



Mimi Rieger (top left) instructs a Budokon class in the District. Ms. Rieger has a background in both yoga and taekwon do, and found Budokon to be a "perfect fit" for her. Below and bottom: Joanna Kujat (left) and Shari Gronwall (right) practice Budokon. The sessions, which are at least an hour long, combine yoga's focus on the mind-body connection with the high-impact cardio of martial arts.



Photographs by Michael Conner/The Washington Times

Spiritual warrior

Budokon brings together many elements of yoga, martial arts

By Christian Toto
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Hybrid fitness trends are as commonplace as hybrid pouches. For every "labradoodle" or "mug-gie" there's cardio-kickboxing or yoga-bouty ballet.

Yet the carefully nurtured exercise form known as Budokon might be something different. Budokon, which literally translates into "way of the spiritual warrior," is the brainchild of martial arts expert Cameron Shayne.

Some know the California-based Mr.

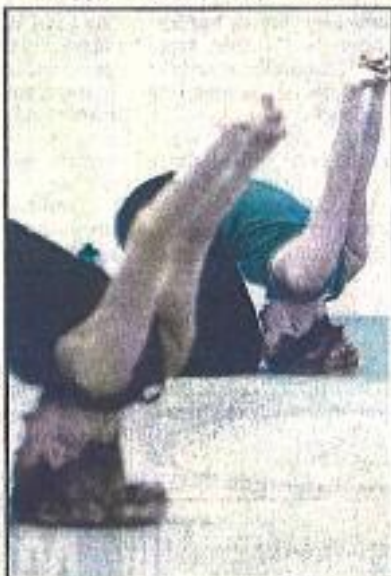
Shayne as the former bodyguard of Oscar-winner Sean Penn. Others may have heard how he whipped celebrities including Jennifer Aniston into starlet shape.

Mr. Shayne's creation fuses the mind-body connection of yoga with the more overtly physical moves common in martial arts. The discipline is only seven years old, but it already has taken root in the District thanks to Mimi Rieger.

The tall, lean Ms. Rieger, a certified Budokon instructor, had studied both yoga and taekwon do before she immersed herself in Budokon last year.

"This was a perfect fit for me," Ms. Rieger says.

Budokon's yoga elements firm up the body's core, the latest name for the abdominal- and mid-region, while concent-



rating on the mind-body connection. The sessions also involve kicking and punching movements, which might sound alien to a yoga mind-set, but in practice flow smoothly together.

see BUDOKON, page B4

Metropolitan

The Washington Times



Arts

At the movies / B6
TV listing / B7

Bad girl Pink fires up 9:30 crowd / B5

SEE THEM



Michael Connor/The Washington Times

Joanna Kujat (left) laughs while taking instruction from Mimi Rieger during a Budokon class. Ms. Rieger said she sometimes has as many as 35 people come to her sessions and double that when Budokon-creator Cameron Shayne comes to town.

BUDOKON

From page B1

She says the courses are attracting a wide array of people, sometimes as many as 35 for her sessions and double that when Mr. Shayne comes to town.

"I have a lot of super-athletic people who come in on the weekends, but during the week it's people who have never done yoga or martial arts."

She suggests new students prepare to be overwhelmed at first.

"Students need to be open-minded ... the first time. It requires strength and quite a bit of patience," she says. "It takes a while to progress into the postures."

The class itself will leave students lunging for their exercise towels. It's not a class for the sedentary. Each session is at least an hour long, and students are advised to stand apart from one another. Budokon demands room to roam.

"You can't go from the couch to a Budokon class," says Nicole Beland, deputy editor of *Women's Health* magazine.

Miss Beland says Mr. Shayne's celebrity is helping spread Budokon far and wide, particularly on the coasts.

"He gives it a touch of glamour so it stands out a little on the shelf," Miss Beland says.

While the West Coast tends to break trends faster than the East, Budokon is addressing the bicoastal need for time-management skills.

"People don't have enough time to go to an aerobics class and a yoga class," she says. "We want the two in one."

The discipline also might chip away at men's reticence toward yoga.

"It offers you a sweaty, really high-energy punching and kicking workout ... you can get out all your aggression," she says, adding Mr. Shayne himself could make a few male converts.

"He's a little macho," she says.

Beyond image posturing, she says Budokon increases one's heart rate, improves cardiovascular health and enhances flexibility.

She does fear Budokon could suffer if



Michael Connor/The Washington Times

Mimi Rieger, the first certified Budokon instructor in the District, stretches while instructing a class on the yoga/martial arts exercise form.

it spreads faster than anticipated.

"With any trend, as it gets bigger he'll be unable to train every teacher individually, then you get variations," she says. "Ultimately, these trends can spin a little out of control."

Allyson Donnelly, the director of group exercise with Washington Sports Clubs, says the time is right for a fitness movement like Budokon.

"Mind-body programs are extraordinarily popular [right now]," Ms. Donnelly says, adding many people are trying to expand the types of exercise programs they tackle to tone their bodies.

Some might resist yet another fusion

experiment, but she says the time-saving element, combined with the class's unique nature, sets it apart from other trends.

"It's a perfect hybrid of yoga and martial arts. ... You actually learn something here that will make your yoga practice better," she says. "And it's taught well."

Ms. Rieger says Mr. Shayne is aggressively training teachers personally to spread the word, adding would-be instructors must absorb 200 hours of training before they can teach their own Budokon classes.

She says Mr. Shayne often scours the Internet to see if anyone is teaching a course labeled Budokon who wasn't a part of one of his training courses.

"There have been cases where people tried to pass off their teachings as Budokon without the certification," she says. "That's flat-out dishonest."

For now, Ms. Rieger is the only certified Budokon instructor in the District. But she is busy, teaching classes at D.C. Aikido in Northwest and in the coming months at several clubs including the Sports Club/LA, also in Northwest.

She might have company soon.

District resident Juliana Bonilla, 24, took a weekend Budokon course taught by Mr. Shayne during one of this recent treks to the District, and she quickly became hooked.

Miss Bonilla, a yoga veteran and former college diver, says the class provided her with her first taste of martial arts.

"It's like the best of both worlds. It incorporates the philosophy of yoga and the discipline of martial arts," Miss Bonilla says. "You think about every movement your body is doing."

Miss Bonilla credits the Budokon lessons she began taking in the spring for adding strength to her upper body as well as her core muscles.

She became so interested in the routines she decided to become an instructor, a process she may complete by early 2007.

She advises those curious about Budokon to give it a try but to not give up after just one class.

"It gives you a completely different kind of workout," she says.