



When Meg Ryan Met A Sweater
Emulate one of cinema's best-known knits **D3**

OFF DUTY

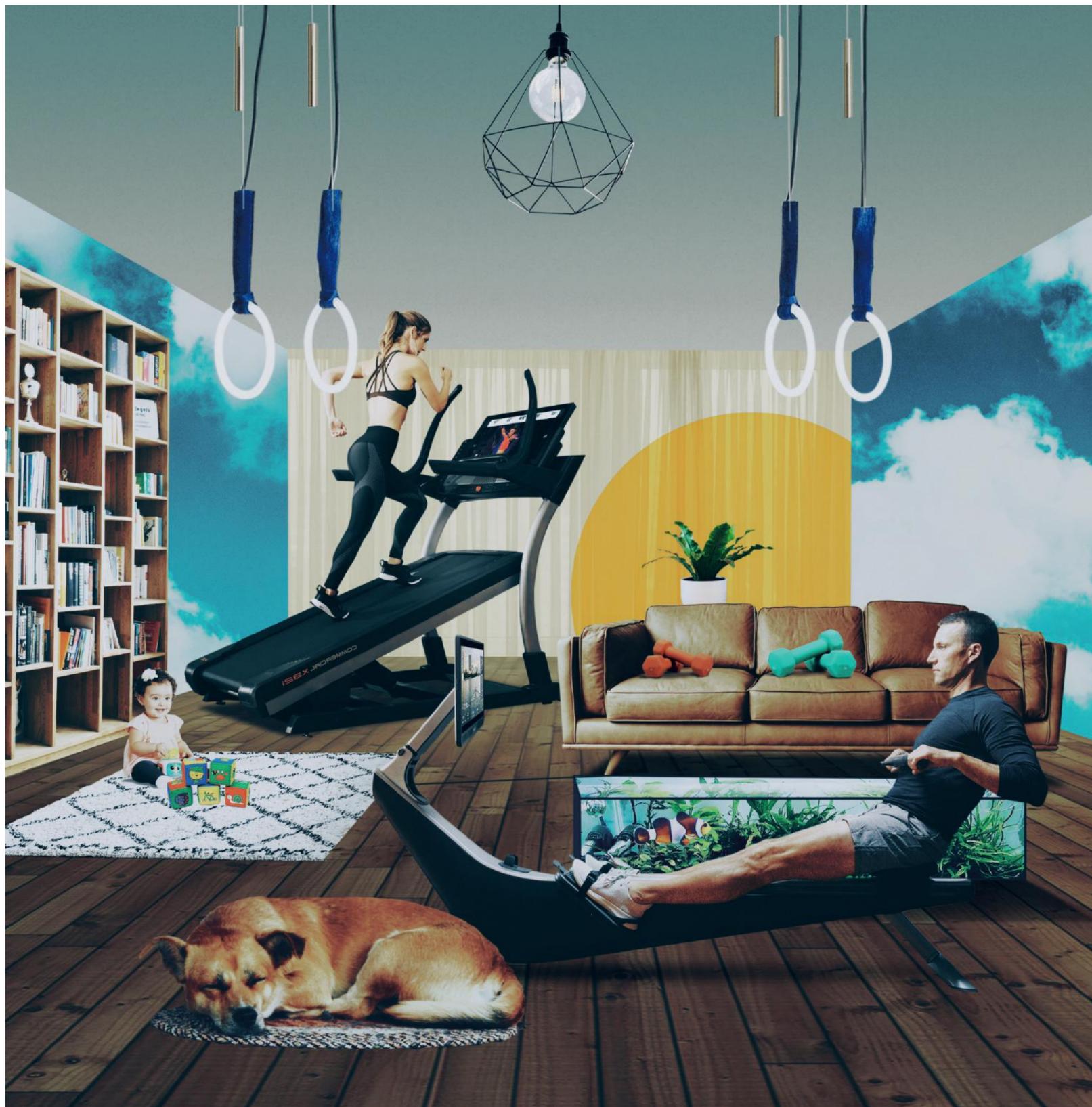
Compost Uncommonly
Four chic, high-tech ways to transform food waste **D8**



FASHION | FOOD | DESIGN | TRAVEL | GEAR

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JULIEN PACAUD ILLUSTRATION; GETTY (KETTLEBELL)

Home Sweat Home

Are we never going back to the gym? As Covid-19 has decimated fitness facilities, Americans have spent big on digitally connected home-workout equipment, happily forgoing the line at the water fountain



BY ASHLEY MATEO

WITH THE ONSET of Covid-19, gyms across the country closed their doors. Many of us who habitually hit a spin class or gritted our teeth through circuit training were newly stranded at home, confronting the seeming inevitability of flabbiness. Where were our walls of mirrors? Our post-workout showers that let us hand-pump hair conditioner so liberally? As our scrunchies lay dormant, we even grew wistful for the awkwardness of locker rooms. Now, almost a year later, we're far less nostal-

gic. Many have found novel, even superior, digitally connected ways to stay fit at home—and it's beginning to look like we'll never return to gyms again. That is, if they're even still there: Last September, the International Health, Racquet & Sportsclub Association estimated that up to one in four would permanently close by 2020's end. And a TD Ameritrade survey found that 59% of Americans don't plan to renew their gym memberships after the pandemic.

Meanwhile, we've been outfitting our homes with pricey Peloton bikes at such a rate the brand saw profits grow by 100% in 2020 to \$1.8 billion. Rival equipment outfitter Nautilus saw its 2020 third-quarter sales jump 151.8% year over year. Even the relatively new Mirror, whose interactive fitness "machine" is a sleek, wall-mounted looking-glass that does not junk up décor, was expected to bring in \$100 million in revenue in 2020.

The shifting dynamic has triggered new thinking. Kara Liotta, former creative director and trainer at New York-based indoor cycling studio

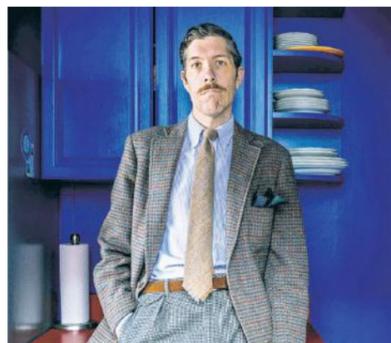
Flywheel Sports, saw the crash of gyms as an opportunity. "My partner and I had always thought about doing our own thing, but I had been too afraid to leave a big company," she said.

In March 2020, they launched KKSweat, a virtual boutique fitness platform offering live and on-demand classes over Zoom. While her former employer, Flywheel, declared bankruptcy in September and closed all 42 of its studios, she and her partner are producing 15 classes a week for more than 500 people. "Eleven months in, and this feels like the new norm," she said.

The rapid growth of at-home fitness is creating a connected culture that bears little resemblance to the days when isolated apartment dwellers bleakly rolled up their leg warmers and halfheartedly aped Jane Fonda's video contortions. Futuristic, Peloton-esque machines beam you into virtual classes and let trainers make incline and resistance adjustments from afar (see the NordicTrack Commercial X32i Treadmill); or correct

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GEAR & GADGETS



GONE, GYM BUDDY, GONE Will fitness facilities find themselves crowded again if the rollout of Covid-19 vaccines reduces the fear of interacting with others at close quarters indoors?

Fitness Goes Domestic

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your form in real-time using motion sensor cameras (like those embedded into the giant screen of the Tempo weight-training device).

The American College of Sports Medicine recently named “online training” its number-one fitness trend for 2021—up 25 spots from its ranking in 2020’s predictions. Since the pandemic started, 76% of Americans said they’ve tried working out from home, according to a survey by the New Consumer and Coefficient Capital—and 66% prefer it to the gym.

“Being at home strips away all the excuses,” said Peloton tread instructor Matty Maggiamo. At home, you never have to wait in line for equipment. There’s no factoring in commute and shower time. You needn’t worry about finding child care—or feeling like you don’t belong because you’re too old, too chunky, too saggy Spandexed.

“We’ve been socialized to have a very limited definition of the right space for fitness,” said Michelle Segar,

Ph.D., director of the University of Michigan’s Sport, Health, and Activity Research and Policy Center. “And if we couldn’t make it to that gym or studio we signed up for, we’re conditioned to think of that as a failure. But by opening the door on where you can be active, you democratize movement and expand the number of people who can be active more regularly.”

Exercising at home, once considered a last resort, has become something people are willing to invest in, much as they’ve upgraded their at-home offices, said Mr. Maggiamo. “The thing that changed everything was connectivity,” he said. In 2020, fitness-class-booking service Mindbody reported that 85% of consumers were using livestream classes weekly versus 7% in 2019.

“People were loyal to gyms for decades because they got something out of that structured environment,” said Ms. Segar. But with immersive, interactive experiences created by live streaming and smart technology, some of what people went to the gym for is transferring to the home, she adds. “People are starting to see that they have a whole menu of possibilities.”

Yes, you’re losing the social experience when you work out in your basement or that one corner of your studio

apartment. But that sense of community has moved online. After noticing members were using video chatting to exercise together, Obé, an ‘80s-inspired fitness subscription service that offers live and on-demand workouts including dance, strength and yoga, developed Workout Parties. This built-in feature lets members invite up to seven friends to join a class; the group can see and hear each other alongside the instructor (\$27 a month, obefitness.com). And Mirror, the reflective LCD screen that broadcasts live and on-demand classes from an iOS app, just launched a Community Camera feature; users can now turn on their built-in camera to see classmates and receive additional guidance from the instructor.

These connected features address the biggest issue with at-home workouts: motivation. “Most people are not intrinsically motivated,” said Walter Thompson, Ph.D., author of the ACSM trend report. If you’re too busy, too tired, you’ve got your excuse. But these live, connected classes serve as an external motivator. Now, your friends are waiting for you in a Peloton class. You know your trainer will miss you if you bail on your virtual class.

“The power of the shout-out is huge,” said Ms. Liotta. “I try to make

5 Things We Don’t Miss About The Gym

1. Wiping someone else’s copious sweat off the elliptical
2. Struggling to avoid eye contact with that flirty, man-bunned guy flexing in the mirror
3. Having your headphone music drowned out by whatever the front-desk guy is “feeling”
4. Fretfully monitoring whether others’ lips are touching the water-fountain spout
5. Panicking that some interloper will nab your “lucky” bike in spin class

5 Things We Do Miss

1. Chatting with friends and being motivated to finish strong by someone who isn’t paid by Peloton
2. Actually walking over and flirting with the man-bunned guy, just this once
3. Enjoying access to more machines than the one you can fit in your living room
4. Partaking in steam rooms, saunas and eucalyptus-scented towels
5. Having someone else whip up that delicious strawberry chia-seed smoothie you’ve more than earned

my classes as interactive as possible so that everyone in each of my classes feels seen. And I can still give real-time feedback over a livestream—it’s just a verbal cue instead of a hands-on one.”

If you shun the idea of sweating with others, another breed of connected devices offers similar “hands on” feedback you can process privately. Apple Fitness uses the Apple Watch’s workout-tracking sensors combined with iPhone, iPad, or an Apple TV screen to provide real-time encouragement during on-demand workouts—based on metrics like heart rate and calorie burn. Arena, a compact portable box has a built-in cable pulley system that uses an internal computer and motor to adapt the resistance in real-time as you move through exercises from squats to deadlifts.

While these devices lack a live element, those smart features provide more motivation than traditional fitness approaches. FightCamp—which uses Bluetooth-enabled punch trackers in hand wraps to track how aggressively you hit their free-standing, weighted punching bag—analyzed member retention data and found that 85% more people stick to their workouts after six months if they use connected fitness equipment.

Though gyms have been closed or struggling, Mr. Thompson believes we’ll see a return to their relentlessly mirrored environments in the third or fourth quarter of 2021, depending on vaccine rollout. He’s betting people will seek out true, face-to-face social interaction after being cooped up for over a year. “Ultimately, people crave that in-person connection,” agreed Lindsey Clayton, a New-York based instructor at Barry’s Bootcamp, which pivoted to Zoom workouts last spring. “Nothing will ever replace the feeling of being under the red lights in a Barry’s room, where you’re all sweating as a team. That energy, that vibe, that’s what it’s about.”

But gyms might never truly reclaim their former role in our lives. When they do reopen, “I think people will eventually start splitting their time between in-person and at-home fitness,” said Ms. Clayton—a hybrid option that allows for more balance and flexibility in one’s schedule.

For Ms. Liotta, who’s begun offering monthlong memberships for her virtual KKSweat classes as demand persists, the days of sweaty workout sessions with machines and mats packed against each other are over. “I don’t think the gym will be what people are used to anymore, and there are going to be a whole slew of people who just aren’t comfortable going back,” she said. “It’s so weird and sad to think about, but the gym as we know it won’t be the same experience moving forward.”

HOMING MECHANISMS / SIX OPTIONS FOR FAMILY-ROOM WORKOUTS—ALL DIGITALLY CONNECTED TO A TRAINER, AN APP, OR A.I. TECH

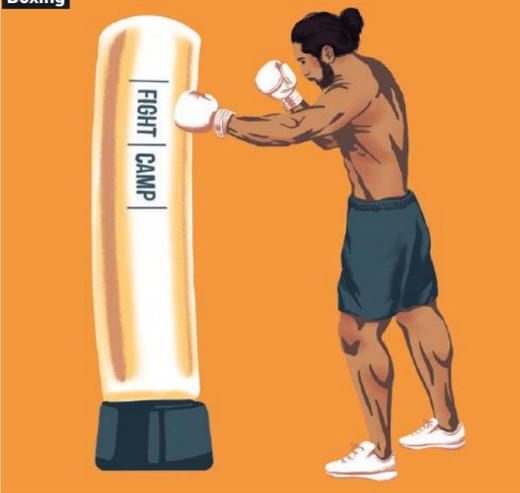
Strength Training



ARENA

This 40-pound brick hides a smart cable system that generates up to 200 pounds of resistance and adjusts in real-time as you use the straight bar, single-handle grip and other attachments. Track your stats, like power volume, in the partner app, which also houses 300-plus strength workouts and programs created by top coaches. (\$1,995, goarena.co)

Boxing



FIGHTCAMP

Fill the base of the free-standing punching bag with water and sand. Then strap on the hand wraps—embedded with Bluetooth-enabled punch trackers—and boxing gloves to pound the bag through hundreds of classes. Those little sensors track your punches, so you can complete or exceed the punch goal for each round. (\$1,219, joinfightcamp.com)

Treadmill



NORDICTRACK COMMERCIAL X32I TREADMILL

It brings the outdoors inside, inclining up to 40% and declining to -6% to mimic real terrain. During live and on-demand workouts with iFit, you can “run” routes anywhere from Easter Island to the Boston Marathon course; trainers automatically adjust resistance and incline so you can zone out to the scenery on the 32-inch HD touch screen. (\$3,799, nordictrack.com)

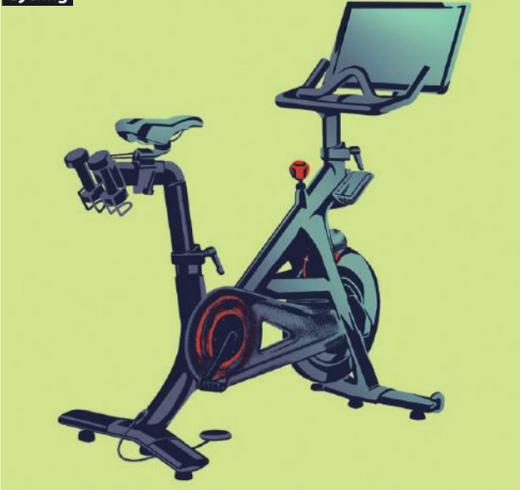
Rower



HYDROW

This sleek rowing machine uses an electromagnetic, computer-controlled drag mechanism to simulate the experience of being on the water. Row in sync with athletes in live and on-demand classes as they paddle down waterways like the Charles River in Boston or Indian Creek in Miami Beach on the 22-inch touch screen display. (\$1,995, hydrow.com)

Cycling



PELOTON BIKE+

In addition to the interactive, live class experiences that made Peloton famous, the latest version lets users opt in to automatic resistance adjustments throughout workouts to increase the challenge. And the larger touch screen TV rotates 360-degrees to make moving from cardio to strength or yoga workouts even easier. (from \$2,495, onpeloton.com)

Live Fitness Classes/Personal Trainer



MIRROR

Behind this mirror is an iOS-controlled LCD screen, so you can watch your own form while following along with live and on-demand classes. Wear the included chest strap for personalized feedback based on your heart-rate data, or turn on the camera to work directly with trainers for virtual one-on-one coaching. (\$1,495, mirror.co)