



Association of Fitness Studios: Designing a Fitness Studio

Ten Tips for Designing a Dynamic and Functional Fitness Studio



"When starting or running your own business, we understand there's a lot of noise out there - and you're going to have questions – what we do is take the guesswork out of being a fitness business owner."

– Josh Leve, Founder & CEO, Association of Fitness Studios



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When designing a fitness studio, there are several factors that come into play.

The cost associated with the design and construction of a fitness studio is highly variable and depends on many factors, the most important of which include (i) the size of the studio, (ii) the scope of the work (e.g., number of rooms and level of finish), (iii) the condition of the space (shell or partially finished space), (iv) whether an architect was retained, and (v) the time frame for completing the work. Architect fees typically are presented as a percentage of the total construction cost, ranging from as low as six percent to as high as 12%.

A well respected architect may also charge you a flat rate per square foot (a better approach to pricing). Depending on the scope of work they perform, this should be in the range of five to 10 dollars per square foot.

"How you go about conceptualizing, designing and constructing your studio can have a material impact on the future success of your business. If a studio owner approaches the process well informed and well prepared, they can eliminate many, if not all of the barriers that derail many studio entrepreneurs."

– Stephen Tharrett, Co-Founder & Partner, Club Intel



From a construction perspective, a very simple single space studio (e.g., reception, restrooms and workout area) with minimal finishes (e.g., floor surfaces, lighting, ceilings) may cost as little as \$20 per square foot to construct, while a more complex studio (e.g., changing rooms, group studios, general workout area, rest rooms, lounge, reception, provision of new HVAC and electrical) with quality finishes (e.g., detailed millwork, quality floor surfaces, quality fixtures) might cost as much as \$100 to \$125 per square foot (note that costs in markets such as

New York and California could be 50% to 100% higher). All told, if you plan properly you should be able to design and build a quality studio for between \$50 and \$70 per square foot.

Before doing anything it is important to understand the expenses of designing and building a studio as well as what it will cost to operate your new facility. Expenses to consider include Pre-design expenses, construction costs, and operational costs.

Demographic studies and surveys of the surround neighborhoods within a ten mile radius will help understand the people that will become members of your studio and it will be the beginning of your Pre-Design expenses. This will help determine where you can get the member interest and the right price point for your members. This will also help you decide on the best location for your studio to be a success.

Looking for the perfect site will depend a great deal on your business plan. Owning or leasing a space should be immediately considered in your budget and future plans. Do you want to lease a space in an existing building or build a new studio from the ground up? What are the pros and cons to selecting either of these options? And, how will it benefit your studio when you are open? Building your studio from the ground up will allow you to have the exact plan that meets your program. However, it may be cost prohibitive, due to all of the design and construction expenses. Leasing a space inside an existing building will be the more cost effective solution in the short term, but there might be some design items that have to be sacrificed. For example, you may find the perfect footprint for your studio, but it may have lower ceiling heights than you would like to have that would not allow you to do box jumps or to hang your aerial yoga pieces.

Below are our top 10 tips for creating a dynamic and functional fitness studio...



1) *Define the program for your studio space.* It all begins with understanding how you will use the studio space to fulfill your brand promise. This requires knowing exactly what amenities, programs and services you want to provide. Knowing exactly how you will use the space will establish what has to happen with the design. Whether you will have yoga, Pilates, or small group training, it is important to understand the needs of your audience and what activities will be offered in the studio.

2) *Don't make them sweat for the wrong reasons.* We all know that clients mistakenly believe that the more they sweat the better their workout was. Well, you want clients to perspire when they workout, but it should be a consequence of a properly prescribed exercise regime, not a physical environment that is improperly ventilated. One of the most critical elements of design is having good ventilation that allows the studio space to be maintained at the proper temperature and humidity, while also providing sufficient cross ventilation. In most instances you want to maintain your studio space between 68 and 72 degrees Fahrenheit with humidity levels under 50%. A group cycling room with 40 clients packed in generates a much higher heat load than an open training space serving a dozen training clients. Consequentially you want to make sure you understand the demands of each space and design the system accordingly.

3) *Don't create a space that requires clients to trip over each other.* Overcrowding is the most frequently heard complaint among members and former members of health and fitness clubs. Clients want some personal space when they exercise, they don't want to be rubbing shoulders or other body parts with strangers. While your goal as a studio operator is to get as many clients as possible into your space, you also want to accommodate people's need for personal space. Beyond the issue of personal space, there is the issue of safety. When space is limited it increases the likelihood that an accident could occur. In general, you want to allocate between 10 and 20 square feet for each member you expect to have, or you should allocate at least 40 square feet for each client you expect in your studio at any given time.

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– Christa Plaza, Owner, Essenza Architecture



4) *Don't forget about lighting; it helps set the mood.*

One of the more critical elements for creating the right environment for your studio involves lighting design. Lighting is more than just providing a sufficient level of lighting; it's about creating a mood, generating energy and fulfilling the promise of the experience you are trying to create. If your studio will be dedicated to delivering a great yoga experience, using light fixtures made from natural elements can help to create a peaceful environment. In yoga it is important to foster

a calming and peaceful, nearly transcendent experience and as a result you want to incorporate indirect lighting so the light shines upward in a soft pattern. If your fitness studio is going to focus on the delivery of small group training classes that depend on a dynamic environment, then you might want spot lights or colored LED lights that add drama. Incorporating direct and indirect lighting allows you to create a theatrical effect. Another important aspect of lighting design is to select high efficiency lighting which can reduce heat load (often a frequent complaint of members) as well as reduce the studio's operational costs.

5) *Select the right colors to bolster the experience.* Colors are essential to establishing the proper mood. Color, along with lighting, has a material impact on the mood that is created within your space. If your studio is focused on delivering high energy small group training then vivid color combinations can denote high energy and provide an inspirational setting. If your studio is positioning itself as a mind/body retreat then you want to incorporate calming earth tones that create a natural and tranquil feel.

6) *The right flooring can enhance performance and protect clients.* Flooring is more than decorative; it is instrumental in enhancing the functionality and safety of the space. The best choice of flooring for most studios, especially for those offering sports performance and functional training activities (e.g., tires, ropes, kettle bells, free weights and resistance machines) are high density synthetic sports floors. These floors are made of high density foams and rubbers; coming in a variety of colors and thicknesses. They also come with a moisture barrier backing, so if your slab is in a high humidity area you do not have to provide an additional vapor barrier. If your studio will be focused on group exercise activities such as barre, mat Pilates or yoga, then an all-purpose wood athletic floor is the best choice.



7) *Incorporate space to gather.* If your fitness studio will target group exercise activities such as barre, group cycling or yoga then it is beneficial to create a social gathering space or pre-assembly area adjacent to the group exercise spaces that allows clients to socialize prior to and after taking classes. If your studio will focus on personal training, then you want to have a location where clients can gather if they choose. The social element is important in helping clients establish relationships with other clients.

- 8) *Don't forget to leave space to store your accessories.* There is nothing worse than entering a fitness studio and having to immediately engage in agility movements to avoid stumbling over accessories (e.g., hand weights, dumbbells, weight plates, medicine balls) that are scattered throughout the space. Creating sufficient storage space will ensure that your employees and clients don't have to dodge items left on the floor, and will also ensure that your studio presents itself professionally to prospective clients. Having sufficient storage space can lessen the costs associated with liability claims resulting from client's and/or employees injuring themselves as the result of exposure to improperly stored equipment. Ideally you want to allocate about 5% to 10% of your entire space to storage.
- 9) *Add an element of interest to your space with simple design features.* Nothing is more boring or de-energizing than four blank walls and a vanilla ceiling. If you want your space to "pop" and inspire, then you want to incorporate small design features. For example, if your space has an open ceiling you should consider incorporating hanging acoustical panels or elements. These small and relatively inexpensive features can really add energy and interest.
- 10) *Mirror, mirror on the wall.* Mirrors are a design feature that can convert a small boring space into a large dynamic space or one that is relaxing and intimate. Mirrors, if properly placed, can make a space appear much larger than it is, giving clients a sense of personal space. Mirrors can assist in creating the proper mood, such as giving an appearance of calm. Mirrors can assist trainers and clients monitor their exercise movements; ensuring proper alignment and posture. In group exercise spaces, mirrors are essential in helping instructors monitor the form of clients, and for clients to monitor their own form.



As a fitness studio operator, remember, your facility space is your canvas; it is where you craft your trade. Whether you are operating a personal training studio, a yoga studio, Pilates studio, dance studio, MMA, or other - the aesthetic and functional elements of the space are an important ingredient in the delivery of your brand's value proposition.

A well designed studio becomes an asset that allows you to differentiate your studio and deliver the types of programs and experiences that will differentiate your brand in the marketplace. Creating your fitness studio space will most likely represent the single largest outlay of capital your business makes. How you go about making this investment can have a significant impact on your short term and long term profitability.



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