

Property

No place like home for a workout: furniture doubling as gym equipment saves space in Hong Kong flats

A side table that doubles as a rowing machine, a chair that's an 'invisible gym', a stand-up workstation that's also a workout station - how to make your small flat into a home gym


Peta Tomlinson
[+ FOLLOW](#)

Published: 12:15am, 16 Sep, 2015 ▾

 [Why you can trust SCMP](#)


Liquid Interiors designs exercise areas that are 'relaxingly bright and minimal'.
 Photo: Rowena Gonzales

We don't need another survey to tell us the benefits of exercising more - yet research companies continue to peddle them out.

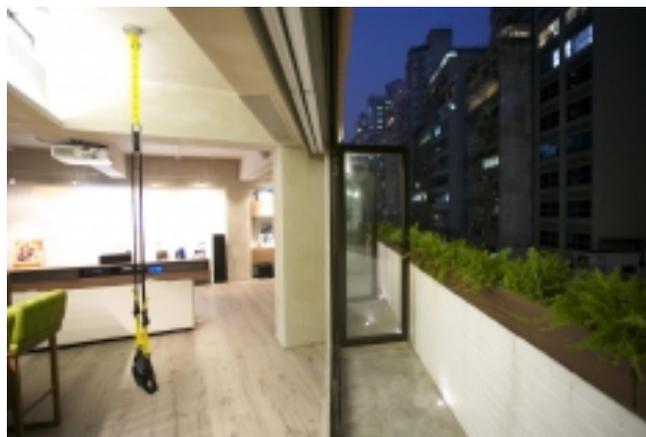
The hours spent at home offer potential time to up the movement ante, but with apartments becoming excruciatingly small, there is no place for bulky gym equipment. Here's how to work up a sweat without leaving home.

Lawyer Jonathan Barkey has slung a TRX from the ceiling in his 1,000 sq ft flat, a feature of his home's remodelling that he specified should incorporate opportunities for impromptu exercise.

"I don't have a dining room table - just a bar set-up on the kitchen island," he said. "This frees up a decent space to do push ups, roll out the yoga mat, or use my TRX."

It is easily removed - "so I could take it down if friends are coming over" - but mostly, Barkey does not bother. He finds the equipment visually unobtrusive, and something of a novelty among guests, who tend to "swing off it like monkeys".

Personal trainer Alex de Fina, founder and CEO of Bikini Fit Asia also appreciates the TRX's minimal design impact. "It can be anchored to a ceiling or door frame without being a design eyesore," he said.



TRX hangs from the ceiling in Sheung Wan flat. Photo: Jonathan Barkey

He also advocates investing in small items of equipment, which can enhance the benefits, and even mimic a lot of gym movements. He recommends plastic push-up handles, for extra leverage on floor workouts, resistance bands for torque, and an inflatable ab mat that enhances resistance training. All are available cheaply at sports stores or online. He would also have a quality yoga mat, for essential stretching. The cheap ones absorb moisture and will not last in Hong Kong's humid climate, de Fina says.

Or let your furniture do the heavy lifting. It's a rare beast who doesn't bring some work home, and stand-up desks are all the rage - some even with built-in treadmills. Latest models include the high-tech Stir Kinetic Desk F1 from Stirworks, a touchscreen-operated model from America with software that learns your standing and sitting habits over time, and feeds that data to your Fitbit via Bluetooth connection.

The new Tao Chair from US firm Tao-Wellness, looks a bit like an Eames chair, but with fitness sensors running through it. The company calls it an "invisible gym". The user can do a range of core exercises while sitting down - including curls, presses and leg lifts - with an armrest display counting the calories burned and pounds pressed. It is expected to be ready in mid-2016, at a cost of around US\$1,200.

Liquid Interiors' CEO Rowena Gonzales says more Hongkongers are seeking exercise opportunities in their homes. "In one of our projects we are designing a multipurpose guest bedroom and meditation/yoga room," she says. It is designed to be "relaxingly bright and minimal", with low cushions on the floor, floor lanterns for candles, motivational messages in the hand-painted calligraphy artwork, plants for fresh air, and hidden storage for yoga mats, etc. The sleeping arrangement is a Murphy bed - completely concealed - with a "discreetly reflective" side that can be used as a mirror when doing yoga.

"There are some types of innovative furniture that can transform into very stylish exercise equipment which we would love to use in future projects," Gonzales says, citing No, Sweat! by Vancouver-based designer Darryl Agawin, which goes from workstation to workout where "hundreds of exercises can be extrapolated", and Disguised Exercise, by Yanko Design, which appears to be an upright planter, but is in fact an exercise apparatus equipped with pulley systems for strength training, and a padded mat for stretching and ab workouts. The Ram & Row, by French designer Patrick Saint-Martin, is another example of exercise equipment in disguise: a wooden side table that unfolds into a rowing machine.

Perhaps the most compelling reason to get off the couch at home is that sitting is actually bad for us - and most of us do enough of that either in the office and commuting. According to the online publication smithsonian.com the answer to keeping lifestyle-related diseases at bay and body weight under control lies not on the jogging trail or in the gym, but by "incorporating standing, pacing and other forms of activity into your normal day".



Tao Chair acts as 'invisible gym'. Photo: SCMP Pictures