

# HOME

## & Garden

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Section F



RUSTY RENIERS / Special to the Chronicle

Designer Tish Key wanted this fitness room for the San Francisco Decorator Showcase to be "more than a place where you got on a treadmill."

An at-home fitness space sounds like a good New Year's resolution — but it's not for everyone

## A VERY PRIVATE CLUB

By Susan Fornoff  
CHRONICLE STAFF WRITER

The regulars at my gym are braced for that annual rush of resolvers who write their first checks of the new year to the local fitness center, certain that they'll put their sweat where their money is and finally make exercise part of their lives.

Trust me, the regulars aren't worried about long-term overcrowding.

"Ah, they'll all be gone by the Super Bowl," one of them said the other day. "Then we can have the place to ourselves and the owners can spend their money to make the club even better for us."

Which leads fitness experts and home decorators to wonder: Why not just stay home? The benefits of exercise are obvious, but with our time so precious there's a strong case for

### Exercise for fingers

The Web sites for the nonprofits American College of Sports Medicine ([www.acsm.org](http://www.acsm.org)), American Council on Exercise ([www.acefitness.org](http://www.acefitness.org)), and National Strength and Conditioning Association ([www.nscs.com](http://www.nscs.com)) offer geographically based listings of certified personal trainers and other information for those starting an exercise program.

To download Larry Golding's program, visit [www.lagolding.com](http://www.lagolding.com) and click on the link to "exercises used in the Adult Exercise Program."

Visit [www.michaelmerrill.net](http://www.michaelmerrill.net) to track the renovation of Kathy Fardy's Eichler. Michael Merrill can be reached at (415) 440-2111.

To see more of Tish Key's work, go to [www.tishkey.com](http://www.tishkey.com). The designer's firm can be reached at (415) 359-1470.

investing in a bit of home improvement — instead of spending money furnishing a local gym.

"Working out at home is more convenient — plus, you don't have to wait for someone else's sweaty body to get off the equipment," said Tim Welch, an aspiring fitness trainer who's setting up a home gym in his spare bedroom in Pacifica.

"By having equipment of your own, you beat the weather factor," said Barbara Bushman, exercise specialist and associate professor at Southwest Missouri State University.

"Also, the days are shorter — I'm not going to go out and run at 5 o'clock this time of year. And for some people, the idea of going to a gym means you have to get yourself prepared. Some folks actually spend time match-

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# Home gym presents its own set of problems

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ing socks and shoes. For them, the home workout may be a time saver.

"But some people prefer the social aspects of going to the gym over staying at home on the treadmill. Unfortunately, you may not know until after you get it — which is why so many treadmills show up at garage sales."

Treadmills — and their brethren: exercise bikes, cross-country skiers and rowing machines — show up at garage sales, on Craigslist and at the annual White Elephant Sale of the Oakland Museum in such numbers, perhaps we at Home+Garden ought to devise alternatives to their intended uses. Plant stand, maybe? Lamp table? Of course, many who keep exercise equipment in their bedrooms already know of a major application.

"Intentions are good but the flesh is weak," said Neal Pire, a New York fitness trainer active on committees of the American College of Sports Medicine. "All too often, exercise equipment becomes a clothes-hanging tool, because the purchaser just wasn't committed enough to using it and sticking with their original goals."

(Note to those shopping for "clothes-hanging tools": cross-country ski machines make especially good ones, due to their extended bars.)

"The thing is, to exercise you don't need any equipment at all," observed Larry Golding.

Golding, a distinguished professor in the University of Nevada, Las Vegas' department of kinesiology, says he's concluded the primary decision is not whether to exercise at home or to join a gym, it's to exercise at all. In one study of 25 unfit people who came to see him for a prescription for exercise, he asked each one, "How committed are you?" Each proclaimed, "I'm very committed." So he asked, "Well, when will you do this?"

With each, he carved out a time to walk a mile and then return to him in a week.

"Out of 25 people," said Golding, "not one of them came back. So how committed were they?"

Top-of-the-line treadmills may engage some people more than push-ups, said Golding, and investing big money in a gym membership may motivate the guilty to show up once in a while. But he recommends first

committing yourself to exercise, then to a time to exercise — getting up a half-hour earlier, say, for 15 minutes of cardio and 15 minutes of resistance exercise — and next deciding on a place.

"The only problem with home exercise," he said, "is the discipline of doing it. In the classes I teach, students rely on the social pressure of coming. You don't have that at home."

What you do have are distractions, especially when the price of square footage prohibits many from allotting more than a space in the garage, basement, living room or bedroom for exercise equipment. Even among designers customizing fitness spaces for clients, there are two schools of thought: Allow space for other activities, or eliminate the possibility of distractions.

Choosing the former, Tish Key created a fitness room and adjacent massage room on the top floor of this year's San Francisco Decorator Showcase house that included drapes to soften the look and a sitting area "where the client could take calls or look at e-mail."

"I didn't want it to look like Gorilla Sports in there. The room had quite a bit of light and was very cheerful, and so we wanted it to be more than a place where you got on a treadmill," she said. One wall was mirrored and had a ballet barre; seagrass covered the floor; bas-

said Merrill, who described a marble floor, white color scheme and track lighting. "She was thinking of putting equipment in the garage — but, why not make it nice, so that you actually want to go in there and exercise?"

But, what about wannabe exercisers who can't set aside an entire room just for fitness? Well, consider that the experts recommend that we exercise our hearts and our muscles, and also stretch. For a workout at the price of the clothes on our backs (and feet), that means running or walking, doing push-up and sit-up type exercises, and stretching ourselves. (A good, free indoor prop for all three programs: stairs.)

For a little more money and space: Add a jump rope or exercise video, some flexible tubing and a yoga mat. For yet a little more money and space: Search out a good piece of used cardio equipment and purchase some weights and an inflatable exercise ball, which can double as a bench for weight training. Spending to the max for a bigger space: Buy the most suitable cardio equipment you can afford (topping out at around \$3,000), add a multi-station piece of weight-training equipment (another \$1,500 or so) and install one of the newfangled stretch trainers (\$700).

"If you spend very little on a treadmill, it's unlikely you'll get the kind of quality that will keep you using it," said Bushman. "It will probably become a clothes hanger. I recommend doing what I did: Dress up in your workout clothes, go to a store and try them out at the speed you like, putting the grade up and down. Is it stable? Is it smooth? Does the belt hesitate at all? Then make a selection or two and start working on negotiating a price."

Or, shop online or at re-conditioning shops for a used model. In addition to the equipment, Pire, who helps clients set up home gyms, recommends having television or music in the exercise area, to "keep the exerciser going and distract them from the task at hand — especially effective during cardio exercise." And he suggests springing for a consultation or two with a professional trainer, to devise an at-home program worthy of commitment and recommend suitable props.

"A trainer can help the at-home exerciser devise a program that's effective and safe — or, after interviewing the client, may say, 'You're too socially motivated to waste your time trying to do this yourself — either hire me or go to a gym.'" Pire said. "The ideal candidate for exercising at home is the typical type A organized individual, who can schedule a workout and stick with it."

Of course, that's probably also the ideal candidate for exercising at the gym, which in the Bay Area can run anywhere from \$30 a month at small, no-frills facilities to more than \$300 monthly (plus initiation fees) at clubs with swimming pools and tennis courts. If you crave the social interaction, it's probably worth the money.

Me, I have an ancient NordicTrack at home, and sometimes I strap on a heart-rate monitor, crank up the TV and hop on board. But I really enjoy being a regular at my neighborhood gym — especially after the resolvers make their hasty retreat.

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**"All too often, exercise equipment becomes a clothes-hanging tool, because the purchaser just wasn't committed enough to using it and sticking with their original goals."**

NEAL PIRE,  
fitness trainer

kets held towels and yoga mats.

"You have to make it feel like not a forgotten space but an intentional space," she said. "Even if you only have a small bedroom, or space in the garage, and investing big money in a gym membership may motivate the guilty to show up once in a while. But he recommends first

Fitness expert Bushman says she lets the telephone nowhere near her at-home exercise space, which has a treadmill as well as a road bike mounted for indoor use in winter. Simplicity also is the goal for San Francisco designer Michael Merrill, who is putting an exercise space in a small bedroom in Kathy Fardy's remodeled San Mateo Eichler house.

"I get tired of renewing my gym membership and not using it," said Fardy, who works long hours as a compensation analyst at Stanford. "There's guilt, and there's also the matter of the money I'm wasting. My plan is to put in an elliptical orbiter and a TV and try to get a workout in at home."

"The room has no other purpose or function, so you go in there and have no distractions,"



MICHAEL MALONEY/The Chronicle

Clothes hanger, plant stand, lamp table, book shelf — abandoned home exercise equipment takes on many uses.