



Spa Secrets for Studios

by Lawrence Biscontini, MA

One of the largest trends in the wellness movement is the emergence of spas around the globe. Originally derived from the Latin “solus per aquam,” or “health from water,” the today’s evolved spa offers a plethora of different modalities for self-care, including body treatments, nutritional approaches to wholesome eating, educational platforms ranging from guided meditation to stress management. This article explores some of the unique aspects of spa-based facilities so other studios can glean some spa-like approaches for general programming. When faced with the following suggestions, the ultimate question this author poses to someone working in the traditional fitness facility is “Why couldn’t we embrace that even if we *don’t* have a spa?”

S-P-A

As a spa consultant, I use an evolved acronym of “s-p-a” where the “s” stands for “school,” “p” for “palace,” and “a” for “abode” to some degree within each class or personal training session.

School

Spas serve as places to “school” guests in places of educational potential, such as in classrooms, kitchens, and outdoor spaces in which programming exists designed to address the mind in learning something life-changing in addition to working the physical body.

Palace

Next, spas serve as places to make guests feel “palatial” by including elements of royalty in service such as providing elegant public and private areas, from outstanding attention to detail, to creating a royal ambience (easily achieved with candles), to small details such as offering water of decaffeinated green tea with sliced fruit after class. Karla Overturf is a group fitness instructor with both spa and traditional

fitness experience. “At Sierra Fitness I teach ‘classes,’ but at Canyon Ranch, I create ‘experiences.’ We don’t welcome ‘members,’ but ‘guests,’ and greet them like in a palace with a slight bow, hands folded in prayer position, a movement reserved in the traditional environment only for yoga. The choreography at both places may be the same, but the whole approach at the spa encompasses total wellness.”

Abode

Third, spas try to help guests feel like they are in a comfortable “abode” to create a “homey” feeling, from offering robes and comforters in waiting rooms, to touches of aromatherapy carried out in all spa areas (including the gym floor!), to offering amenities like fruit bowls, newspapers, and toiletries in the locker rooms.

Mission Statements

Like traditional facilities, spas have both mission and vision statements, but go a step further in creating them for *each* department. A mission statement explains what the facility is about *today* in terms of wellness, and a vision statement shows where it wants to move towards *tomorrow*. One of the spa director’s missions, then, is to coordinate these statements so that they all flow together instead of appearing “a la carte” in which different departments merely coexist. Blake Feeney, Spa Director for Canyon Ranch Spa at the Venetian Las Vegas, says “the spa’s group fitness, personal training, movement therapy, and nutrition departments not only possess their own mission statements, but these complement the missions of our treatment, retail, and food & beverage departments as well. We reflect our mission in all areas, including music, aromatherapy, equipment, uniforms, and terminology including standardization in class and personal training introductions.”

This mission-statement interconnectedness commences at hiring for *versatility*. Consequently, spas usually have more cross-training and cross-utilization than at traditional facilities, which can boost sales. Deanna Saraceni, massage therapist at the Golden Door Spa in Puerto Rico, also instructs yoga and is a certified personal trainer. “I get my guests from massages to join me in classes, and from there I usually get personal training clients as well.” The overall effect is that every department in a spa appears connected under the umbrella of wellness, and, ultimately, every department assists boosting sales in other departments. This rarely occurs in the traditional facility where departments seem to run independently.

Spa guests usually have one expectation: expect something different. Generally, since they almost completely disrobe for most treatments, their guard has to be down. “The resulting advantage to spa group exercise and personal training is that guests are open to try things they may not try outside of our sanctuary, so they really cross-train and learn things that help them make life-changing positive changes” says Deborah Puskarich, Group Exercise Director for the Cooper Fitness Center and Spa at Craig Ranch in McKinney, Texas. “Regular clubs can simulate this environment if they change their creative programming often so the students come to expect exciting change.”

Both spas and traditional facilities today offer strong fitness and wellness components. Because spas offer body and beauty treatments, food and beverage offerings, and retail support that all is designed to complement the missions of classes and personal training sessions, the result is the feeling of being in a place that fuses school, palace, and abode. Even without all spa amenities, traditional facilities can still explore some of the specific aspects of spa fitness in an effort to make their own environment feel a bit more like a s.p.a., ultimately offering the potential to cross-promote, cross-utilize, and cross-sell all programs within the facility, with true aspects of a more holistic wellness center.

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and then

January 2008 "Sample Mind-Body Fusion Class" from IDEA Journal

Sample Class: Body-Mind Fusion

Class Take Out: Emphasize stability and mobility with a combination of disciplines.

by Lawrence Biscontini, MA

Fusion classes typically combine two or more formats, equipment choices and training methods. Sometimes these cross-training opportunities can yield more benefits than practicing a single discipline. This sample class draws from the influences of yoga, Pilates, tai chi and

the Feldenkrais Method®. Feel free to replicate the class exactly, or use it to stimulate your creative process to fuse something of your own.

Body-Mind Fusion Details

FORMAT: triplanar body-mind fusion

TOTAL TIME: 30 minutes

EQUIPMENT NEEDED: Yoga sticky mats enhance the experience but are not required.

MUSIC: Mindful, slow music with no distracting, steady background beat works best. Choose songs that promote introspection and relaxation.

PROTOCOL: This class experience trains proximal stability first (primarily through yoga) and then enhances and challenges that stability by adding distal mobility (primarily through Pilates). The addition of energy work (tai chi) at the beginning and end completes this triplanar functional core class. The exercises celebrate all spinal movements (flexion, extension, lateral flexion and rotation). Although the Feldenkrais Method® is not specifically referred to in the body of the class, whenever we perform an exercise with eyes closed to promote a more mindful inner journey, we invoke concepts from this discipline.

Breathing:

- Teach participants to breathe in the way that is most natural for them.
- For a more traditional approach, hold yoga-inspired postures for five breath cycles on each side, breathing through the nose. For every Pilates-inspired movement, inhale through the nose to prepare, and exhale through the mouth during the main movement.
- Teach only as many repetitions as is safely challenging.
- Cue participants to avoid holding their breath.
- Remind students to continue breathing in each discipline, regardless of the specific technique.

Teaching Tools: I've found that the following formula works best when leading fusion formats, because it promotes consistency. Every section begins with the letter "P" to help you remember the steps:

- pose and position (How do we set up and prepare for this posture?)
- purpose (Why are we doing this?)
- prana (How should we breathe?)
- progression/regression (How do we increase/decrease the difficulty for all levels?)
- past (Which discipline inspired this exercise?)

Main Work Section

The following movements "fuse" into one another, creating a seamless transition (see chart below).

Pose; Position	Purpose	Prana; Progression/Regression	Past (plus Cues)
back-bending/ sinking the chi Sit in easy pose with legs crossed in front, hands palm up on knees.	extension; promotes mobility of back muscles (primarily lats) Gathering of chi serves as good warm-up and cool-down for upper body.	Abduct arms overhead, fingers almost touching. Direct palms toward body, and lower hands in front of face, heart and belly-button, at which point they separate to repeat the process. Inhale through nose as arms rise, and exhale through nose as they lower. Repeat 8–12 times. Progression: Extend spine and look up as arms reach to gather chi, while strengthening spinal erectors and stretching abdominals.	yoga and tai chi "Feel the hamstrings lengthen and the spinal muscles engage to keep your spine long."
<i>Transition/fuse into...</i>			
leaning potted palm Begin in easy pose.	lateral flexion; promotes mobility of spine's lateral flexors (quadratus lumborum) and rotators (obliques)	Let right hand "walk" rightward on floor, allowing body to lean without moving either knee; "walk" left hand up toward right hand. Keep spine long without rotating. Try to hold for at least 5 breath cycles on each side. Progression: Try to get lower elbow to floor.	yoga "Feel the spinal muscles open to the side."
<i>Transition/fuse into...</i>			
mermaid From easy pose, separate legs and sit with right lower leg parallel to torso. Touch left knee to right foot.	lateral flexion; promotes stability and strength in lateral flexors	Inhale and lean to right, putting weight on right palm. Exhale through mouth and extend hips, bringing them off floor and pushing slightly forward as left hand continues to reach rightward. Extend knee of top leg (leg is now straight). Return to start as you inhale. Imagine that you can touch left hand to floor and laterally flex spine to right as if lying over a stability ball. Repeat a minimum of 8 times each side. Regression: Keep hips on floor.	Pilates "Feel your hips and spine work to one side and open to the other."
<i>Transition/fuse into...</i>			
staff pose Sit with legs extended straight in front, so body resembles the letter L; hands are at sides.	extension; promotes hamstring mobility and spinal stability with core extension	From seated position with legs in front, hinge forward at hips without flexing spine. Dorsiflex ankles. Try to hold for a minimum of 5 breath cycles. Regression: Bend one or both knees.	yoga "Feel the hamstrings lengthen and the spinal muscles engage to keep your spine long."
<i>Transition/fuse into...</i>			
roll-down and roll-up From staff position, reach arms forward until parallel with floor.	extension and flexion; promotes lower-body stability and upper-body mobility via spinal flexion	Exhaling through mouth, slowly lower core to floor, rounding spine down while reaching hands above head. Inhale to prepare. Exhale, using rectus abdominis to flex spine, pulling core up toward starting position. Repeat 9–13 times and finish supine on floor. Regression: Keep hands on upper legs for support; flex knees.	Pilates "Feel your abdominals control you eccentrically on the way down, and call on their power concentrically on the way up."
<i>Transition/fuse into...</i>			
supine spinal twist Lie supine on floor.	rotation; promotes mobility of entire spine and core (obliques)	Draw knees into chest and place arms out to sides. Slowly lower knees to one side while simultaneously looking to other side. Keep shoulders "imprinted" on floor. Try to hold for a minimum of 5 breath cycles on each side. Progression: Extend knee of top leg. Regression: Rotate only the lower body.	yoga "Feel your breath promote a deeper sense of rotation in each direction."
<i>Transition/fuse into...</i>			
criss-cross Lie supine on floor.	rotation; promotes stability and strength of transversus abdominis, obliques and rectus abdominis	Draw knees back into chest and place hands behind ears, being careful to keep elbows out of line of vision. Inhale to prepare. Exhale through mouth as you rotate right shoulder toward opposite hip, concentrating on closing ribs into hip area. Repeat on other side and repeat 9–13 times, performing up to 3 sets.	Pilates "Feel your obliques pull you toward each side as you keep your elbow out of your peripheral vision. If you can see your elbow, you may not be pulling fully with your obliques."
Repeat warm-up (back-bending/sinking the chi) as a cool-down. From relaxation/corpsé pose, guide class in a 5- to 10-minute closing meditation.			

Lawrence Biscontini, MA, has won instructor-of-the-year awards from ACE (2002), IDEA (2004) and Can-Fit-Pro (specialty presenter, 2004). He is an international wellness and spa consultant and possesses multiple personal training and group certifications. Find out more about him at www.findlawrence.com.