

POSTHOMES

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DESIGN

HOW FRESH!

Jeffrey Fisher
jazzes up a
furniture staple.
PH4

STREET SMARTS

SOUTH ETOBICOKE

The lure of the
'hood with the
small-town feel.
PH8-PH12

MARKET

SWANSEA

Contemporary
dazzler with huge
deck: \$1.29M.
PH14



SKY-HIGH BOOT CAMP

Fitness guru
Mark Stables
modernizes
condo gyms
*By Suzanne
Wintrob*

Does a nicer environment,
such as this one at M5V,
ensure a better workout?

PETER J. THOMPSON / NATIONAL POST

Mark Stables learned a valuable lesson in Grade 10. His teacher had plastered the room with a selection of inspirational quotes and one seemed to speak directly to the teenager: If you do as you've always done, expect what you've always achieved.

"It taught me that unless you make a concerted effort to change, you'll be the same person tomorrow that you are today," Mr. Stables recalls. "That propelled me into doing something differently."

Twenty-five years later, Mr. Stables still lives by those words and encourages everyone he meets to take them to heart. As a personal trainer and certified wellness coach, it's the line he uses to push his clients to go the extra mile, whether working out or adopting healthier behaviours. And lately it has become his mantra when sitting around boardroom tables as he guides condominium developers to better outfit their fitness

spaces. They should be creating "bespoke experiences," he tells them, whether they're catering to twentysomethings looking to bulk up or boomers striving for extra energy so they can keep up with their grandchildren.

"As a purchaser, the fitness amenity is the most used amenity in any building, bar none," Mr. Stables says.

Over the past year, the 36-year-old founder of Benchmark Group and Movement Haus ("It's a fancy name for a gym," he quips) has held court with many of the city's big-name builders, including Minto, Cityzen, Pemberton Group and Tridel to talk up everything from layout and decor to equipment, services and staffing. High on his wish list are TRX suspension training, spinning and gravity classes, Technogym's Kinesis stations and Internet-enabled cardio machines so users can watch videos on their iPods while exercising. He's also keen

on online portals so residents can book and pay for classes or training sessions from their laptops and smartphones.

Sometimes, Mr. Stables is hired to consult on equipment and perhaps run orientation sessions, fitness classes and personal training. But he much prefers to be in from the get-go to help build and run the space from start to finish. That way, he says, the architecture and decor is sure to mesh with the activity.

"You can put equipment into a poorly designed room and it will be good equipment," Mr. Stables explains. "But if you've got seven-foot ceilings with bulkheads, you're running into all kinds of problems regardless of the kind of equipment you put in there. You can't change that. It's like taking a condo that's 500 square feet with low ceilings and putting European appliances in it. The appliances will be nice, but that's not going to change the fact

that you have a low ceiling."

Alessandro Munge agrees. The managing partner of Toronto interior design studio Munge Leung works out at 5 a.m. every morning to pump up for his busy workday, so it's no surprise he urges his luxury condominium clients to think seriously about the look and feel of their fitness spaces.

"We're trying to make sure that fitness centres are no longer at the parking levels of buildings, if you will," says Mr. Munge, who has noticed a surge in fitness space usage over the past decade. "They require natural light. The programming and variety in them is very important."

With condominium suites getting smaller, developers appear to be putting more emphasis on their amenity space so residents can spread out and entertain in style. From gourmet kitchens catering to parties of 12 through to game rooms, rooftop bars and

See **GYMS** on Page **PH6**

ALWAYS ALERT

STOP THIEF! IS THERE A COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN IN YOUR BUILDING?



In an ongoing series, condo-security expert Frank Fourchalk offers tips. "Many residents are ill-informed when a building violation has taken place. This makes matters worse. Concealing knowledge of a break-in is, in fact, a crime itself and puts the building at risk of a repeat performance. Council members or building managers must inform all owners or residents of each and every break-in or break-in attempt. After all, this is an apartment dweller's right. Councils or building managers must send letters to all residents informing of each and every occurrence as it happens. A meeting with all the residents should also be arranged to discuss the violation. Somebody may have information about the break-in that could assist the police in apprehending the thief. Keep in mind, an aware resident is an extra pair of eyes helping to keep your building safe." *National Post*



Trainer Mark Stables helps Amanda Marshall get in the zone at M5V's condo gym.

PETER J. THOMPSON / NATIONAL POST

Squat & sweat WITH A VIEW

GYMS

Continued from Page PH1

indoor-outdoor lounges, the amenity space is as much a selling feature as the units themselves. And with folks such as Mr. Stables and Mr. Munge offering inspiration, the fitness component will get a makeover, too. Gone are

gyms of old comprising an all-in-one weight machine, some barbells and a couple of treadmills. Rather, condo towers today promise bright and invigorating "wellness centres" combining the very latest in workout gear with tempting spa services.

Build it right, Mr. Munge says, and purchasers will lap it up.

Take the case of The Madison, a two-tower, 644-unit condo project being built by Madison Homes near Yonge and Eglinton that Mr. Munge's team is working on. The fourth-floor indoor amenity area — which Mr. Munge describes as "prime real estate space" — features a two-level gym, indoor saltwater lap-style pool, co-ed sauna and steam room off the pool deck, a hot tub integrated with the pool deck overlooking the outdoor amenity area, a yoga room with outdoor terrace and an area for spinning classes. The decor will have "the sophistication and the elegance of the building itself and the interiors we've created," he says, with raw metal stairs and floor-to-ceiling metal rods "for a hard-core feel but still keeping it very elegant."

Mr. Munge is also excited about working on Empire Communities' Eau du Soleil condominium in Etobicoke that promises an indoor track plus a mixed martial arts room with the requisite punching bags and training gear.

Still, the goal isn't merely to entice residents to get fit and de-stress. It's also about upping the social vibe. Elaine Ceconi, principal of Toronto interior design consulting firm Ceconi Simone, says the wellness aspect is what has condo dwellers enthused. Co-ed saunas are popular for socializing, as are treatment areas that are equipped with towels, candles and audio equipment to make it easy for residents to hire their own massage therapists, acupuncturists or other relaxation experts. She cites one of

“There are places to lounge after a workout — there's a social aspect”

her team's latest projects, Chaz on Charles near Yonge and Bloor, as a perfect example where calming warm tones, wood floors, simple lines and natural light all contribute to the serene yet social wellness scene.

"[The fitness space] is not just a place where you go hop on a treadmill for 30 minutes and go back up to your unit," she says. "There are places to lounge and relax after a workout — the treatment rooms, the hydro-bed therapy — it becomes more of a social aspect of the building."

But are developers ready to go that extra mile? Not always, it seems. When Mr. Stables launched Movement Haus a year ago, going bespoke was a tough sell. As he recalls, developers didn't quite understand the importance of tying exercise to architecture and many couldn't get past the cost of the fitness equipment alone, which Mr. Stables says could run anywhere from \$40,000 to \$120,000 for a 350-unit project.

"A lot of developers are used to tradition," he explains. "They're doing what has worked for them for the last 10 years and they haven't seen the value yet in switching that mindset to creating something truly bespoke and custom tailored that's different. It's challenging sometimes because they're not used to what we're presenting — yet."

But slowly, after spending 2011 spreading his gospel, Mr. Stables is noticing a change. To his delight, they're heeding the advice he learned in Grade 10 and he hopes the wave will follow.

"[Purchasers] want to look good and feel good," he says. "It's now part of a lifestyle, whereas 10 or 15 years ago, it was more of an afterthought," he says. "And that's how developers were creating their fitness amenities. They were taking leftover space, dropping in that multi-gym, treadmill, elliptical, exercise bike and calling it a five-star fitness amenity. Now, they're putting it on the top floor with a huge expansive view of downtown."

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