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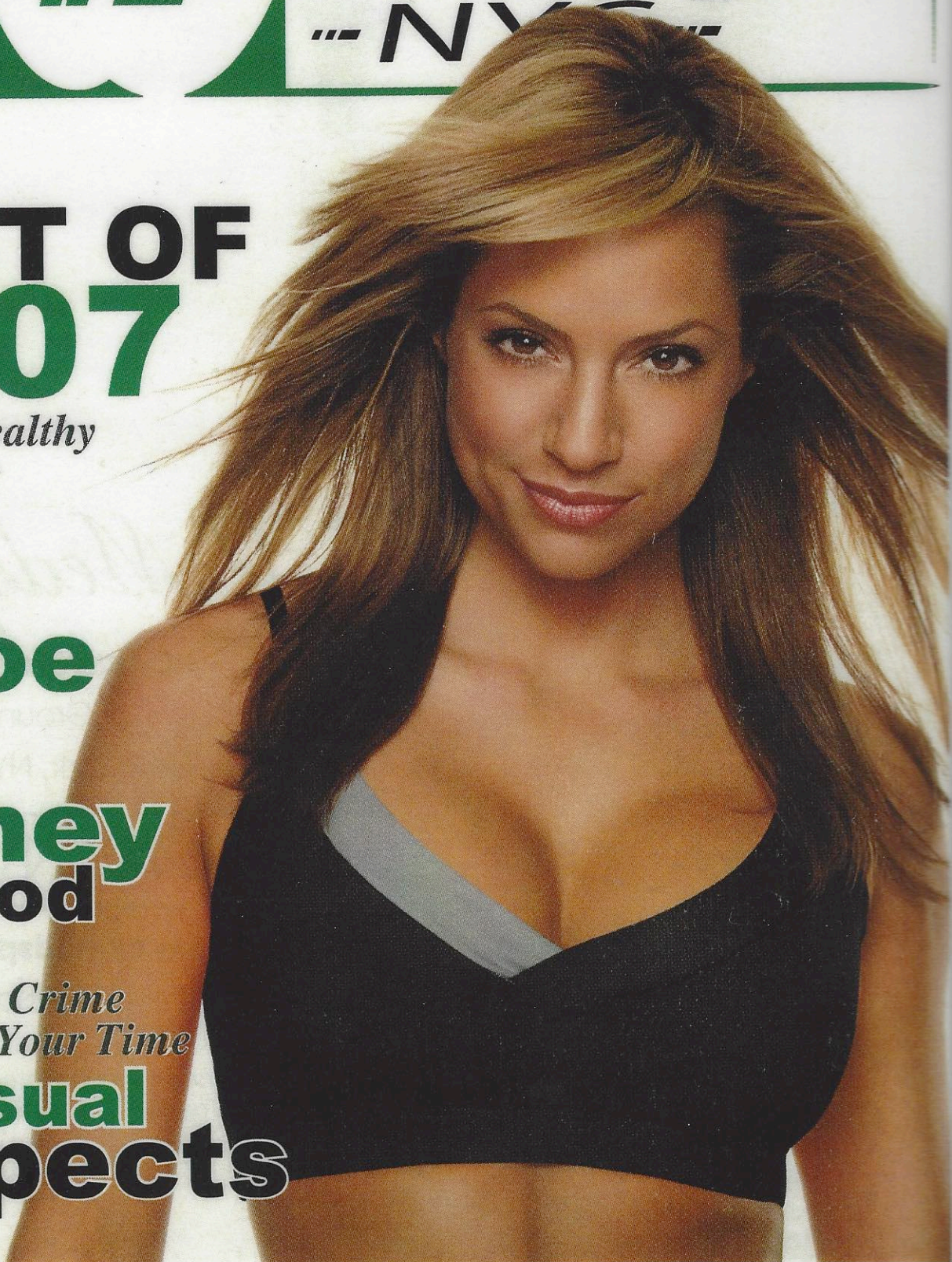
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Harmony By Karate

Located within Reebok Sports Club/NY
(Reebok membership is not necessary)
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New York, NY 10023
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Rating: ●●●●●●●●●●
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They say true harmony comes from within. But I'm not sure that "they" had all the modern external distractions and responsibilities that we have. These days, harmony is what you get with a good cell phone ringtone. It seems that whether it's the phone, email, work, family, relationships—there's always something pulling us away from our focus. I mean, how are we supposed to achieve balance in life, when we can't even balance our checkbooks?

But there might be a simple answer. Sensei John Mirrione would tell you that

much of what you need to achieve inner harmony can be learned through karate. That's a tall order to say the least, but I was willing to give it a try.

As the sensei of Harmony By Karate, a school housed within the extravagant 6-floor Reebok Sports Club/NY, John has infused his teachings with an interesting blend of modern philosophies and ancient traditions. Throughout the workout, there is a focus on breathing, and the calming, meditative aspects of connecting the mind, body, and spirit. His training also incorporates many of the old fighting techniques with a unique fluid approach that recognizes differences rather than constraining students to a strict set of movements.

Before doing anything, I was asked to raise my arms directly in front of me in the most relaxed and comfortable position possible. This is the position where all of my punches should make contact. Right away, this was making sense. Everybody is different, so of course, no two people will punch or kick the same. It's not about studying proper form, It's

Harmony By Karate

about doing what's natural to you, and allowing your body to react in the most instinctive way possible. Within those natural movements, there is more speed and power than any practiced technique could ever provide.

Could these thoughts possibly apply to creating a more harmonious lifestyle outside of the dojo? Let's apply them to relationships? Who gets the girl—the guy who spends all his time planning what he's going to say to her from across the room, or the spontaneous guy that whisks in, goes with the flow, and sweeps her off her feet?

You know—I'm starting to think there might be something to this. I had just walked in the door, and already I had a new perspective on movement, my body, and life in general.



John Mirrione goes in for a choke

But the technique goes beyond just embracing your natural range of motion, it's about bringing a fluidity to that motion. Punches and kicks are not snapped in a mechanical fashion. That snapping motion breaks down the cartilage and wears down joints over time. Each punch is done from a relaxed stance with a circular follow through. This allows you to create an angular attack and return to a relaxed position in a single, fluid movement. The

method is a hybrid of karate and kung fu with a hint of Western boxing.

Another lesson learned. Life is cyclical and trying to go through it in a mechanical fashion will only wear you down. You'll get better results out of your ac-

tions if you relax and always follow through.

Though his specific techniques have less structure than traditional karate teachings, John has a tremendous respect for the art. He also has a tremendous respect for his students, which is reflected in his various philosophies. Everyone in the Harmony By Karate dojo is equal. It's not built around a hierarchy of rank or what color belt you wear. It's an ego-free environment, and everyone is treated with equal respect. In fact, John will often ask the students to instruct one another—and even to instruct him. It's an interesting concept, but by teaching someone else, watching them learn, and letting go of your own habits to concentrate on their movement, you actually learn a lot about your own technique.

This one's obvious: equality is priceless. We can learn from our differences, and it's never too late to keep learning. In the coming months, Harmony By Karate will take that philosophy to the next level, as they partner with MaAfrika Tikkun (www.MaAfrikaTikkun.org.uk), a charity organization working towards transforming African communities in crisis. Two women from South African villages will be flown in to live with John, and learn the Harmony By Karate ways. They will share their own unique take on karate and life, and bring their knowledge back to the villages where they will teach a new generation—a generation largely orphaned by a horrific pandemic—how to achieve fitness, empowerment, and harmony within.

And I can think of no better way to teach them. After just one hour, I walked away with a completely new outlook on my daily life. The true test was the next day when I ripped the crotch of my jeans in public while demonstrating some kicks for my girlfriend. My newfound inner harmony allowed me to relax and go with the flow. Of course, my girlfriend urged me to take my flow home and change my pants. But that just didn't feel like the natural thing to do. Maybe I should have her stop by Harmony By Karate. After all, I was just bursting at the seams with my newfound inner harmony. ■