

Group Fitness Room Design

Make an Impressive First Impression



STRENGTH IN NUMBERS

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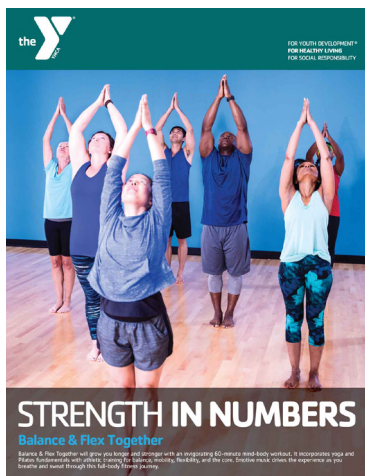
Executive Summary:

Delivering a great member experience is critical to attracting more people to your facility and improving member retention. The design of your group fitness room can affect the member experience positively or negatively. The layout, the sound system, the look and feel, all leave an impression on your members and prospects. Discover keys to designing a great space to maximize participation and be aware of some pitfalls that keep people away.

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MOSSA is the exclusive provider of the YMCA Group Exercise Programs, designed to help your Y deliver a safe, fun, and memorable member experience — for all ages, women and men, and all fitness levels. To learn more, visit www.mossa.net/ymca.

The Setting for the Experience



“**GROUP FITNESS OFFERS THE PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOU TO HARNESS THE POWER AND VALUE OF THE EXPERIENCE ECONOMY.**”

Your group fitness rooms are your most valuable real estate because you have the potential to service 50% of your members in experiences that ensure higher retention rates, greater referrals, and less price sensitivity. Along with the instructor and the program, the room is a critical part of a memorable member experience. The design, look, and feel of the rooms can encourage participation or it can discourage participation.

Put simply, room design can make or break the member experience. According to the book that reveals the magic of Disney’s approach to customer service, *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*, “All organizations, knowingly or unknowingly, build messages to their customers into the settings in which they operate.”¹

The author, Ted Kinni, compares a luxury car dealership and a used car lot, a theme park and a carnival, and a designer clothing retailer and an outlet store to emphasize the importance of the setting. “In each pair, consumers are buying similar products, cars, entertainment, and apparel, but in each case, the setting in which they buy these products is communicating a great deal about the quality of the products and the level of service they can expect. Not to mention the effect it has on the price they are willing to pay.”²

Companies like Disney, Starbucks, Apple, and Cirque du Soleil invest heavily in their settings to ensure their customers are immersed in their experience. These companies have embraced the “experience economy.” They have elevated their service and products to become memorable experiences, and to create more engaged and loyal customers. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore brought us the term “experience economy” in a 1998 article and then authored the now classic business book, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre and Every Business a Stage*.

Pine and Gilmore identified three economic distinctions that are widely accepted – commodities, goods, and services. They then added a fourth category: experiences. Economists have historically lumped experiences in with services, but as Pine and Gilmore note, “Experiences are a distinct economic offering, as different from services as services are from goods. Today we can identify and describe this fourth economic offering because consumers unquestionably desire experiences, and more and more businesses are responding by explicitly designing and promoting them.”³

Group fitness offers the perfect opportunity for you to harness the power and value of the experience economy. Group fitness can take a commodity such as exercising on a treadmill or with free weights, and evolve it into an experience with a dynamic instructor, innovative programming, motivating music, and a well-designed setting...all coming together to make it memorable.

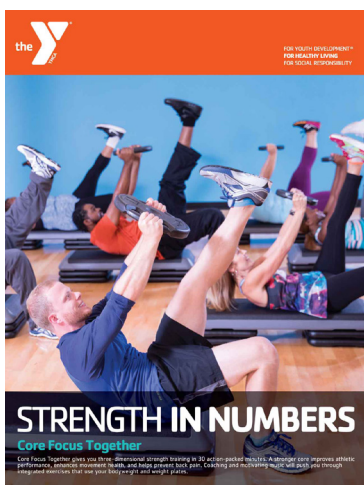
¹ The Disney Institute, Kinni, Theodore. *Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service*. (New York; Disney Editions, 2011), 93

² Ibid.

³ Pine, Joseph II, Gilmore, James. “Welcome to the Experience Economy.” *Harvard Business Review*, 76 (4), (1998): 97-105.

Group Room Key Considerations

“**EVERY DESIGN ELEMENT OF THE ROOM MUST ENHANCE PARTICIPATION.**”



This well-designed setting, the group fitness room, plays an important role in enhancing the member experience.

Every design element of the room must enhance participation. Rooms must be designed to appeal to the broadest audience possible, minimizing design elements that limit participation. For many that do not participate in group fitness, there are connotations that group fitness is “aerobics” and is only for women. Your group fitness room must be a space that is as inviting to a male as it is to a female, and to people of all ages. The room must feel like an athletic group workout room and not feel like an “aerobics studio.” Both words, ‘aerobics’ (which is old fashioned) and ‘studio’ (which implies dance) should be removed from your team’s vernacular.

Because for many operators their space is limited, the design of the room needs to ensure it is a very versatile space so that it can deliver a great experience for a broad range of programs, from an athletic, high-energy, strength workout like Strength Train Together to an emotive, invigorating mind-body workout like Balance and Flex Together.

Ideally, three group rooms are needed to be able to service 50% of your member visits in group fitness. The first room should be approximately 2,500 – 4,000 square feet, the second room should be 1,200 – 2,500 square feet, and the third room should be a dedicated cycling room of 800 – 1500 square feet. The design and feel of the two group rooms should be similar, which enables all programs to be offered in both. It’s recommended to always have a dedicated cycling room to ensure the best utilization of space.

“**Group fitness is a "DOING" activity, and not a "VIEWING" or "SIMULATING" activity.**”

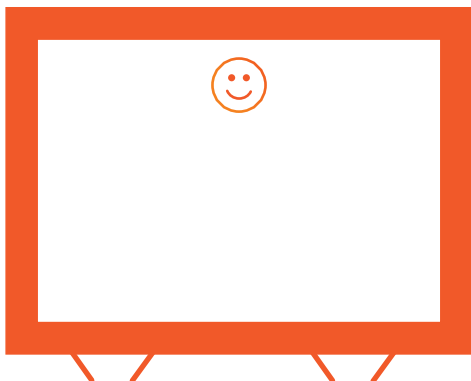
There is an industry fad to treat exercise like entertainment, or “exertainment,” but we must keep in mind that group fitness is a “doing” activity, and not a “viewing” or “simulating” activity. Often, room designs that include large video screens, flashing lights, and fitness tracking data scoreboards can interfere with the “doing” aspect of exercise which requires timing, agility, coordination, concentration, and following the instructor. For many people this “exertainment” approach can appear gimmicky and does not create an inviting space to actively move, sweat, and feel successful.

Group Room Design Top 10

The group fitness room design has ten categories that can greatly impact the setting of the experience to maximize participation. These also apply to group cycling rooms.

1

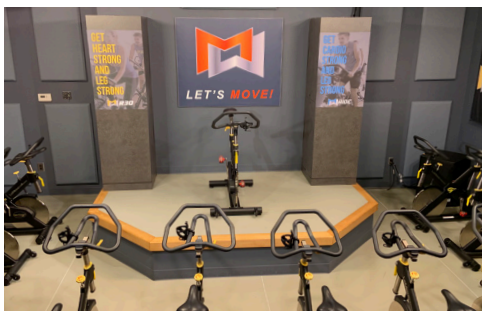
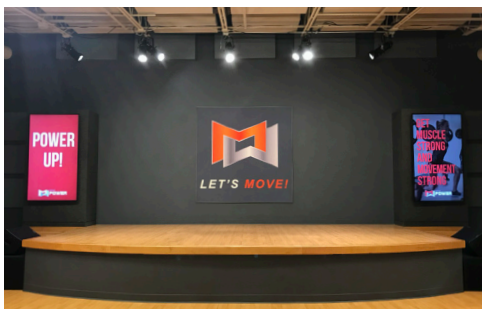
LAYOUT



- A rectangle shape with the instructor teaching from one of the long walls ensures all participants are closest to the instructor to ensure best sightlines and communication.
- Two wide doors allow one door for entry and another for exit, allowing smoother traffic flow.
- Doors should be at the back of the room (the long wall opposite the instructor). This allows those who arrive late or leave early to come and go without disrupting the workout or feeling embarrassed about being late or sneaking out.
- Windows looking into the group fitness room are essential to allow people to “window shop.” Many future participants will need to see that they could be successful by watching what happens in the room. Often, they may window shop numerous times before crossing the threshold into the group room.
- If unable to have windows, doors with windows, or all glass, are an effective option.
- Safe spots for new exercisers are important for their success. These safe spots are created by not having too many windows and drastically reducing the number of mirrors. There should be space in the room where a person can avoid mirrors and windows and otherwise feel “lost” in the crowd, which is what many prefer.

2

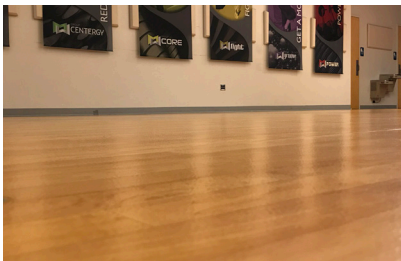
STAGE



- This is a MUST HAVE! No room is too small for a stage. Contrary to popular belief, a stage creates MORE space. Members will stand closer to the instructor, because they are elevated. This changes their personal space and allows more people to fit in the room.
- When the instructor is elevated, they can better see all participants, and the participants can better see the instructor, especially the new exercisers who tend to hide in the back of the room.
- The stage is a rectangular shape with the front being arched to encourage amphitheater, wide fan, set-up. This set-up brings the participants closer to the instructor to ensure the backrow distance is minimal, ensuring efficient sightlines and communication.
- The size and height of the stage is based on the size of the room. Give consideration if team-teaching is a common practice to ensure enough space for multiple instructors.
 - Less than 1,500 square feet: 10-12 ft x 7 ft x 1 ft (long end is front)
 - 1,500 – 2,500 square feet: 12-14 ft x 8 ft x 2 ft
 - 3,000+ square feet: 12-15 ft x 8 ft x 2.5 ft
 - Cycling room: 7-10 ft x 7 ft x 1-2 ft

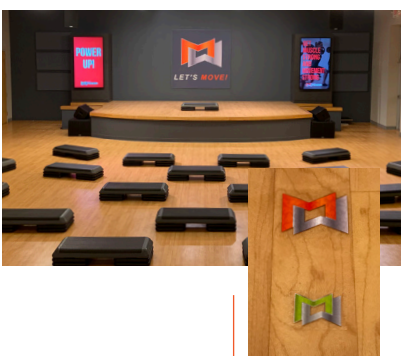
Group Room Design Top 10

3 FLOORING



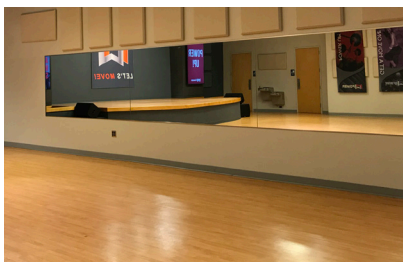
- A beautiful, sprung, hardwood floor looks impressive and is a top choice for a professional standard look.
- Synthetic or rubber flooring is a less expensive option (approximately half to a third less than hardwood), which is easy to care for, has padding, and can be replaced very efficiently and quickly. There are designs that look like hardwood to give a higher quality appearance.
- Flooring is an ideal place to increase your brand awareness by placing your facility logo.

4 SPACE



- Allow 45 square feet per person in group fitness room and 25 square feet in cycling room. This square footage does consider normal storage needs and a stage.
- During workouts, be sure to stagger rows so participants in consecutive rows are not right behind each other, just like in amphitheater styled seating. This ensures the best sightline to the instructor and gives each participant maximum space while filling the room to capacity.
- Place markers on the floor to help with proper spacing. One great idea is to make stickers with your facility logo to enhance your branding!
- Create socializing spaces outside the rooms, allowing people to build relationships. One of the biggest powers of group is the connection participants make with each other, the staff, and instructors. These connections happen inside the room, and just as important, outside the room, both before and after the workout.

5 MIRRORS



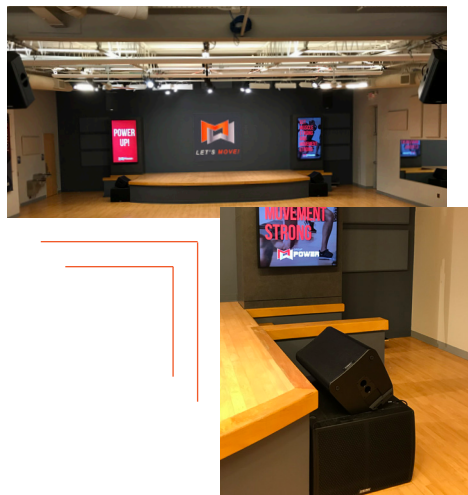
**LESS MIRRORS CREATES
A MORE INVITING ROOM
FOR EVERYONE.**

- Several research studies have shown mirrors to produce anxiety, lower performance, and to be a relatively ineffective guide for execution self-correction.³
- Fewer mirrors create a more inviting room for everyone. A heavily mirrored environment is reminiscent of aerobics and dance studios. The new group room is an athletic workout room that appeals to everyone; women and men, young and old.
- Mirrors should be placed on one side wall with the 4 ft x 8 ft mirror sheet turned so the height is 4 ft. This will reduce cost as fewer panels are needed to cover one wall. The open space below the mirror now has less chance of breaking from equipment and the space above is ideal for branding.
- Remove mirrors in the front of the room as this is often a major distraction for participants. The most important source of information is coming from the instructor, and it's important that participants are concentrating on them to ensure their success. Many participants have watched themselves in the mirror, continually executing poor movement. It is only when they are watching the instructor and paying attention to coaching cues that they correct their execution. Instructors that teach in a non-mirrored environment create a far superior experience for the member because their connection is better.

³ Frayeh, Amanda. "The Effect of Mirrors on Women's Body Image and Affective Responses to Yoga" (doctorate thesis, University of Minnesota, 2015); Radell, Sally, "Body Image and Mirror Use in the Ballet Class," *The IADMS Bulletin for Teachers*, vol. 4 no. 1 (2012): 10-13; Ehrenberg, S. "Reflections on reflections: mirror use in a university dance training environment," *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, 1(2) (2010): 172-184.

Group Room Design Top 10

6 SOUND



- Buy the best sound system you can afford because music promotes movement efficiency⁴, prolongs muscular endurance⁵, increases workout intensity⁶, and creates a positive emotional response to exercise⁷. Along with the instructor and the program, music is a key ingredient to make the workout a memorable experience which encourages the “doing” activity, rather than distracting from the activity.
- Speakers should be hung from the ceiling, slightly tilted downward, and all pointing toward the back of the room. If your room is over 2,000 square feet, four speakers should be utilized with two near the front facing the back wall, and two speakers should be positioned halfway from the front facing the back wall.
- A subwoofer is as critical as the speakers to produce great sound. A subwoofer is a loudspeaker that handles the low frequencies, or bass, which makes the sound feel full and rich. This enables the system to be on a lower music volume setting. As with the stage, no room is too small for a subwoofer.
- A wireless microphone is a must for instructors to effectively connect, coach, cue, and ensure participants’ success in conjunction with proper motivating music levels. As with the stage and subwoofer, no room is too small for a mic.
- Sound absorbing products like acoustic panels, tiles, ceiling clouds and ceiling baffles are extremely important to maximize sound quality and ensure the music assists in creating a memorable experience. These products absorb the sound to keep it from bouncing off hard surfaces like exposed ceilings, brick walls, glass and hardwoods, which cause echo and distortion, detracting from the quality of sound.
- We highly recommend having a professional music company assess room needs and requirements to ensure the best music experience possible.

7 LIGHTING



- Lights should be adjustable so that you can create the appropriate ambiance for different types of workouts. High energy workouts will have all lights on so the room is brightly lit. Mind-body workouts can have dim lights to create a more relaxing, soothing mood. Lighting controls should be located on the stage so the instructor can control them easily.
- The stage should have spotlights so that the instructor is always brightly lit and can be seen clearly by participants.
- Darker rooms are not conducive for people exercising as they need to see the equipment, space, other participants, and the instructor to navigate the workout and feel successful. A well-lit room ensures that the instructor sees all participants clearly to ensure their safety and success. This further emphasizes the importance of connecting, personalizing the experience, and coaching. Athletes don’t train in the dark.

⁴Karageorghis, Costas, and David-Lee Priest. "Music in Sport and Exercise : An Update on Research and Application." *The Sport Journal*. October 20, 2016. Accessed February 10, 2017. <http://thesportjournal.org/article/music-sport-and-exercise-update-research-and-application/#sthash.RCpYLNxr.dpuf>.

⁵Bartolomei, Sandro, Rocco Di Michele, and Franco Merni. "Effects of Self-Selected Music on Maximal Bench Press Strength and Strength Endurance." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* 120, no. 3 (2015): 714-21.

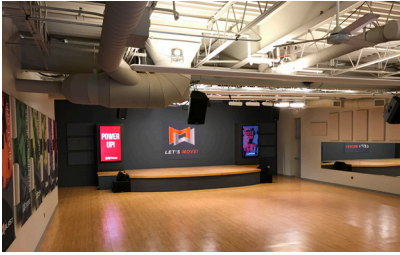
⁶Stork, Matthew J., Matthew Y. W. Kwan, Martin J. Gibala, and Kathleen A. Martin Ginis. "Music Enhances Performance and Perceived Enjoyment of Sprint Interval Exercise." *Medicine & Science in Sports & Exercise* 47, no. 5 (2015): 1052-060.

⁷Stork, Matthew J., and Kathleen A. Martin Ginis. "Listening to music during sprint interval exercise: The impact on exercise attitudes and intentions." *Journal of Sports Sciences*, 2016, 1-7.

Group Room Design Top 10

8

TEMPERATURE



- Fans are essential for airflow and should be adjustable speeds to accommodate all conditions.
- Industrial strength air conditioning is recommended as the room sits idle for parts of the day and the room temperature balances out. When the workout is about to start, the temperature needs to come down quickly to ensure the proper environment.
- Each room should have its own HVAC system and not be connected to other parts of the facility that have different air and heating needs.
- It's important to seek professional engineering advice to ensure you have the proper system to control the environment.

9

EQUIPMENT



- The equipment in the room needs to look athletic and be male and female friendly. Colored dumbbells or strength training weights portray a toning class, rather than an athletic strength workout, and will deter men from participating.
- Storage for equipment should be located throughout the room, starting with back and sides first, and if additional space is needed, the front corners. This eases traffic flow and makes it less congested when trying to put away equipment after one workout while another workout is starting.
- The goal is to keep the room neat, tidy, and easily accessible.

10

LOOK



- Your space should feel athletic where men and women both feel welcome.
- The facility logo should be placed on the main wall behind the stage for branding.
- Paint walls with facility colors.
- Large inspirational words create an inspiring athletic look.
- Paint program names or logos, or purchase/print additional posters or banners, to add color and design to the space.
- Large monitors near the stage are a great way to create excitement, messaging, and branding.
- Open ceilings that expose structure and utilities enable many lighting options to be installed, and makes the space feel industrial and athletic, compared to low hanging ceiling tiles.