

# STYLE

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## RISING STAR

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# FIGHTING FIT

These days you're as likely to find a model in the ring as on the catwalk. With the launch of BXR, the latest celebrity gym, *Kate Spicer* reports on boxing's rise from back streets to boutique

**N**o respectable lifestyle brand dare open its doors these days without a waft of bespoke fragrance. At BXR London, a hypnotic synthesis of leather, musk, talc and a trace of warm aftershave is pumped through the air conditioning. If the smart candlemakers Cire Trudon, just down the road, called one of its £50 candles Boxing Glove, it would smell like this.

BXR is a new private members' boxing gym on Chiltern Street in Marylebone. Yes, that Chiltern Street, of Firehouse fame and one of the most unlikely locations for a boxing gym in Britain. BXR is spread over two floors and 12,000 sq ft of a £250m development, and its boxing ring sits in full view behind floor-to-ceiling glass on this fashionable and chichi street. Passers-by may spot members such as Ellie Goulding and Mark Ronson sparring.

Training like a boxer is a highly effective full-body workout and has been a fixture on class schedules in normal gyms since Boxercise first launched in 1992. In recent years, though, its popularity has grown hugely. According to the fitness app ClassPass, there was an 89% increase in boxing classes in 2016.

There are many reasons boxing is having something of a moment. Some are noble: the extraordinary achievements of the likes of Nicola Adams and Anthony Joshua, who is attached to this gym. Others less so: Instagram. Red gloves repeatedly pop up on the fists of its prettiest perspiring beautiful people, especially Sports Illustrated and Victoria's Secret models. And the favourite location for these shots isn't beaches or beside twinkling swimming pools: it's in the gritty grass-roots boxing gyms.

For those A-listers who can't bring themselves to train in an authentic East End boxing club, BXR is the answer. Anyone can pay £30 to drop into one of the classes downstairs, but upstairs is the £1,500-a-year gym, which aims to have the authenticity of a spit-and-sawdust establishment, despite functioning like a private members' club. It's already attracting the mandatory Victoria's Secret Angels, such as Sara Sampaio, a Portuguese model with 4.6m followers on Instagram. "I hate spin and yoga, but boxing is a great workout and cardio, and it's perfect if you're stressed. Lots of my friends do it," she says.

Still, while BXR might whiff like a billionaire's bathroom, the owners are quick to tell you there are no bikini waxes in the treatment rooms, only sports medics, and the gym's focus, says its co-owner Neil Sanyal, is the boxers. The heavyweight champion Joshua has a share

in the company; Adams has membership. "People are inspired by the boxers," Sanyal says, and his gym is about, "boxing as a martial art as opposed to a workout. We want to remind people of the glamour and history. This isn't about training for the beach, this is about training for life."

Some are sceptical. "It sounds brilliant and I hope it brings more people to the sport," says the boxing promoter Nisse Sauerland, "but the truth is, when I want to box, I go somewhere a bit dingy."

The old-school-type places are in tatty decommissioned churches with broken windows, underneath railway arches or stuck in dark basements. These historic gyms in what were working-class communities are where boxing legends are made. One of the most popular in London is Box Clever, a makeshift gym in a multistorey car park by Ladbroke Grove, in west London. No tantalising fragrance here. It smells of sweat, rubber mats and the cold.

Some of the people that go there, however, are the sort you would expect to see at BXR: the designers Charlotte Olympia and Alice Temperley; and the flamboyant and glamorous event planner, Fiona Leahy. Laura Bailey goes, as does David Beckham with some of his kids. The list is pretty long. Ask them if the new, upmarket take on the boxing gym is interesting, and there is universal agreement.

Olympia, possibly the most carefully coiffed and groomed woman this side of Fifth Avenue, says: "When I want to sweat, I come here. It feels like a club and it's a genuine gym, the guys are lovely. You're there to work out and then you leave."

Temperley says: "I don't like gyms, but a boxing gym is different – it gives you a buzz and the men are real. It's sweat, swearing, torture, pure adrenaline. It's refreshingly unfancy."

For Leahy, the authentic boxing experience is intrinsic to her love of the place. "You know the perfect socialite doing kettlebell lifts on Instagram? It's the opposite of that vibe. Those sorts of people wouldn't dream of going there. There's so much fake authenticity now. This is the real deal."

In an age when everything is private members or a luxury, it is perhaps inevitable that this smelly, noisy, antithesis is actually what's exclusive. Sauerland says: "Boxing gyms are the scariest places to get into, but once you're in, you're really in." ●

[bxrlondon.com](http://bxrlondon.com)



## GET-IN-THE-RING

**Gotham Gym, Manhattan** A favourite with New York's acting, modelling and banking elite. The West Village hotspot provides one-on-one training and group classes to the likes of Gigi Hadid, who refers to its owner, Rob Piela, as "the guy who makes-up for my love of burgers and pasta". [gothamgymnyc.com](http://gothamgymnyc.com)

**Gymbox, London** Closer to home, this multisite brand has resident trainers, including Derek Williams, formerly one of Mike Tyson's sparring partners, and hosts full-body classes such as Fitboxing and Fight Klub and technique-focused classes such as Muay Thai & Sparring, Gymboxing and K1 Kickboxing. [gymbox.com](http://gymbox.com)

**Bells Boxing & Fitness, Altrincham** The go-to gym of the Cheshire set offers cardio boxing classes, including "boga" (boxing yoga) and Hiit boxing, teen classes for 10- to 15-year-olds, kids' boxing parties and one-on-one training. Regulars include the cast of Cheshire Wives and local Wags. [bells gym.co.uk](http://bells gym.co.uk)

**KoBox, London** This one-stop shop combines high-intensity with boxing routines and functional strength training in a "Fight Club meets nightclub environment", according to its founder, Shane Collins. Cheryl Cole is rumoured to be a fan of the workout that promises "to tone every part of your body". [koboxlondon.com](http://koboxlondon.com)



**From top** Fight fans Karlie Kloss, Gigi Hadid and Ellie Goulding.

**Left** Adriana Lima

