

Star power

Want to try the fitness fad that's sweeping Hollywood? Budokon is a combination of yoga and martial arts and Jennifer Aniston and Meg Ryan are fans. By Madeleine Collins.



In the figure-obsessed metropolis of fitness fads that is Tinseltown, one unique workout has (shock, horror) endured. So what's got Hollywood so keen to work up a sweat? Budokon – which means “the way of the warrior spirit” in Japanese – is a practice that blends yoga, martial arts and meditation and promotes agility, control, power, balance and flow, in both the body and mind.

It may all sound a little LA, but then again budokon first gained serious recognition in 2005, when Jennifer Aniston, in her first post-Brad interview, draped her scantily clad body all over the pages of Vanity Fair magazine.

And the person credited for her perfectly toned form? Cameron Shayne, the creator of budokon, who has been teaching it since 2000, and who also counts Courteney Cox, Meg Ryan and Sean Penn among his disciples.

Animal instinct

At its core, budokon is all about bringing out the animal in you – which is apt considering Hollywood could be called a jungle all of its own. And here I am in la la land at Santa Monica's trendy Equinox Fitness Club to see what all the fuss is about.

“The way we move reflects the way we think, the way we think reflects the way we live and the way we live reflects the world we're creating,” explains Shayne as we head into the studio. “Once you understand how to be masterful at one thing, you can be masterful at everything, because it's a formula.”

The dimly lit space is full of beautiful people all psyching themselves up – or down. I can't really tell. But there's not a love handle or bingo hall in sight, so they're obviously experienced “budokonites”.

Shayne, 36, takes his place at the front of the class, his tattoos of the budokon symbol and “Jesus, Lion of Judah” glistening on his large biceps under the spotlight.

A sense of calm pervades as soft music fills the studio. The class begins with five minutes of seated meditation,

followed by a spinal warm-up to lengthen and flex the spine. So far, so good. Then it's on to the floating lunge. “Pulse and float,” instructs Shayne soothingly. It's harder than it sounds – from a loose version of downward dog, you jump one leg towards your hands at a time, “floating” as you change. I feel like a lead weight.

I peer around to see everyone performing the graceful, sweeping movement as directed. It's now or never. I attempt to defy gravity and fling (I decide I'm not quite at the floating stage) one foot towards my hand. Thud. At the next try, I leap too high and, with my buttocks in the air, I crash down on bent wrists, looking about as graceful as a constipated frog.

Strike a pose

I fare better with the Dancer's Bridge. From downward dog, I raise my right leg, draw it to my chest and, as my left heel extends, I raise my left hand up to full extension so that my stomach faces the sky. It feels great. Impressed at my sudden sense of control and power, I feel the urge to make Japanese karate noises as I deftly rotate my body back and forth. But I sense that's not encouraged.

Then it's onto some serious kicking. The routine – a knee strike (the knee is raised to touch the hands) and front kick (a traditional martial

arts kick) – requires precision and focus and Shayne adds a floor judo roll to keep the core area active, as well as some jabs for power.

The rest of the class includes kung fu stretches; the Spinning Leaping Leopard, 180- and 360-degree jumping turns; the Fighting Crocodile, a floor-to-standing, prowling-to-kicking exercise; and the Fighting Monkey, an exercise which alternates between lunging, punching and jabbing.

Body and mind

By now I'm exhausted and sweating up a storm, and I almost cry with relief when it's time for the child's pose. The final meditation includes some spiritual teachings from Shayne, which add a final touch to the whole experience.

Budokon is a fantastic way of discovering what your body can achieve with concentration, strength and technique. And thanks to Shayne's new range of dvds, you can master budokon at home.

Back in my living room, I wonder how I will fare alone, but as soon as the soothing music starts it's easy to focus and follow. Whenever a new move is introduced, you can temporarily switch to a detailed one-on-one tutorial onscreen, where Shayne talks through the position while demonstrating on a student.

Budokon is an excellent technique to learn at home – it's unique, challenging and interesting. And after all, how many forms of exercise are also thought-provoking?

“Budokon is a fantastic way of discovering what your body can achieve with concentration and strength.”



Jennifer Aniston (left) and Meg Ryan keep in shape with budokon.

Power up

● The new budokon dvd range can be purchased from www.budokon.com and selected Australian stores. Shayne plans to visit Australia to conduct workshops later this year. Visit the website for more details.