



The most exclusive new fitness studios on five continents help customize the wellness experience.

BY DANIEL SCHEFFLER

ALICE LANE,
JOHANNESBURG

THE | ULTIMATE



IN 2006, WHEN ELIZABETH CUTLER AND JULIE RICE FIRST LAUNCHED THE HYPERSPECIALIZED SPIN STUDIO SOULCYCLE ON MANHATTAN'S UPPER WEST SIDE, THEY HAD A CLEAR VISION: A SPACE WHERE TRANSFORMATION—PHYSICAL, MENTAL, POSSIBLY EVEN SPIRITUAL—COULD OCCUR.

Their formula of a beautiful space with high-intensity classes held in darkened rooms, fueled by exuberant instructors who are part DJ and part whip-cracking motivator, has created a nearly cult-like base of 10,000 daily riders in 32 locations nationwide. With SoulCycle, which is set to launch in London in 2015, Cutler and Rice kickstarted a philosophy that has gone global—the boutique fitness studio.

The latest component in this arena is a scrutiny of the inner workings of what we know the gym experience to be. This recent focus has given rise to gym-goers who want to belong to a genuine community of people sharing the wellness ethos and not just members to another plush but anonymous weight room. We are not always looking for vast and various—sometimes we would prefer one singular and consistent experience.

Today's fitness experience often includes nutrition experts, self-help gurus, unique classes that foster energy from a pack, and niche personal training that builds on a true lifestyle assessment. Eight such gyms have arisen in six countries and on five continents, with more to come. With a renewed accent on creating a peaceful and beautiful space, combined with the best equipment available and time-efficient workouts, these studios are paeans to wellness in a busy existence.



BODYTECH, SÃO PAULO

AirFit

PLEASANTON, CALIF., USA

THIS UNIQUE STUDIO ON THE FRINGE OF Silicon Valley offers spinning, yoga, and circuit-training classes in a “hypoxic” room that emulates a high-altitude environment, the largest of its kind open to the public. Research has shown that exercising at a higher altitude increases caloric expenditure and encourages the production of red blood cells, which then carry more oxygen to muscles, lessening fatigue and improving performance at lower elevations. Part of this studio's appeal lies in its efficiency: A 50-minute workout at a higher elevation can calorically match a 90-minute session at sea level. Faster dehydration and “brain fog” can be side effects, so, to ensure safety, AirFit's director, Carlo Maravilla, encourages water breaks and the use of heart monitors, which are available to guests. AirFit plans to expand to Southern California and, later, the East Coast. » thequadfit.com

PANDALUX (BODYTECH)

Alice Lane

JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA

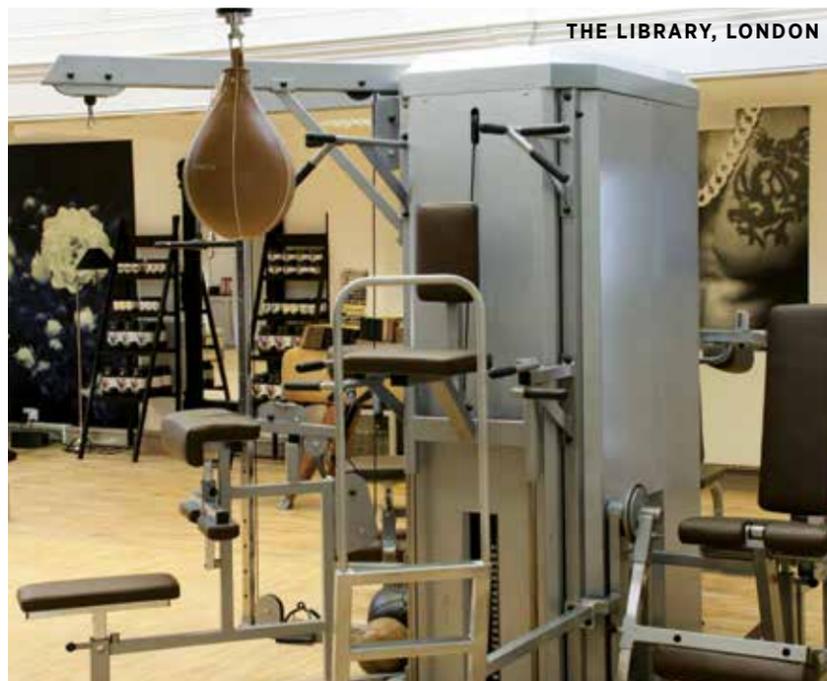
AS PART OF THE VIRGIN GROUP'S EX- pensive Active network across the world, Alice Lane—an “in-the-sky” fitness space incorporating rooftop views of Johannesburg's affluent Sandton area—is its latest luxury offering. This fresh concept has brought new vigor to the industry in Africa by offering an exclusive space that also adheres to sustainable design. According to Herman de Beer, the property director of Virgin Active South Africa, the brief from the international team was simply to design the world's best health club but with elements never seen before. The result has everything from non-electric Woodway treadmills to spin bikes, a Queenax interactive adult jungle gym, anti-gravity yoga, a two-lane Astroturf sprint track, and full-time personal trainers to guide fitness enthusiasts through it all. » www.virginactive.co.za/microsites/alice-lane

Aqua Studio

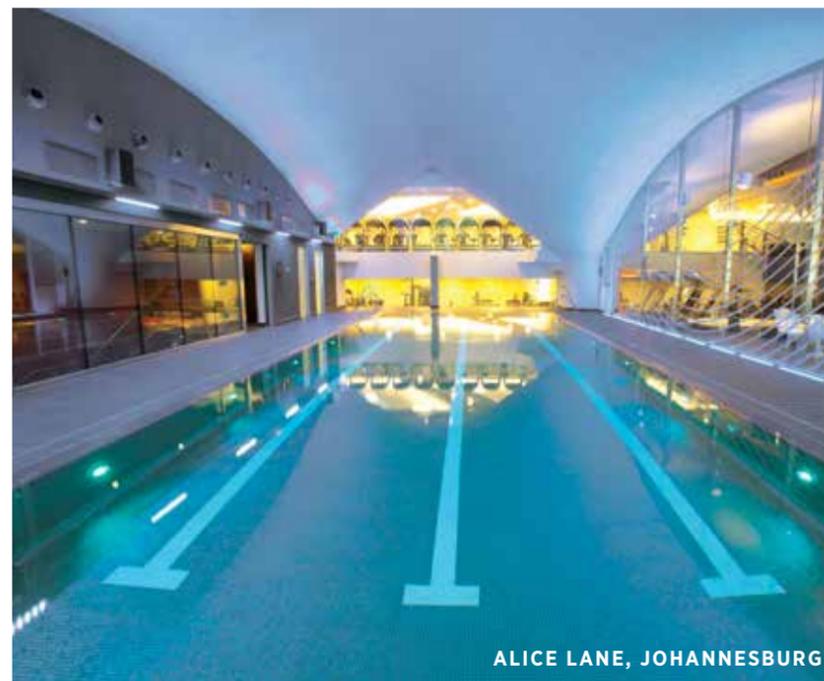
NEW YORK CITY, USA

WITH A WEST COAST EXPANSION ON the horizon, this specialist space offers joint-friendly underwater cycling, as well as nutritionist-designed detox programs that pair aqua-cycling classes with diet and lifestyle counseling. Esther Gauthier, owner of Aqua, got the idea for the studio in her home country of France and thinks that balance through a community-connected space is most important to achieving conscious wellness. “We offer a space for like-minded people to connect and share but also to hold each other accountable,” she says. “It's about bringing positive people together.” The studio offers daily group classes, single-sex classes, and is planning to add personal and private training sessions to its menu in 2015. » aquastudiony.com

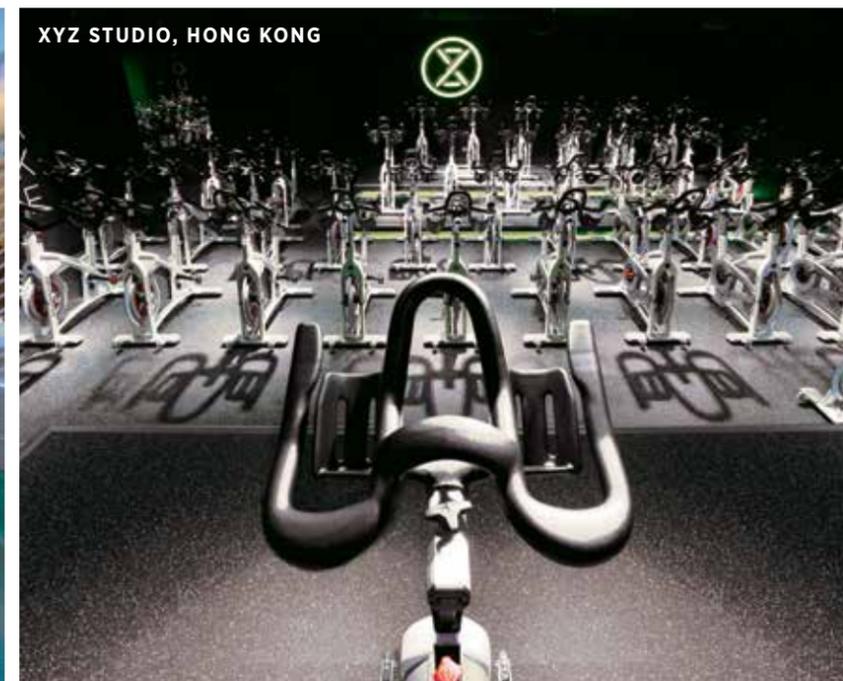
THIS FOCUS HAS GIVEN RISE TO GYM-GOERS WHO WANT TO BELONG TO A GENUINE COMMUNITY. WE ARE NOT ALWAYS LOOKING FOR VAST AND VARIOUS—SOMETIMES WE PREFER A SINGULAR, CONSISTENT EXPERIENCE.



THE LIBRARY, LONDON



ALICE LANE, JOHANNESBURG



XYZ STUDIO, HONG KONG

Bodytech
SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL

FOR THE LOVE OF DESIGN, THE BODYtech Group recently opened its finest offering—the Bodytech Academy—in the city’s well-heeled Iguatemi shopping mall. Designed by Isay Weinfeld, the novel wellness space caters to both mind and body in Brazil’s biggest city. Luiz Urquiza, CEO of Bodytech, thinks of the concept as totally pioneering in the marketplace and says, “We try to be one step ahead, whether in equipment, new modalities, structure, technology, or in services.” Besides offering meditation spaces alongside all the workout facilities and a makeup room modeled after a boudoir, the Academy offers personal training and coaching that incorporates whole-body wellness. » bodytech.com.br

Heart & Hustle
LOS ANGELES, USA

AT EACH SESSION IN THIS NEW, VERY private fitness studio, the trainee is one of only two clients in the gym. Owner Gregg Miele and his partner, Kevin Lilly, guide clients in using the latest equipment—such as the Espresso bike, which employs interactive video, and the Surge 360, a full-body workout machine featuring two hydraulic pistons as resistance—alongside time-tested free weights and old-school football sleds. Post-workout, after the owners have hustled clients between several machines for both cardio and strength training, they stretch weary muscles on a massage table to ensure swift recovery. The team here will also make smoothies, ready for clients at the end of the session. A private entrance and valet service make pre- and post-training transitions seamless. » heartandhustle.com

The Library
LONDON, UK

OPENED LAST YEAR IN NOTTING HILL, the Library has taken private fitness to new heights in the English capital. Every member’s program starts with an in-depth consultation upon joining that addresses schedules, lifestyle, stress, travel, and even nutrition. Zana Morris, the founder of the Library, believes in taking a sincere, personal approach, thus creating a welcoming gym for exactly that. She says, “It’s a total individual approach—this ensures that everyone is really looked after in fully managed sessions. We also want clients to be truly mindful—not just endlessly running on a treadmill while reading away at their emails.” The Library offers unlimited personal training and believes in tweaking the experience as often as possible, which means results are pretty much guaranteed here. » thelibrarygym.com

Physique 57
DUBAI, UAE

THE LUXURY FITNESS STUDIO THAT started in New York and launched a national barre studio craze opened an outpost in Dubai in 2013. With her focus on customer service, the owner of Physique 57 Dubai, Maryam Fattahi Salaam, says, “If clients are going to part with money, it better be a fulfilling experience from beginning to end—from the front desk receptionist to the locker room with amenities.” The studio offers a 57-minute, barre-based workout that incorporates cardio, strength training, stretching, and recovery. This workout is especially good for working all those oft-ignored small muscles (such as the gluteus medius and minimus) and for creating a long, lean figure. For extra attention or privacy, personal sessions are also on offer. Look for their newest location in Bangkok this winter. » physique57.com

XYZ
HONG KONG, CHINA

TUCKED INSIDE THE NEW WORLD Tower in the Central district of Hong Kong, XYZ is designed to feel like a hidden cave—a place to escape everyday life and “reset one’s compass.” The studio facilitates a cult of serious indoor cyclists who push the boundaries of meditation during 50-minute rides. Founder Belinda Koo believes in “changing the culture of wellness by adding fine measures of creativity and entertainment.” Also part of the experience: Zen-like changing rooms and personalized attention from well-trained instructors whose absorbing playlists draw from ’80s, ’90s, pop, rock, house, hip-hop, and classical tunes. » youarexyz.com ♦

Carolyn Meers also contributed to this story.