have to resist the urge to move the back of the arm more than an inch up above the hip. (Now I start to pray to a higher power that the twitching and trembling eventually eliminates my unwanted underarm jiggle.)

The temporary torture of working out both of my triceps finally came to an end. A slow set of push-ups and tricep dips to finish out the upper body sequence forced us to exert more energy. Lind throws out an advanced option to do these exercises but form must not be comprised, and modification poses are given for those suffering from wrist injuries.

Those with dreams of dancing in a Bob Fosse musical relish in the standing stretch segment for loosening tight muscles in the lower body. One rule of thumb to remember in the Bar Method is whatever muscle gets worked always gets followed by a stretch.

At the ballet bar, Lind continued to push us by doing 5 sets of lower body exercises. The intention is to create an active caloric burn throughout the body by creating a leaner shape to our thighs. Instructing us to stay challenged, we were reminded that we must not let the leg muscles disengage as the body moves up and down the wooden bar. Several of my classmates panted like dogs in heat as they struggle to keep their lower bodies firm throughout this seven-minute series.

To define our derrieres, we did a classic Bar Method move called the “pretzel.” Sitting on the floor one leg is bent at the knee, while the other leg is behind the body working against gravity. The pretzel pose immediately fatigues all of these working muscle groups in the buns, low back and waist. Hips have to stay forward to do the pose correctly. Lind told us the intense sensation is a sure sign of a significant change occurring! Sounds encouraging...yet offers little comfort to ease the burn.

For flattening out all of the abdominal muscles, we took a padded mat against the wall to do a “Round and Flat Back” sequence. The legs lift off the floor connecting the core closer to the back. Using proper form always guarantees a dynamic belly workout regardless of skill level.

The final part of the Bar Method abdominal workout requires students to lie down on their mats with their low backs glued to the mat. Lind handed us all white rubber playground balls to place between our thighs for stabilizing the lower body. She continued to instruct us to really wake the abs up by curling the torso over the knees.

As the tension in our bellies released, we prepared for what looks like a pelvic tuck, but is known in the Bar Method world as “Back Dancing.” We put our front side to rest and worked the backside one last time. To get that final seat lift, we tucked, pulsed and squeezed every muscle from below the bellybutton to our knees.

Lind the acknowledged the hard work our bodies endured and asked us to take a few moments to relax on the mat to replenish tired muscles. Class is sealed with a round of applause.

Exiting the Bar Method to enter the world again, I clutched onto my serenity in hopes it would stay with me for the rest of my day. To walk out of a challenging situation feeling accomplished makes life in LA feel so good.

Overall Workout: Beginners, Mixed and Advanced levels of classes are available. The positions of the postures do not always feel natural. However committing to a regular routine of attending class eases the body’s adaptation.

Hobby-Developing Potential: High. The first few classes might feel strange to exert the muscles so intensely. Bar Method classes can be quite cathartic so the renewal that comes after class is worth the work. It is recommended that Bar Method students take one class at least three times a week so they can understand the precise method of familiarizing themselves with the postures.

Next Day Pain: It is suggested to come right back in the following day to work out the kinks.

Cost: Cheaper than most Pilates session but paying \$20 for a single class can burden the budget. To cut costs buy a package of classes. Introductory and unlimited monthly specials are always available.

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Photos Courtesy of Kate B. Grove