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Orange County's favorite villainess reveals how Pilates has taken over her living room

BY ANNE LOUISE BANNON

"The OC's" Julie Cooper-Nichol may be angry, conniving and utterly dysfunctional, but Melinda Clarke, the actor who plays her, is just the opposite—a pleasant, positive person who's just as happy talking about her daughter's recent birthday party as she is about her work. She's also a Pilates enthusiast and combines her Pilates regimen with cardiovascular work to keep her body in Orange County-worthy shape. Clarke, who also got a lot of attention for her guest-starring role as Lady Heather, the dominatrix whose client turned up dead in the second season of "CSI," has said that playing Julie is a lot of fun because she gets to be the kind of scheming witch she would never be in real life.

Pilates Style: The show is doing well. That must be fun.

MC: It's a lot of fun. But there have been some story lines that are actually very...I can't say what it is, but I've got to say it's not my favorite story, just because it's dark.

PS: I'd love to talk about your exercise regime.

MC: I like to do all kinds of things. But I've

been doing Pilates, for, gosh, 14, 15 years now? I actually have a Reformer—a real Reformer—in my living room. I have to move it to my garage when people come over. I've also been working with a fantastic trainer, a very knowledgeable guy named John McClain, and he does a lot of traditional things. In addition, I also do cardio ballet class.

PS: What do you like best about Pilates?

MC: Well, it's not boring, number one. And also, my mother was a ballet dancer and I grew up dancing. It incorporates what you know as a dancer into a form of exercise. It's fun and beautiful to look at, but at the same time, it'll center everything about your body. It's about the core strength, and that's what I like.

PS: Along with your Reformer, what other equipment do you use? Do you do the mat exercises or do you have a ball, or rings?

MC: All kinds of stuff. When I work with a trainer, I do the original Pilates and the mat-work. Everything you can do on the machine, you can do on the ground, too. But, yes, I like to incorporate the ball. I like to move. I know a lot of people kind of like to go through it, and feel kind of de-stressed and relaxed. That's fine, but I want to move. I want to sweat. **PS**