

GEAR & GADGETS

Boxing Goes Boutique

No longer hiding in grimy basement gyms, the sweet science is back in vogue—minus the violence—thanks to luxe new studios and celebrity clientele

By ASHLEY MATEO

AT RUMBLE, a Manhattan fitness studio that could pass for a more hardcore version of SoulCycle, a swanky white entry decked in emoji-like logos and pop art leads to a crimson-lit workout room. Instead of bikes, however, the room is filled with bags, swinging under heavy assault.

Rumble—which launched in New York in 2016 before expanding to Los Angeles and San Francisco, and last year sold a minority stake to luxury mega-gym Equinox—is at the forefront of the boutique-ification of boxing, a sport more likely to evoke the sweaty ambience of “Rocky” than a Victoria’s Secret outlet. The combat sport has evolved into something a casual gym-goer might try. Among the catalysts: social media-savvy supermodels like Gigi Hadid, Kendall Jenner and Adriana

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Lima, and stylish male celebs like David Beckham, Chris Hemsworth, and Scott Eastwood—all of whom happily Instagram jabs and crosses.

“Celebrities started showing that boxing didn’t have to be grungy,” said Andy Stenzler, Rumble’s CEO. “That you didn’t have to hit each other to get a great workout.” Boxing may be a centuries-old sport, but the combination of inviting spaces, trainers who aren’t bullies and circuit-style classes feels fresh.

Aspiring sluggers spend half of each session clobbering the bags, the other half executing strength exercises using body weight, dumbbells and lighter brass knuckle weights (\$36/class, \$3 to rent gloves, rumble-boxing.com).

At Rumble, the glossy leather gloves don’t reek of sweat; they’re stored on ski-boot heaters that kill bacteria. The teardrop-shaped bags don’t hurt your wrists; they’re filled with water, more forgiving than sand. And the sequences—described in punchy graphics beamed along the crown of each studio’s wall and synchronized to music—are easy to follow. There’s no fear of getting struck in the face by a classmate, either. “We want it to be fun, not intimidating,” said Mr. Stenzler.

Subtract the combat and boxing is still a killer total-body workout.

“You’re constantly moving,” explained Chris Gagliardi, a certified personal trainer with the American Council of Exercise. “It’s challenging muscular endurance, strength, flexibility, body composition, your brain. You’re working on power, speed, balance, agility, coordination. It’s a lot of bang for your buck,” he said.

“You’re exhausted, dripping sweat, and have worked so hard you can’t hold your arms up,” added account executive Minna Ramos, 26, who trains at Rumble in New York. “But you walk out feeling confident, inspired. That’s what keeps me going.”

Americans have re-embraced boxing for reasons beyond the appeal of smart marketing and body benefits. “The world is more stressed than ever,” said Susan Boresow, president of Title Boxing Club, which was founded in 2008 and now operates more than 175 studios in the U.S. “People just want to go hit something, and boxing is a great way to alleviate that stress in a very healthy way.”

While Title’s gyms were originally designed with cage paneling and a dark, gritty atmosphere that paid homage to pugilists, the chain undertook a redesign influenced by the success of boutique gyms when it began franchising in 2012. “We rebranded with a brighter, cleaner look,” said Ms. Boresow—better lighting, light wood floors, pops of red. Title’s noncontact HIIT (high-intensity interval training) classes are inspired by workouts performed by pros like WBA welterweight champ Manny Pacquiao. And for today’s fitness-tracking nerds, some clubs feature bags with innovative sensors that measure how hard and how frequently you hit, displaying scores on wall-mounted TVs (*memberships from*



\$59/mo., titleboxingclub.com).

Meanwhile, Rumble is taking things further with At Home 360, a Peloton-esque venture that combines a Technogym boxing bag (\$1,700, technogym.com) with a \$39/mo. subscription for live and on-demand Rumble classes streamed to your smartphone.

Other cleaned-up gyms offer noncontact circuit classes: There’s Everybody Fights, in Boston and Kentucky; Shadowbox in Brooklyn, Dallas and Austin; and L.A.’s Mayweather Boxing + Fitness, owned by former world champ Floyd Mayweather, which plans to add 500 gyms in the next five years.

“It was just a matter of time before it became more appealing to the masses, thanks to the popularity of UFC and MMA,” said Mr. Gagliardi. “Now you have bright, open environments where you can still be hardcore”—a classic one-two punch.

HIT PARADE From top: The action at Rumble; Title Boxing Club’s redesigned gyms feature classes inspired by pro pugilists’ workouts.



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Sanabul Elastic Pro Boxing Wraps Hand wraps keep sweat from KO’ing your gloves, but often harbor that stench instead. This set is made of a breathable polyester blend that won’t irritate skin. \$7, sanabulsports.com



Reebok Boxing Boot Rereleased in 2018 with a new mid-cut design to allow for more flexibility, these boxing boots are crucial for nailing all that Ali-esque footwork without rolling an ankle. \$100, reebok.com



Title Weighted Plastic Speed Rope Skipping rope is one of the most effective forms of cardio for improving endurance, balance and footwork; weighted handles add an extra challenge. \$13, titleboxing.com