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IMPROVE

Home gym ideas to set your pulse racing

Two thirds of adults have exercised at home since the pandemic began, so no wonder build-your-own gyms are all the rage, Hugh Graham writes



Borja de Maqua and Dean Poulton at their home in Coleshill, Warwickshire
ADRIAN SHERRATT

Hugh Graham Sunday May 30 2021, 12.01am, The Sunday Times

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Dean Poulton had long wanted a home gym on his Georgian estate in Warwickshire. “But I questioned myself, would I use it that much?” says the architect, 34. “In a home gym you don’t get that motivation from other people. Then Covid hit, gyms closed, so I decided to do it. And we run a holiday let (mytinyestate.com) in one of our cottages, so I figured if I don’t use the gym, at least the guests will.”

He and his partner, Borja de Maqua, converted the rustic Georgian laundry building themselves — it is the size of a single-car garage — and bought a multidisciplinary machine from Primal Strength (primalstrength.com), as well as free weights, slam balls and rubber flooring — they spent about £6,000 on kit, including the Olympic rings they hang from the old oak beams.

“We ordered the equipment in August and got it in December. So I have no excuses anymore. The gym has become my morning ritual. Even though gyms are opening up, I am not inclined to go back. It is so convenient because you don’t have to get ready and look half-decent for other people. And once you finish you can just shower in your own home.”

Poulton is not alone in moving his workouts home. Eleiko, the gym equipment company, has seen an 1,800 per cent spike in sales since the UK went into lockdown in March 2020 — typical spends for home gyms are between £4,000-£15,000, according to its managing director, Dale Beech; 28 per cent of all British adults have bought exercise equipment since the start of Covid-19, and 64 per cent of adults have done home workouts according to Mintel, the consumer trends analyst.

Even though gyms are opening up again, architects think demand for home gyms will increase, as the WFH lifestyle becomes the workout-from-home lifestyle. To suit the pandemic mood, sterile basement gyms are out and holistic wellbeing spaces are in: natural light and ventilation, eco-friendly materials and equipment, as well as smart space-saving equipment such as JaxJox’s six-weights-in-one digital kettlebell.



Here are some home gym ideas to set your pulses racing.



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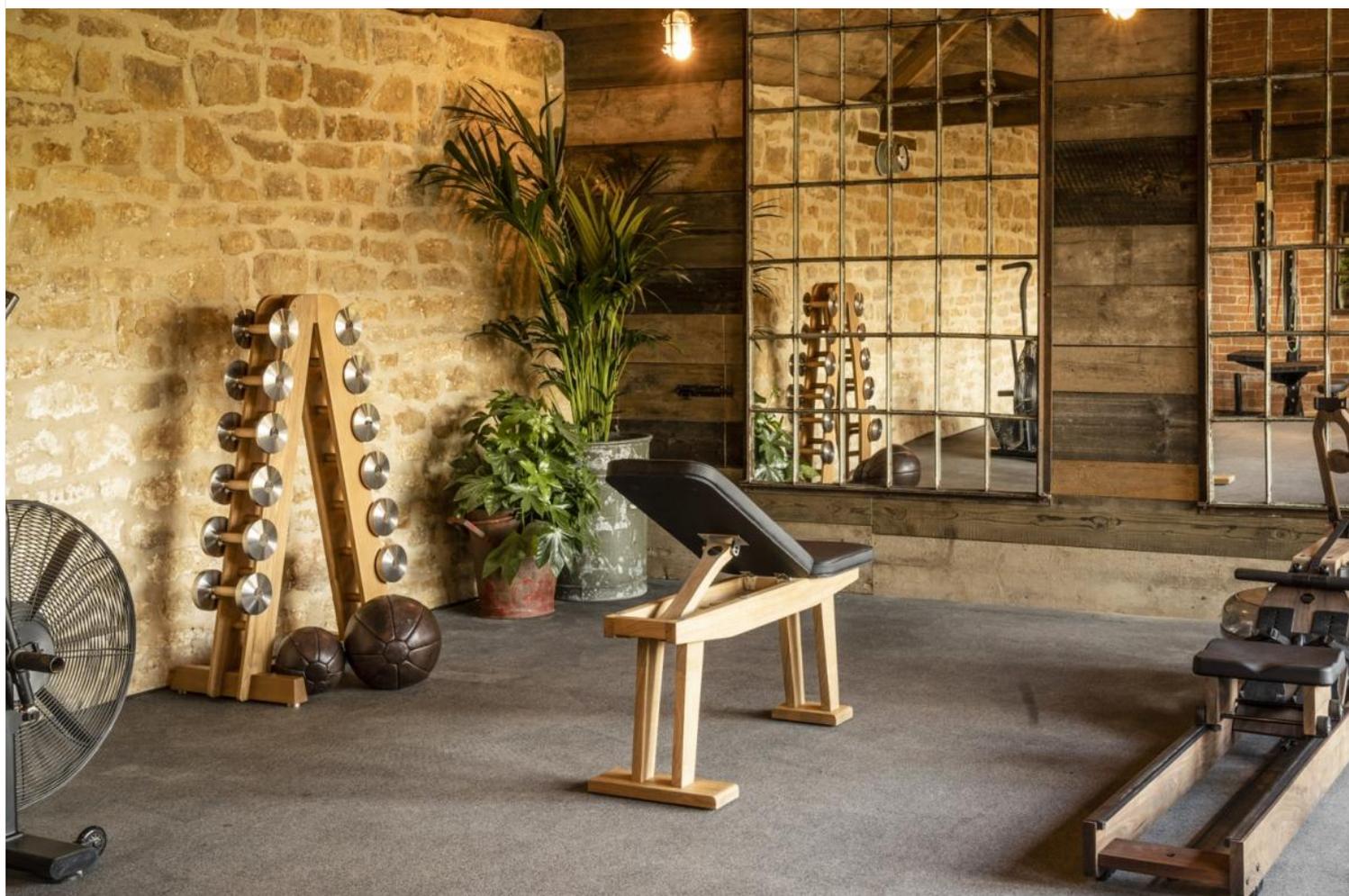
Zanna Van Dijk at home in Surrey

The gym in a garage

When gyms closed during the pandemic, [Zanna van Dijk](#) and her boyfriend resorted to working out on the floor of their flat in Earlsfield, southwest London. That got old fast. By August they had bought a house in Surrey, and immediately set about converting their double garage into a home gym. “It was the highest priority. I am a personal trainer, so it was all systems go,” says Van Dijk, 28. “We built a home gym before we had our sofa, our bed or our dining table.”

They put in rubber flooring, a squat rack, rowing machine, SkiErg crossfit machine, racks of dumbbells, slam balls, kettle balls, medicine balls and a box for step-ups. To keep it warm in winter, Zanna’s boyfriend taped sheets of insulation to the garage doors and covered them with a roller blind; in hot weather they open the garage doors. “I train five days a week, about 40 minutes a day. I don’t do so much Pilates as I am a sucker for a sweaty

workout. Having a home gym makes it easier to work out, I don't have to commute. I definitely feel fitter. Although I do miss the community feel of classes, so I will do those again as things open up."



CHRIS TERRY

The Cotswolds stable

Converted from stables in a Cotswolds manor house, this rustic gym captures the zeitgeist perfectly. It was inspired by Soho Farmhouse, uses reclaimed materials (the timber, mirror frames and lights are from factories and salvage yards) and the rubber flooring is made from recycled tires. The plastic-free kit is by the eco gym equipment company Paragon Studio (paragonstudio.co.uk). It includes a WaterRower machine that uses FSC certified walnut (£1,375); the display screen is powered by your own exertions (there is no mains plug) and the resistance comes from water in a tank (proponents say it feels more like real rowing). Also pictured is Paragon's oak dumbbell rack with weights made from recycled steel (£9,500 inc VAT) and an oak and leather adjustable bench (£3,000 inc VAT).



The 'living wall' gym

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money?

The basement gym of this mansion in Highgate, north London, does not feel like a basement at all. That is because the architects, Charlton Brown (charltonbrown.com), dug a light well and created a vertical garden “so the owners did not feel like they were staring at brick wall”, says Mimi Viney, the project architect. “The garden is artificial, but it feels real, and adds tranquil and peaceful vibes.” (Green Geenvee, Superior Artificial Planting Solutions, £14,000 for about 25 sq metres, greenenvee.co.uk). The minimal-frame glazing by Orama opens so you can step out into the stone-clad light well and cool off (it cost £37,000, en.oramaminimalframes.it). On the rack are sculptural free weights by Nohrd — the designer dumbbells du jour.



GRANT MAUNDER

Cool Welsh concrete

The idea of a concrete gym conjures visions of a brutalist prison, but this Welsh workout space positively shimmers - it is above a garage outbuilding for an Edwardian country pile in south Wales. The polished concrete is a “beautifully soft surface to touch”, says Chris Loyn, founder of Loyn & Co architects (loyn.co.uk). “The oiled steel ceiling also gives off a sheen.”

The vast floor space (15 x 7 metres or 1,130 sq ft) stops the fiftysomething businessman and his wife from getting overheated. It has full glazed windows onto farm fields, and is reached via stairs to an outdoor deck with hot tub; there is also a sauna and shower room. Loyn thinks a serene aesthetic is helpful when you are busting your gut in a workout. “There is a coolness and calmness to it. It is all about yin and yang.”



The prefab garden gym

These prefab home gyms cost £58,500 plus VAT, are made of eco-friendly materials (Accoya and cork) and can be assembled in your garden in five days. Made in Hertfordshire by Modulr Space ([modulr.space](https://www.modulr.space)), the entire M7 H&H units measure 805cm x 305cm and contains two 7.4 sq metre rooms separated by a breezeway. At 2.5 metres high, they can be built without planning permission, but this may pose a problem for tall people who want to run on a treadmill or do overhead weights. There are three solutions for that: Modulr Space does dual-pitch 4m tall structures (permitted if the dwelling is 2 metres away from the boundary) or it can dig another 800mm into the ground, for example, which raises the ceiling (and the price, to £65,000). Or it can dig a trench for the treadmill alone (£300). Made of structural insulated panels, with underfloor heating, solar blinds and several doors for cross ventilation, it is warm in winter and cool in summer.



ANDY MATTHEWS

The tree in the basement

Basement digs don't have to be all doom and gloom: in this five-storey townhouse in Notting Hill the architects Tigg & Coll (tiggcollarchitects.com) built a light well with room for an olive tree inside. On the left side of the light well is a glass door for ventilation. And they made the ceiling height 3 metres, which they suggest as a minimum for home gyms.



SAM GRADY

The glass gym

The next best thing to outdoor workouts, this partially glass gym has two French doors that open onto a yoga deck and several windows that open for ventilation. It is an extension on a Victorian family house in Whitstable, Kent, linking the garage to the main house. “The clients wanted a Crittall-style window, so we used double-glazed aluminium-framed windows in a bronze finish from the Heritage range by Smart Systems (smartsystems.co.uk),” says Sonya Baker, partner at Meme Architects (memearchitects.co.uk). “The cost of the glazing for this project was £13,000, including VAT. The cost of the room itself was £39,000 for 18 sq metres.”



Oxfordshire zen

Built for the Chinese owner of an Oxfordshire pile, this yoga/Pilates studio is the embodiment of home gym zen. The floors and walls are engineered wood with a laminate bamboo finish, trimmed with white Amtico vinyl for easy cleaning — tiles with grout get really grubby in gyms, advises Stephen Green, co-founder of Holland Green architects (hollandgreen.co.uk). On the left are benches with towel storage and on the end is a cushioned bench with storage; Green also likes to use benches on top of cages for storage. At the opposite end, not pictured, is a mirrored wall incorporating a TV — which hides ugly cables and conceals more storage. LEDs hidden in the coffered ceiling and gauzy blinds keep the mood soft and meditative. “I advise people to just have a single machine and some weights, and don’t cram too much in. Often people buy multiple machines and only end up using one.”

Green also advises painting in VOC-free paints, which won’t harm you as you huff and puff, to have full glazing only on north and east-facing walls otherwise you will overheat, and to ensure good ventilation such as MVHR systems.



Hampstead sanctuary

A “wellness basement” under construction for a family of four in Hampstead, this gym is a “little paradise” inspired by the Japanese-style California houses of Frank Lloyd Wright, according to its architect, Daniel Leon, founder of Square Feet Architects (squarefeetarchitects.co.uk). It has a hot tub, shower, living wall and light well. And the floor will be an old-school English oak stained in soothing tones. “When we were at school all the sports hall floors were made of larch and pine,” Leon says. “Wooden sprung floors are what you need in basketball. If you drop a kettlebell, an English oak floor can take it. It just adds to the patina.”



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Hans van Riemsdijk



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A ⋮

Concept 2 rower which you can split and fold away.
 Two dumbbells with adjustable weights. Google all you can do with those from squats to curls et cetera
 Simple yoga mat 5 to £10 - everything from push ups press ups planks sit-ups etc

Interchanging all of those will give you a full blown circuit training adjustable any which way you choose.

Don't bother with the treadmill - just go running in the street or park.
...See more *(Edited)*

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(9\)](#)

J ⋮

A foldable incline/decline/flat bench is a good addition too, to make the most of what you can do with the dumbbells.

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(1\)](#)

J ⋮

Not exactly budget are they? I pay about £120pcm for my gym membership. At the prices quoted here, it would take 35 years+ to break even and that's before you factor in establishment and hire replacement. Nice though they are, I'll stick with the gym and the local park as a free bonus.

2 DAYS AGO

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(5\)](#)

A ⋮

My no-frills gym costs £30 per month.

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend](#)

[↩ Show 1 more reply](#)

S ⋮

Back in January 2020, I took the plunge and bought my own squat rack with weights etc. and it's probably one of the best investments I've made:
2 DAYS AGO

- No commute to the gym
- No monthly membership costs
- No waiting to use equipment
- No rubbish music playing
- No pressure to finish sets for other people

The only downside are no dumbbells, no machines if you want to target specific areas and no cardio machines and no perving on other people in the gym but c'est la vie.

1 DAY AGO

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(4\)](#)

R ⋮

I would strongly recommend the twist selectable dumbbells.. they have become very pricey in last year at 500 quid a pair for a set up to 25kg... but you can get heavier if you need them. Incredible space saving piece of kit

1 DAY AGO

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend](#)

M ⋮

“Wellness”: what a ridiculous word.

Situl
[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(3\)](#)

2 DAYS AGO

S ⋮

My flat is now half gym, half workspace, half everything else! ie overcrowded. Punchbag and trx hanging in the sitting room, water rower standing by the costume rail, treadmill next to the bed. Piles of fabrics on the sofa !! Just off to walk some more of the Ring of Kerry- Conqueror- great app!!

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(2\)](#)

A **Rikitiki** > Situl ⋮

2 DAYS AGO
Step one; move put of my apartment and into a house.

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(2\)](#)

M ⋮

A great idea but is it over capitalising?
Mike Hunt

SEVERAL YEARS AGO
Several years ago I watched a video of a young athlete in South Africa, demonstrating his preparations for the Olympics. His equipment was made entirely from discarded materials that he had recycled and repurposed. Cost? Nothing. He set up an outdoor gym which was as amazing as it was effective.

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(2\)](#)

T **isan Smith** ⋮

2 DAYS AGO
Could the South African climate be replicated in the UK?
Nope.

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(1\)](#)

M ⋮

~~Not a fan~~ **Wendy** stick with my garden (came with the house!), rusty weight plates (free from a mate) and Les Mills online classes (£75 for a year) :)

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(2\)](#)

P ⋮

Mark Thomas garden for working out in the rain...?

2 DAYS AGO [Reply](#) [☆ Recommend](#)

[↩ Show 1 more reply](#)

S ⋮

Entertaining, if unreal. "typical spends for home gyms are between £4,000-£15,000," eh? I'd already converted my garage into a workshop, fully dry ~~The Vagabond~~ **andreas** 2 DAYS AGO ~~and one~~ ago, I'd become sick of commercial gyms. So well before lockdowns came to blight our lives, I was devoting part of this comfortable space to exercise. Well, a bench, plus a set of weights, all acquired on Ebay for a total of around £25. Regular walking does the rest. But I suppose this kind of article is envy porn, how the other half lives. *(Edited)*

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(1\)](#)

I **MBCB** ⋮

2 DAYS AGO
A bit different from tripping over the dogs in the kitchen. Which is what happens in our house!

[Reply](#) [☆ Recommend \(1\)](#)
Paul Jenkins > MBCB
2 DAYS AGO

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 **Samuel Roberts**
2 DAYS AGO

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