

A FLAIR FOR FITNESS

Watch a movie in the cardio theater, swim to underwater music, and get someone else to wash your workout clothes at these posh health clubs.

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It's not easy living with a fitness professional. While I'm captive behind a desk for most of the workday, my wife gets paid to stay fit. In her career as a national trainer and presenter for a large group fitness organization, as well as teaching local classes in Greensboro, she exercises more in two days than I do all week. If you think this generates a bit of pressure to remain fit myself, you'd be right.

You don't need a resident fitness guru, however, to feel pressure when it comes to working out. Most busy professionals experience some level of guilt when not doing enough to

promote their own health and well-being through exercise. Often it's not a lack of desire that hampers their fitness goals, but more likely time constraints, convenience issues, and, let's face it, overcrowded, uninspiring gyms that offer limited choices when it comes to the total fitness experience.

Luckily, a new breed of health clubs has emerged over the last several years, upscale facilities that redefine the traditional gym philosophies by providing convenience, amenities, and exercise diversity for those seeking mind-body balance within their hectic lifestyles. Here are three North Carolina fitness centers that are elevating the health club experience. Working out just became a lot more enticing.

EXECUTIVE CONVENIENCE

Core Fitness' target market in Charlotte is the rushed executive. Owner Jea Jung stumbled upon the concept by accident. He had planned to purchase land in the suburbs to open a traditional gym when his realtor steered him to the heart of Charlotte's booming financial district.

1. At Core Fitness, richly panelled woodgrain elevates the humble locker room to country-club status.
2. Planning to be on that treadmill for awhile? Tune into a full-length feature film on one of the large-panel TVs in the Cardio Theater.
3. Large windows on the other side of the Cardio Theater give exercisers a real-world view.



UPSCALE
FITNESS



UPSCALE
FITNESS

Swim by city light at Core Fitness' outdoor lap pool.



The sleek workout area (above) and lobby of Core Fitness in Charlotte dispels the notion that this is an ordinary gym.

“There was a hole in the fitness market downtown,” Jung says. “Once I realized that, I began to rethink my entire health club model.”

Jung’s vision is apparent. As you enter the 32,000-square-foot club, one gets the impression it could compete well with clubs in even the largest U.S. cities. In fact, Jung is quite pleased when relocated financial executives tell him his club is on par with the ones they left in New York City.

What makes the club ideal for the hurried executive? For starters, the locker rooms boast private lockers with the members’ names engraved on metal plates. With a 24-hour turnaround for laundered workout clothes, members can walk from their offices in their business attire, free of bulky gym bags, and have everything they need to train, shower, and return to work.

Don’t have time to grab lunch? Place an order with Core’s

food concierge when checking in and your meal from one of several nearby restaurants will be timed to arrive after your workout.

Then there’s the cardio theater. Situated behind an illuminated wall of blue glass, this quiet, dimly lit room has eight large-screen televisions showing not only news and sports, but also two feature-length movies for those who want marathon cardio sessions.

Jung plans to increase amenities to further differentiate his club. He’ll add two virtual golf simulators where members can improve their game while playing famous world courses. And the adjacent rooftop will become a 5,000-square-foot putting green. Jung has little need to advertise the new addition. He has more than a thousand captive prospects in the surrounding office buildings, the Bank of America Headquarters included, that tower over the future green.

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

Dr. Don Linder of Greensboro wasn’t always in the fitness business. While he was interested in people’s health as an anesthesiologist, his work involved treating patients

rather than using the concept of wellness and fitness as preventative medicine.

As the driving force behind a string of successful business ventures including Greensboro’s first outpatient surgical center, Linder used his business savvy to launch an upscale facility named Pyramids Wellness Center, now known as The Club at Oak Branch. “With preventive healthcare growing, I recognized the opportunity to make a difference in people’s lives through wellness,” says Linder.

The Club at Oak Branch exudes an atmosphere of sophistication while remaining inviting. “I wanted people to feel comfortable and welcome as they walked in,” Linder says. And he means it. To enhance the ambience of the club, Linder included numerous pieces of original artwork from his personal collection. His art appreciation is rooted in the contemporary, so you can engage your mind as well as your body while you ponder original gems from Jamali and Lee White. If art is good for the soul, Linder has made great strides in his wellness objectives.

However, The Club at Oak Branch is not just aesthetically pleasing but highly functional as well.



1. The lobby at The Club at Oak Branch has more in common with a four-star hotel than a gym.
2. Take your time in the plush locker rooms of Oak Branch.
3. Stroke to underwater music in the 10-lane, 25-meter pool.
4. You've worked hard, why don't you relax for a while in Oak Branch's waiting area?
5. Children can stay for up to three hours a day in the fun, brightly colored kid zone.

Beyond the traditional equipment within its 60,000 square feet, it also contains a 10-lane, 25-meter indoor pool with underwater music, massage therapy rooms, an on-site certified acupuncturist, a salon with four stylists and one aesthetician, as well as three group exercise studios.

The busy family will find much to like about the facility as well. With family memberships, children get their own exercise in two large kid-friendly gyms. Kids can stay for up to three hours, seven days a week, while the parents exercise or even run errands. The club also just purchased the Carolinas' first Bill Parisi franchise, a sports

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performance school that helps the seven to 17 crowd build speed and agility for more self-confidence in athletics.

THE FAMILY WHO WORKS OUT TOGETHER..

Linda Barmann loves her job. As membership director for Impact Athletics & Fitness Center in Cary, it's obvious she believes in the positive difference her facility is making in people's lives.

The originating vision behind the club sparked as a group of parents grew frustrated with the inordinate amount of time they spent waiting as their children attended various sport practices. Wouldn't it be great, the parents thought, to have one facility with gymnastics, martial arts, swimming, and more, while housing an upscale workout facility where the parents could stay active themselves? Add a host of other amenities and activities to further enhance the environment and you have a place where you can feel comfortable spending large amounts of time.

But the facility is not just for families. Impact went to great lengths to soundproof the equipment area upstairs so adults — both childless and those who wish to be childless for an hour — can enjoy peaceful workouts. Parents can still watch over their children, however, if so inclined. Large glass windows run the length of the exercise rooms so it's easy to keep an eye on a daughter's gymnastic practice below while using the cardio equipment.

One feature of special interest is an exercise room dedicated to novices or the de-conditioned. While anyone is welcome to use the room, there are no heavy dumbbells or other equipment that may be popular with the advanced members. This reduces the chance that beginners get intimidated working out next to the super-fit.

Other amenities at Impact include a private practice physical therapy group, a restaurant, music and art classes,

and a large common area with free Wi-Fi, all of which make the facility a smart choice for the active family. Barmann says it best, "We're a one-stop concept in family fitness."

WELCOME TREND

The one-stop concept appears to be what many of the upscale health clubs are moving toward. Staying in shape is never going to be easy. It's called "working out" for a reason. But these clubs are proving that it doesn't have to be so difficult either. With their emphasis on amenities, convenience, and lifestyle balance, your list of reasons not to exercise just got shorter. □

FOUR-STAR FITNESS

If you live in the Asheville area, check out the Grove Park Inn Sports Complex, part of the Grove Park Inn Resort and Spa. The resort, a four-star destination for Asheville visitors, opens its sports complex to the Asheville community for memberships. As an added bonus, members of the complex receive discounts on the resort amenities and spa.

There's an interesting backstory behind the creation of the resort. In the early 1900s, a wealthy entrepreneur from St. Louis, Missouri, named Edwin Wiley Grove spent time in the Asheville mountains at the behest of his doctor. The doctor believed the North Carolina mountain air would have a healing effect on Grove's chronic bouts of bronchitis and exhaustion. **The prescription must have worked because Grove purchased land in Asheville and built the resort in less than a year so visitors could enjoy the healing nature of the mountains just as he had.** □

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