



Movement Haus: Is your condo's gym fit for an Urban Athlete?

Over the past decade, Toronto's condominium marketplace has evolved significantly. Today's demanding condominium purchasers are young, well educated, health conscious, design savvy and hip. New purchasers want to be where the action is because no one realistically enjoys spending an hour or more commuting to work each day on the Gardiner or DVP (or living with mom and dad) and not everyone in this generation has half a million to drop on their first new home. Thankfully, developers are now offering units at a more affordable price point. There's a catch: these units are considerably smaller, some less than 400 square feet. Entertaining ten of your coolest friends for dinner or a Super Bowl party in a space this size is not ideal, which is why you're seeing more and more emphasis on superlative finishes and unparalleled amenities. The building fitness amenity (a fancy term for gym) is no exception.

Many time-strapped condo purchasers are seeking convenient ways to look and feel their best by maintaining a healthy and fit lifestyle at home. For this reason, condominium fitness amenities have garnered much attention in recent years. Buzzwords like "State of the art", "World class" and "Five-star" make regular appearances in marketing brochures. But do you know what you're really getting in your new condo fitness amenity? And what exactly is "state of the art" anyway?

In the past, many condominium fitness amenities were poorly designed, equipped and maintained. Equally problematic, the fitness equipment was not customized to the building's demographic (translation: "ab rollers" — a no-no for today's twenty- and thirtysomethings). This is what happens when fitness amenities are designed by professionals (the developer's architect, interior design firm or fitness equipment supplier) who know very little about the functionality of the space and how it gets used. Neither are these people spending countless sweaty hours in the completed space. The notion of a fitness consultant is relatively new and now, finally, they play a more integral role in the early planning and design stages. No longer is the fitness amenity an afterthought.

The landscape of how we exercise is constantly changing. Today's health-conscious urban athlete demands fitness amenities that offer an exercise experience rather than various pieces of traditional equipment dropped in leftover space in the basement.

True-to-form state of the art fitness equipment offers tech savvy features such as iPod integration, touch screens and internet-ready capability that makes 30 minutes on the treadmill go by in a snap while you watch Dexter or CSI. Exercise research and functionality has progressed and well-designed and equipped amenities now offer more versatile ways to improve your workout; implementing functional trainers, TRX and proprioceptive training tools for you to get your balance on — such as Bosu, medicine balls and dumbbells.

The design of the fitness area should marry function and form by adopting an equipment layout that flows and makes sense based on various types of workouts. Flooring, lighting, safety considerations and designated areas for small classes are items of chief importance in achieving a studio or boutique feel (the anti-bodybuilding gym). Furthermore, what would an exceptional fitness amenity be without professional health and fitness experts to help you achieve your six-pack? Spinning, yoga, TRX, personal training, Pilates, nutrition, massage therapy are examples of services that will cultivate a healthy lifestyle within your building's community.

Ok, so maybe you're not an urban athlete. But consider that a well-designed and equipped gym has become a significant selling feature for many developers looking to woo health-conscious purchasers to their new, chic condos. Given the competitive nature of today's condo marketplace, it's important to factor in the positive or negative impact your condo's gym will have on re-saleability of your unit and how it may affect the end value of your investment.

Beyond convenience, a gym that's been thoughtfully conceived and equipped makes even more sense when you're spending hundreds of dollars each month on condominium maintenance fees. Why pay an extra hundred dollars per month for a gym membership if you have the convenience of using an exceptional gym in your building — essentially for free?

Enter Movement Haus by Benchmark. Benchmark identifies, addresses and understands challenges faced by today's urban purchasers when selecting a condo with a fitness amenity. When we design a gym for a developer, we ensure that you will actually get what you see in their glitzy sales and marketing brochures. When you purchase a new condo in a building that houses a Movement Haus (our fancy name for a gym), you can rest assured that you'll receive the 'benchmark' in condominium fitness amenities. We strive to create an exercise experience, focusing on the functional design of the space, the equipment contained within it and the quality of services offered to you, the purchaser. If you're an urban athlete, demand the next level in condominium fitness amenities by ensuring your new condo has a Movement Haus by Benchmark (movementhaus.com). **CL**

Mark Stables, founder of Benchmark Group and Movement Haus, is a renowned fitness and wellness expert with over 15 years experience in the industry. Working with hundreds of urban condominium dwellers, Mark has amassed valuable experience and insight into the design of condominium fitness amenities and the way people use them. As the landscape of fitness continues to evolve, this in-depth knowledge of health and fitness coupled with his passion for architecture and design yields an optimal exercise environment for today's urban athlete.