

### tips for a **good cat**

- Be careful if you have sensitive knees or wrists. You may want to avoid the exercise if it causes you pain.
- Keep the shoulders relaxed and away from your ears, with your neck lengthened.
- Do not hyperextend your elbows.

- Knees should be hip-width apart.
- Hands should be under the shoulders with your shoulder blades flat against your upper back, fingers extending forward on the floor.
- Distribute the weight evenly between your legs and arms.
- Keep your belly button pulled in and breathe!



# cat tales

**Felines inspired  
these exercises,  
but Kathy Grant  
brought them to life**

WORKOUT BY KATHY GRANT,  
TEXT BY BLOSSOM LEILANI CRAWFORD  
AND CARA REESER

### **PICTURE CAT**

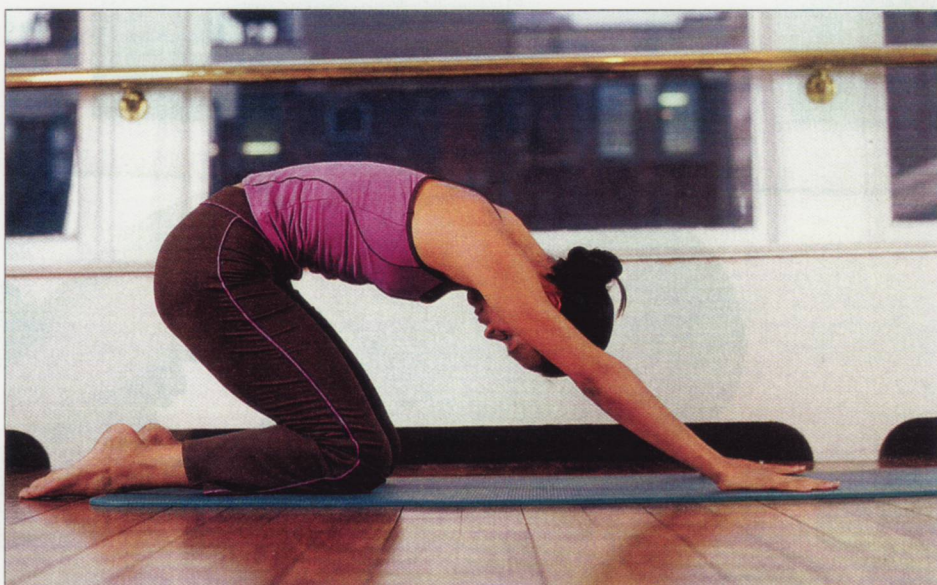
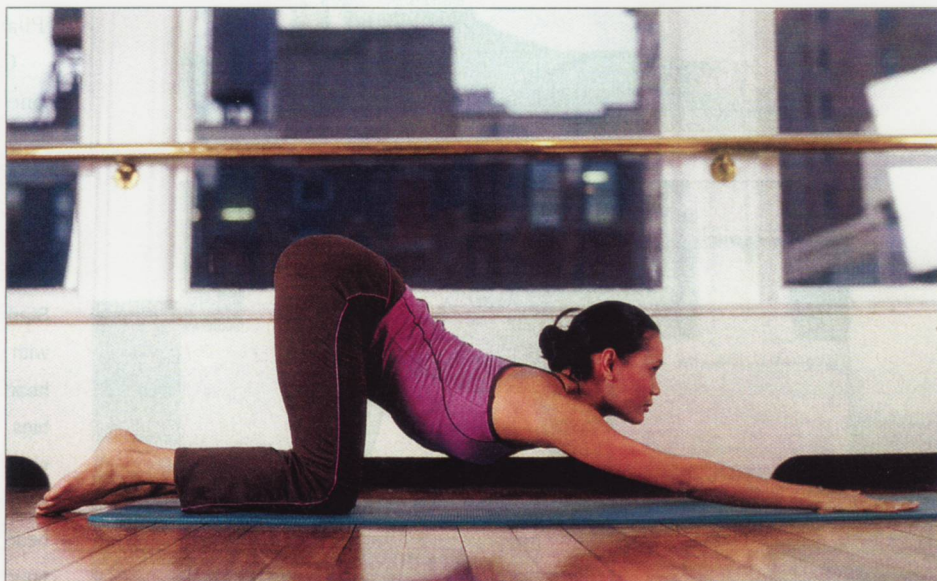
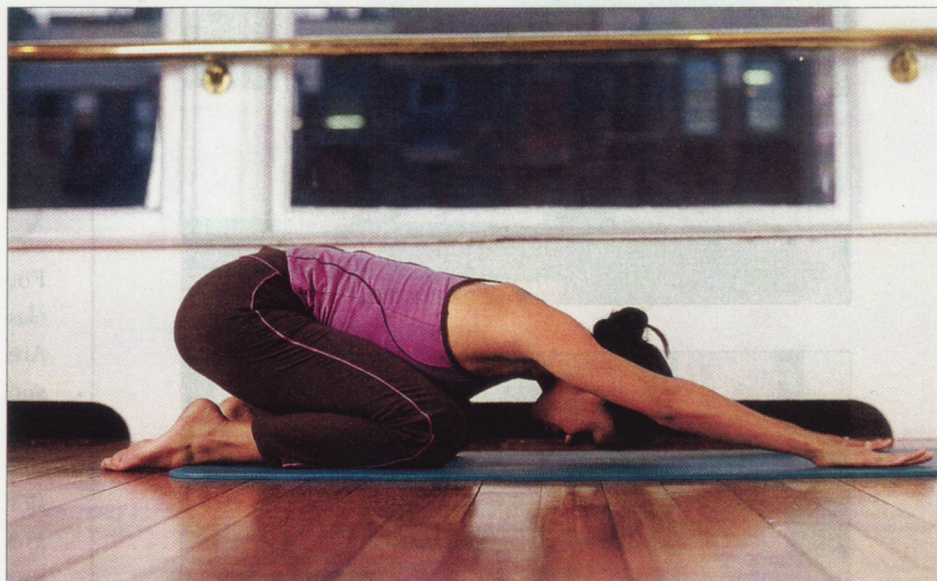
Grant's inspiration for this Cat came from a photograph of a lioness stretching her back.

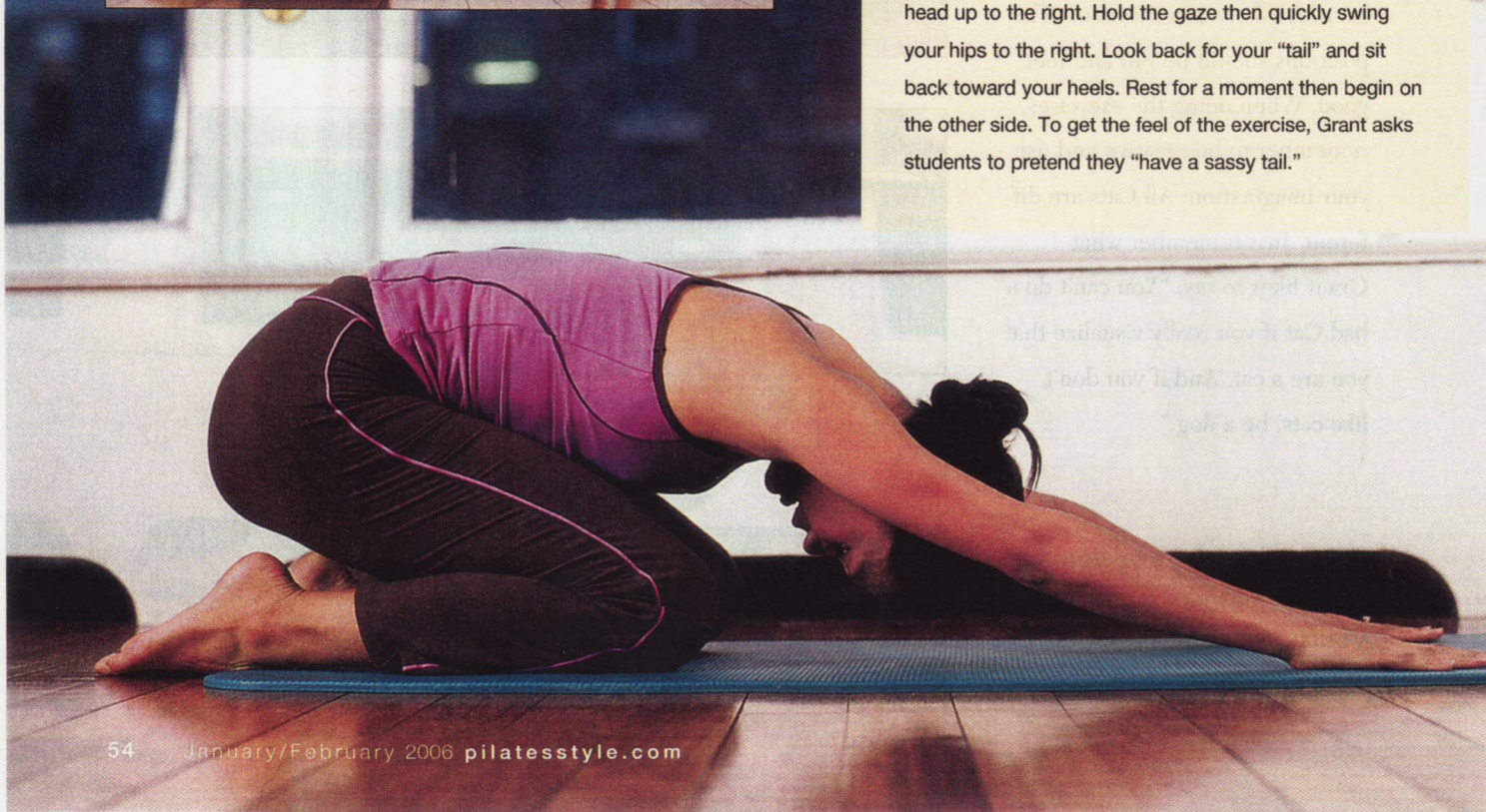
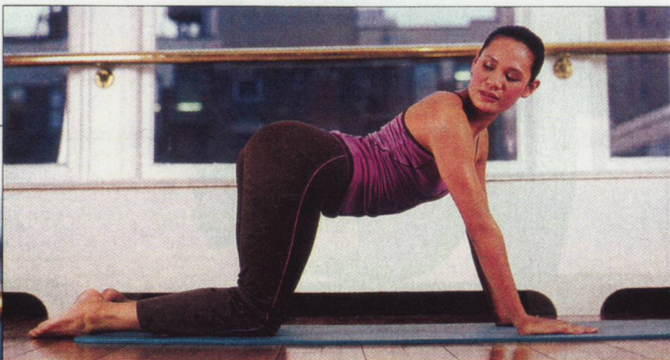
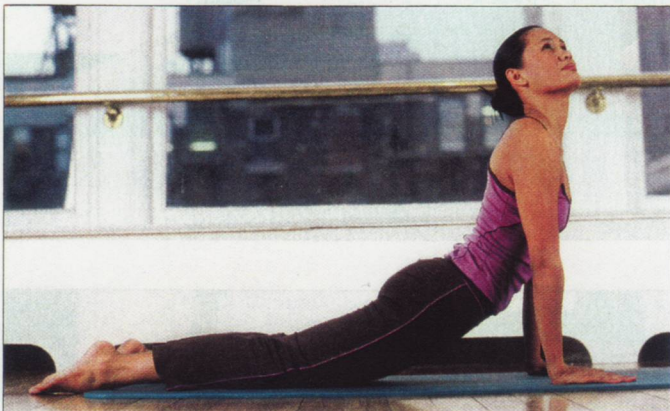
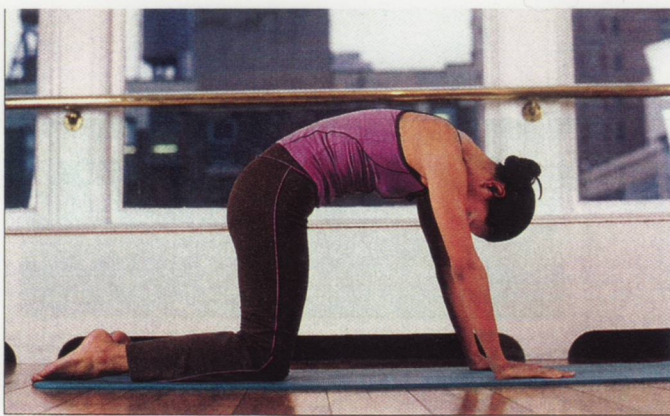
Start in the yoga position "child's pose" (sit back on your heels with your chest resting on your lap, head relaxed and falling toward the mat, hands resting down by your hips; see above). Transform yourself from a child to a cat as you circle your arms around to the front of your body. Slide your arms forward on the mat as you lift your hips, arching the lower back. Lift your head and enjoy the stretch for a few seconds. To finish, reverse the shape, rounding the back, and sit back toward your heels, returning to child's pose (see sequence opposite).

Judging from the number of furry friends pictured in Kathy Grant's small Pilates studio at New York University, it's obvious the cat is her favorite animal. It's no surprise then that the 84-year-old first-generation instructor has developed eight variations of the classic Cat exercise to add to her Pilates program, with names ranging from "The New Cat in Town" to "Sexy Cat." But Grant's affinity for this exercise goes much deeper: Recognizing that most of the Pilates matwork is done while lying on your back, Grant sees the Cats as a way for the body to shift from the supine position and take a quiet internal moment before beginning, for instance, *The Hundred*.

The Cat exercises are also a fun and satisfying way to stretch your spine, move your hips and transition between exercises. The positions should be fun and feel good. When doing the exercises, remember to be creative and use your imagination: All Cats are different. Just remember what Grant likes to say: "You can't do a bad Cat if you really visualize that you are a cat. And if you don't like cats, be a dog."

Photography by Steve Vaccariello  
Hair and makeup by Mia Sarazen  
Model: Blossom Leilani Crawford  
Workout wear by Marika





# higher education

Four days a week, Kathy Grant teaches morning mat classes at New York University, Tisch School of the Arts. Her students are dancers in the program at NYU, and many have never been exposed to Pilates before.

The morning we attended Grant's 9 am class, her students had only been attending her twice-weekly sessions for a month. Still, their form was clean and clear, as would be expected in a class taught by one of the remaining first-generation Pilates instructors, a woman who learned the discipline directly from Joseph Pilates, and has been practicing for 50 years.

On hand to assist Grant was Blossom Leilani Crawford, one of her protégés and a graduate of the program.

## RESTLESS CAT

Start in child's pose. Lift up onto your hands and knees with your spine rounded and head hanging. Keep your head down as you lean forward, lowering the front of your hips toward the mat. Just before you reach a full extension of the hip, imagine you are a cat that suddenly sees something up and off in the distance. Quickly turn your head up to the right. Hold the gaze then quickly swing your hips to the right. Look back for your "tail" and sit back toward your heels. Rest for a moment then begin on the other side. To get the feel of the exercise, Grant asks students to pretend they "have a sassy tail."

Grant would call out the order of the sequence and Leilani would demonstrate. Both assisted the students find proper placement.

The class started standing, then quickly progressed to lying-down work. Grant's mat repertory, "Before the Hundred," had them waking up their spines, strengthening their cores and stretching out tight muscles. They quietly concentrated while Grant tapped out rhythms with her foot and gave colorful cues on form. She asked students to have a "free head," like they were listening to headphones, when gently rolling their necks. "Your eyes are a paintbrush, painting straight down the wall," was her cue to help bring the head into alignment during a sit-up.

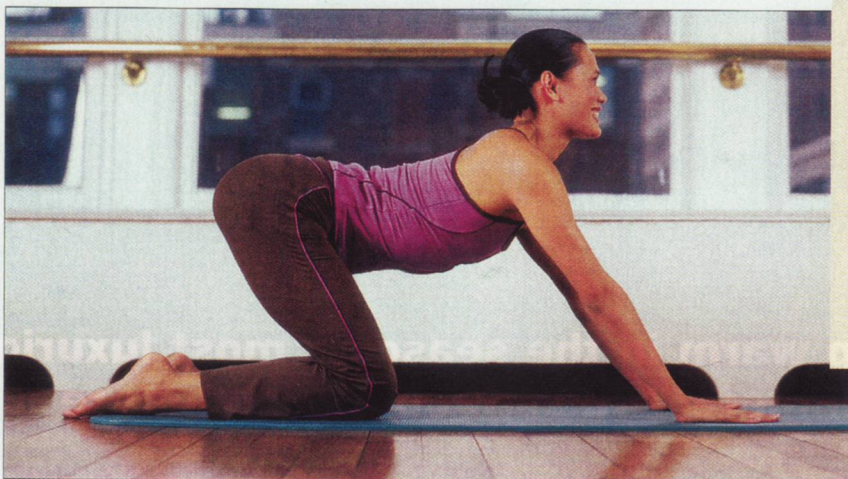
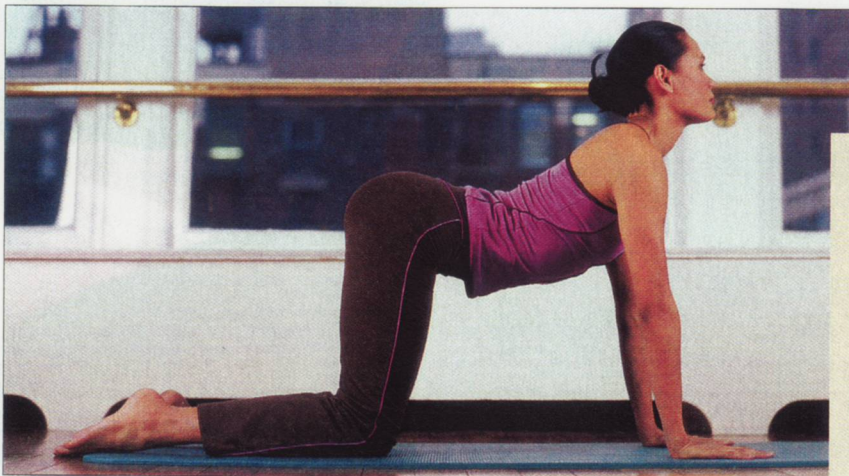
Grant also exercised their vocal cords—students recited their names, addresses and song lyrics, and even whistled and hummed at times. These tricks, developed over a lifetime of teaching, not only keep Grant's students breathing, they also encourage

students to slow down, rather than rush through the movements. When she sees someone having a hard time simplifying a movement, she reminds them, "Don't dance—then you're interpreting. You need to get the substance first. Add that to your dancing."

First-year students (undergrad and graduate) are required to take Grant's Pilates program for a full year; by the end of the second semester, they will be strong enough to do a full, vigorous Pilates mat routine, which means that they must arrive 15 minutes early for class, at 8:45. None seem to mind the early hour—these are movement habits they know can extend their careers, and keep them dancing strong for years. — *Jessica Cassity*



Blossom Leilani Crawford (r), one of Kathy Grant's protégés and assistants, has a version of the Cat named after her.



### HISSING CAT

Start in a rounded-back cat (shoulders over the hands and hips over the knees). Working from your "tail" to your head, slowly reverse your spine, into extension, like you are a cat being scratched. When you reach your upper spine, make a hissing sound as you lift your head to complete the reverse curve. In this arched position, reach your hips back toward your heels. Keep your entire spine in extension as you push through your arms and move your hips back toward your heels. Keep hissing. Remember to keep your lower belly pulled in the entire time. As your hips reach your heels, relax into the yoga pose of the child. **PS**

