

A New Reality

Taking Jim Wagner's RBPP instructor course in LA

When *Blitz's* fitness writer Matt Jones touched down in Los Angeles' Orange County early this year, it wasn't to soak up some sun and party with a lot of rich folk as happens on the TV show, *The OC*. He was there to spend some time training in 'the dungeon', brawling with multiple attackers, getting shot with high-powered air-rifles and sprayed in the face with pepper-spray ... all in the name of becoming an instructor in Jim Wagner's world-renowned Reality-Based Personal Protection system (RBPP). Here, Matt tells it like it was.

After 35 hours of flight time and stopovers, I touched down at LA's international airport, LAX. I was pretty darn tired as I hadn't slept for about 30 hours (long story), but I was really looking forward to starting my training in nine hours time. Some may think it's overly enthusiastic to fly across the globe for training, but from what I already knew of Jim Wagner's Reality-Based Personal Protection (RBPP) system it was going to be well worth it.

Many Australian martial artists may know Jim Wagner from his long-running column in America's Black Belt magazine, though most probably won't be familiar with his RBPP system. Jim has trained in many different martial arts and previously taught Jeet Kune Do under Guro Dan Inosanto in California. He was always interested in training as functionally as possible and shortly after leaving the US Army he became a prison guard, which gave him a great insight into the realities of self-defence. Jim continued his training and went on to become a cop, SWAT team member, SWAT Instructor, Special Agent for the US Federal Government and a bodyguard to the rich and famous.

During this time he kept refining his teaching methods and for over two decades he has regularly been hired as a training consultant by many of the world's leading military and law-enforcement units such as Germany's GSG9, Israel's Mishtara, Brazil's GATE and the US Marshals Special Operations Group, just to name a few. He is also one of the only Westerners to have been called in as a close-quarter fighting consultant at Israel's Baghdad 8 (the military training wing of the famous Wingate Institute).

After retiring from his position as a Federal Agent, Jim decided it was time to start helping civilians improve their self-defence skills. He began designing courses specially for civilians,

drawing on his vast range of professional training experience to help make the training as effective and safe as possible. And so, Reality-Based Personal Protection (RBPP) was born.

So what is RBPP — is it Western, Eastern, Israeli or what? Well, the truth is that it's simply a combination of whatever methods Jim and his worldwide network of RBPP instructors have found to work well under pressure. The system constantly evolves and because most RBPP instructors have a background in at least one other system, Jim gets to see all sorts of things attempted during the instructor courses. If something works well, then Jim and a few others try it out. If it then works well for the vast majority of people, it becomes part of the system (conversely, if it only works well for the athletically gifted or super strong, then it doesn't become part of the RBPP system). Even the tactics of criminals and thugs are analysed and worked into the system so that participants can learn to recognise and deal with 'dirty tactics'.

The Training

Upon first entering Jim's training facility, I immediately noticed that it looked very different from any martial arts or self-defence school I'd been in. Everything was matt-black: the concrete floor, the concrete walls, the ceiling, light switches, door handles — even the electrical wiring and air-conditioning unit was painted black. The windows were all blacked out and there was not a mirror, poster, or certificate in sight. Clearly the priority here was having a very practical training environment rather than a nice vibe. Jim promptly explained to me that he views the training environment as both a stage and a tool; by having the entire place painted black, it's easy to create any lighting conditions for any scenario. It's also easy to paint over any marks left from