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By Linda Laban, Globe Correspondent | July 12, 2007

Sweat, then sip

The Martini Workout mixes exercising with socializing at the InterContinental Hotel



Marzi Alavi joins Martini Workout creator and instructor Jessica Athas (center) and Emily Umpleby for a post-workout drink.
(Evan Richman/Globe Staff)

The Martini Workout sounds like the perfect exercise class for those who'd rather perch on a barstool than lie prone and sweating on a yoga mat. Lift and sip, and lift and sip, right?

Well, not quite. The creator of the Martini Workout, Jessica Athas, is actually a big believer in working out. But the Leather District denizen isn't above enjoying a little reward after all that labor. So Athas's hour-long class, held at the InterContinental Hotel's fitness center, is followed by a cocktail -- a martini, to be exact.

Sweat, then sip (cont.)

Athas has taught workout classes for seven years now and knows that people like to socialize after class. So she added a post-workout drink to the mix. Still, her class doesn't bear that name solely because of the cocktail. Athas employs martini glasses in class, too. Students balance the glasses (OK, they're plastic) on their bellies to learn how to do abdominal exercises correctly.

"Instead of telling people they are doing the exercise wrong and making them feel bad about it, this makes them slow down and think and concentrate on what they're doing," Athas explains about the class, which includes elements of Pilates and yoga. "If you don't do it right, there's no point."

"I'm not pushing alcohol," Athas says. "I'm pushing the funness."

Fun aside, there's work to be done. Athas begins her class with standard warm-up stretches before going into some serious mat work.

"OK, this is the martini straight up," Athas says, launching into a bum-clenching workout move, her feet skyward. Next: "This is the dirty martini," she says, easily moving into another muscle strengthening move. "And this is the martini shaken, not stirred . . . Because that's what you'll feel like after." She laughs, but she isn't kidding.

When spa director Travis Umpleby was choosing classes for the InterContinental gym, he wanted something distinctive.

"I wanted something personalized and unique, not the usual classes," he says. "I was looking for someone with a dynamic personality . . ." He breaks off and nods at Athas. "And that's Jessica."

The fee is \$45 for non-guests, \$20 for hotel guests, and free for SPA InterContinental club members. Classes are limited to 10 people -- advance sign-up is required -- and just switched from Friday to Wednesday at 5:15 p.m.

Though Athas offers a firm "no comment" on her own age, she will say the class attracts men and women, ranging from their 20s to their 60s and even 70s. She also holds *Martini Workout* corporate lectures and works with a lot of golfers.

"When golfers see how much strengthening the lower back improves their swing they get so into this," she says.

When the hour-long class is over, attendees gather in the hotel's snazzy bar, Rumba, and hand over their vouchers for the *Martini Workout* martini. Athas devised the recipe: Grey Goose Orange vodka garnished with an orange twist and four blueberries. Athas likes her martinis crisp and clean. "None of those girlie drinks for me," she says.

Athas also added the chic *Martini Workout* clothing line of T-shirts, hats, and more. "People like the logo," she says, pointing out that the swirls of orange and purple echo the orange and blueberries in her signature drink.

"Those people sitting on the barstools," she muses, "they need this workout."