

The Christmas House • Home Fitness Rooms

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Photos by Phelan Ebenhack

R O O M S T H A T WORK OUT

BY LISA LEVINE

Ready to sweat? So what if your best-looking workout clothes are in the hamper—looks don't matter when the gym is in your own home.

We all want a healthy lifestyle, but fitness routines are often the first thing cut from the busiest schedules. Enter the home fitness room—the newest must-have amenity for the upscale homebuyer or renovator. Whether a well-stocked cardio or strength-training center near a grand master bath or a temple of health with soaring lake views nestled among the main living areas, the health club has found its way home.

Convenience is the biggest factor bringing fitness aids and machines into the home. And if motivation is the key to any health regimen, eliminating the need to drag off to the club can make the difference between establishing a regular workout routine and fitting in workouts during those rare free moments.

The home gym also solves another common health-club issue: lack of privacy. In your own home it's all about you—no glistening hard bodies to show up your not-yet-perfect shape, no waiting to get on the machines you prefer and no shame if you're not wearing the trendiest sport couture.

Orlando custom homebuilder Ray Coudriet says that in his business, fitness rooms are "almost as common now as home theaters." Coudriet has seen them run the gamut from a single machine to a "mini-wellness center," a fully outfitted gym complete with a steam shower, massage table, juice bar and hot tub.

Location is a key consideration in designing a home gym. To help you stick to your routine, a fitness room should be in an inviting location that is well ventilated and has plenty of light. Natural light is a plus, and a beautiful view can turn the room into a welcoming retreat. A mirrored wall can both open up the space and help you monitor your form while exercising, says exercise equipment dealer Greg Pecor, co-owner of Fitness Showcase of Orlando. He also recommends high ceilings, ceiling fans and a wall-mounted television—both for keeping entertained during repetitive exercise



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The type of workout you are going for determines what you will need to outfit a home fitness room. Cardio and weight loss routines require machines that encourage continuous motion: treadmills, elliptical cross-trainers and exercise bikes. Strength training calls for free weights or a home gym system that allows you to isolate muscle groups. Buying top-of-the-line machines may be expensive, but it is highly recommended for ensuring quality. For home gyms Pecor recommends manufacturers Vectra and Hoist at the top end in both quality and price, and Precor and Vision at the mid-range. For treadmills, Pecor's top picks are Landice and Vision.

For customers furnishing a new fitness room complete with several large pieces of equipment, Pecor's company works with architects' plans or drawings of room dimensions and features to design layouts for customers that "show what they can put in." With a considerable time commitment this can also be done by the homeowner: The fitness machine manufacturer Precor has a layout feature on its website.

In building custom homes, Coudriet works with homeowners to ensure that the fitness room is planned and outfitted to complement their fitness routines: for some it may be simply a treadmill near the master bath, while for those who work out daily or who need to accommodate multiple family members, it should be multiple stations in a common area. Some homeowners for whom fitness is central to their lives pull out all the stops. Coudriet recalls clients who chose to build a separate grand fitness outbuilding with picture windows framing water on three sides, instead of the more common guesthouse: "The gym was as important to them as anything."

For all but the simplest fitness rooms, Coudriet points out the need for special



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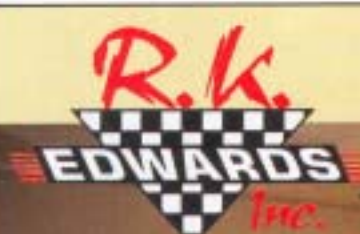





considerations in designing the room, a second-floor room may need a concrete layer under the flooring, both for structural considerations and for noise reduction. Noise should also be a consideration in location; the sound of a pounding treadmill at the crack of dawn may not be welcome to nearby sleepers. If the room contains multiple machines, outlets should be placed near each to ensure the cords do not become hazards. Air-conditioning vents can also be located according to the homeowners' comfort preferences.

When purchasing equipment, you will find higher-quality products and a better selection at fitness equipment specialty shops rather than general sporting-goods stores or department or discount stores. Before purchasing any new type of equipment, it's best to try one out at a local gym for a few weeks and decide if it is something you can commit to using regularly. After all, fitness experts agree that the best pieces of exercise equipment you can buy are the ones that you will use consistently.

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Sticking With Your Workout

Designing a home gym gets you nowhere if you rarely use it. Here are some tips to help ensure your fitness machines don't end up as expensive sculptures.

- Exercise first thing in the morning. Research shows this is the surest route to consistency.
- Schedule your workouts and honor them as you would any appointment.
- Set small, realistic goals to start; otherwise, you set yourself up for failure.
- Vary your workouts to help stave off the boredom of routine.
- Partner with a workout buddy.
- Use a diversion such as television, music or a magazine during repetitive routines.
- Hire a personal trainer to enhance your technique and provide added motivation.

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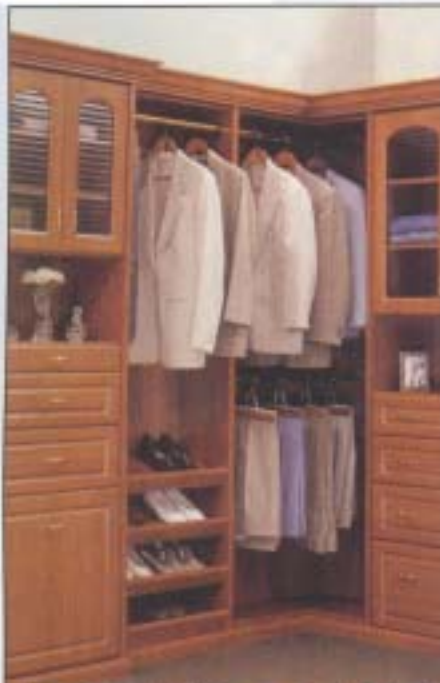
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- Document your progress, including higher intensity or duration of the workout, weight or inches lost, and gains in muscularity and strength.
- Reward yourself for your successes: new music or a massage are healthy options.
- Don't give up if you have to miss workouts for a while. Make the effort to get back on track.

Personal Trainers in the Home

If having a home gym is a convenient way to stick with your fitness regimen, how much more convenient to have a personal trainer visit your home for one-on-one workout sessions. Part expert exercise consultant, part motivator and taskmaster, part monitor to ensure your workout is safe and effective, personal trainers are increasingly taking their business out of the health clubs and into the home.

Local personal trainer Tad Campbell explains that a highly trained and appropriately certified trainer has the expertise to help clients get the most from their workouts. Campbell starts off new clients with a detailed health questionnaire that helps him modify the routine to accommodate any limitations or health problems. He measures heart rate to find the target rate, and blood pressure if the client has a history of hypertension. He also has clients complete a detailed nutrition profile and uses that to construct a sample diet that will work for them,



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saying "95 percent of my clients want to lose weight."

What does it cost to hire a personal trainer to come to your home? Campbell says his range of \$70 to \$75 per hour session is the norm for a qualified professional. While this is more than you will pay for a trainer at a health club, keep in mind that with travel time and waiting through a client's last-minute preparations before the workout, it can easily "take two hours for a one-hour session." Training sessions are typically scheduled for three times a week.

Finding the right trainer for your needs may take some investigation. Campbell notes that the best trainers have at least a B.A. in exercise science as well as instructor certifications from the American College of Sports Medicine or the National Strength and Conditioning Association; Campbell has both certifications as well as a master's degree in exercise science. Other factors to consider when choosing a trainer include the following:

- Ask for references, then call them to get an idea of the trainer's style and competence.
- Make sure the trainer has liability insurance and provides business policies in writing.
- Look for a trainer able to assist with special needs.
- Decide if this is someone you can work with, including timing of workouts, personality and even gender. ■



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