

# The Gym

**W**HEN YOU ARE a bodybuilder, the gym is your office. It's where you take care of business. You can easily end up spending three or four hours in a gym, which means it should have the kind of equipment you need, the kind of people training around you that add energy to your workouts, and an overall atmosphere that will motivate you to achieve your personal goals.

## **THE GYM EXPLOSION**

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When I began serious bodybuilding training it was hard to find adequate training facilities. Good gyms were few and far between. For example, when I was working out in Austria as a young man we had no standard incline bench, the kind you lie back on. Instead, there was a *standing* incline bench, which was quite a different piece of equipment. In order to do incline barbell presses, rather than being able to lift the bar off a rack we had to pick it up off the floor, clean it up to shoulder height, and then fall back against the bench before being able to do a set. That, I can tell you, is doing it the hard way.

When I later went to live in Munich, I had the advantage of being able to train at my good friend Albert Busek's gym, which was very advanced for the time and provided all the equipment I needed to train to become Mr. Universe and Mr. Olympia. In California, I trained at Joe Gold's gym, which had equipment like no other because most of it was designed and fabricated by Joe himself.

Today, it is relatively easy to find a well-equipped gym. World Gym, for example, has franchises all over the United States and the world. Gold's Gym and Powerhouse both have numerous franchises as well.

Bally's, Family Fitness Centers, and many other excellent gyms are located both in big cities and smaller towns. Of course, most health clubs and spas are not oriented toward serious bodybuilding, but they generally provide at least some free-weight facilities in addition to their inventory of machines, cables, and other workout equipment. There are also training facilities in schools and universities, military bases, YMCAs, hotels, corporate office buildings, and upscale apartment complexes.

Gym memberships are generally available by the day, week, month, and year. When you join a gym that is part of a chain, you frequently get reciprocal training privileges, which means you can train at other gyms that are part of the chain at no additional cost or for a small fee.

## **WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A GYM**

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The first thing to consider in choosing a gym is ascertaining what kind of equipment and facilities it provides:

1. A gym should not be too big or too small. If it is too small, you constantly have to wait for equipment and you can't keep up the rhythm of your training. But if it is huge, you can feel dwarfed by too much space, which makes it hard to keep up your concentration.
2. If you want to make the best progress, the gym you train in has to have a full complement of free weights and benches. It should have sets of dumbbells heavy enough for most intense lifts. There should be exercise machines and cable setups that allow you to work all the major body parts.
3. There should be equipment for doing your cardiovascular training—treadmills, exercise bicycles, steppers, aerobic classes, whatever you need for your individual aerobic workouts.
4. Some gyms and health clubs have other facilities like saunas, steam rooms, staff massage therapists, swimming pools, and even indoor running tracks, so if any of these things is important to you check what's available before you sign up for a membership.

## **ENVIRONMENT AND ATMOSPHERE**

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Along with the "hardware" a gym has to offer, you need to consider whether it provides the kind of environment that will help to energize and motivate your workouts, whether the atmosphere of the gym makes you comfortable or ill at ease.

Bodybuilders for the most part are not interested in training in a gym

they feel is too “fancy.” Training, after all, is tough and sweaty, not refined like an afternoon tea party. After winning my second NABBA Universe in 1968, I trained for a while in a health spa in London—very elegant and posh—and I found I couldn’t get a pump no matter how hard I tried. It felt like a living room, nice carpeting, chrome equipment, as antiseptic as a doctor’s office. I was concentrating on training while trying to block out conversations going on around me about the stock market or what kind of car somebody was thinking of buying. I can accept that a spa with that kind of atmosphere is probably perfect for most of the people who work out there, who merely wanted to shape up their bodies and maybe lose a few inches around the waist. But it is not appropriate for those with serious bodybuilding ambitions.

Of course, even for the hard-core competition bodybuilder, it is no fun training in a smelly dungeon either, so don’t be afraid to call a dump a dump, although I have had some very good workouts in some very definite dumps! Again, what counts is not aesthetics but how the gym makes you feel. Also, there is the matter of music. I like to train to really loud rock ‘n’ roll, but others prefer different music or none at all. Check to see what kind of music is played in any gym you intend to train in.

Personally, I could never be comfortable in a gym in a basement, someplace you have to go *downstairs* to get to. I also preferred gyms at street level or on an upper floor. Atmosphere is important. You are going to be spending as much as three or four hours in a gym and you don’t want to be looking around and asking yourself, What am I doing in this place? I always liked a serious, industrial kind of look, something that made me feel “I’m here to work.”

Being in the right environment is very important in many areas of life. Why do people prefer to go to certain restaurants or bars than others? The food isn’t that different from one good restaurant to the other and the drinks are the same. It’s the atmosphere, how the overall environment makes you feel, what kind of mood it puts you in. You furnish and decorate your home to create a certain environment. Great museums like the Getty Center in Los Angeles create a special atmosphere which makes viewing the art they contain that much more rewarding. Restaurants, clothing stores, your home, a gym—you get certain vibes that you often can’t explain but that can make a very big difference in the experience of being there.

At the Arnold Seminar held as part of the weekend of events in Columbus each year including the Arnold Classic, I frequently make a comparison between how environment affects the development of a child and how the gym environment can affect the development of a bodybuilder. If you grow up among successful, motivated people, you yourself will tend to be successful and highly motivated; growing up in an impoverished environment, among people with little hope and little motivation, you are going to have to fight that influence all your life.

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## WHO ELSE IS TRAINING IN THE GYM?

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I remember coming to California in 1968 and training at Joe Gold's gym in Venice. I was already a two-time NABBA Mr. Universe, but training every day among bodybuilders like Frank Zane and Dave Draper—Mr. Americas and Mr. Universes all over the place—and bodybuilders like Sergio Oliva showing up from time to time, I practically had no choice but to become better.

The kind of people who train alongside you in a gym makes a difference. If you are surrounded by people who are serious and train with a lot of intensity, it's easier for you to do the same thing. But it can be pretty hard to really blast your muscles while the people around you are just going through the motions. That is why good bodybuilders tend to congregate in certain gyms. By having the example of other serious bodybuilders constantly in front of you, you will train that much harder.

That is what made Joe Gold's original gym in Venice, California, such a great place—a small gym with just enough equipment, but where you would constantly be rubbing shoulders with the great bodybuilders against whom I had the privilege of competing—like Franco Columbu, Ed Corney, Dave Draper, Robby Robinson, Frank Zane, Sergio Oliva, and Ken Waller. Nowadays, it's rare to find that many champions in the same place, but if you aren't sharing the gym floor with great bodybuilders like Flex Wheeler, Shawn Ray, Nasser El Sonbaty, or Dorian Yates, it can be very motivating if there are pictures or posters of these individuals on the walls or championship trophies displayed.

In 1980, training at World Gym for my final Mr. Olympia competition, I showed up at the gym at seven o'clock one morning to work out and stepped out on the sundeck for a moment. Suddenly the sun came through the clouds. It was so beautiful I lost all my motivation to train. I thought maybe I would go to the beach instead. I came up with every excuse in the book—the most persuasive being that I had trained hard the day before with the powerful German bodybuilder Jusup Wilkosz, so I could lay back today—but then I heard weights being clanged together inside the gym and I saw Wilkosz working his abs, Ken Waller doing shoulders, veins standing out all over his upper body, Franco Columbu blasting away, benching more than 400 pounds, Samir Bannout punishing his biceps with heavy Curls.

Everywhere I looked there was some kind of hard, sweaty training going on, and I knew that I couldn't afford not to train if I was going to compete against these champions. Their example sucked me in, and now I was looking forward to working, anticipating the pleasure of pitting my muscles against heavy iron. By the end of that session I had the best pump I could imagine, and an almost wasted morning had turned into one of the best workouts of my life. If I hadn't been there at World Gym, with these

other bodybuilders to inspire and motivate me, I doubt that day would have ended up being so productive.

Even today, when I'm training for other reasons, such as getting into top shape for a movie role, or just trying to stay in shape, I absorb energy from people working out around me. That's why I still like to go to gyms where bodybuilders are training for competition. Even today, after all this time, it still inspires me.

## **YOU DON'T HAVE TO TRAIN IN LOS ANGELES**

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I've been asked many times whether young bodybuilders need to come to California in order to become champion bodybuilders or whether a young physique competitor can create a great physique working out in Des Moines, Pittsburgh, Seattle, or elsewhere. My response is simple: If you are motivated, train hard, have adequate workout facilities available, and learn the fundamentals of training detailed in this encyclopedia, you can build your body to its genetic potential almost anywhere in the world.

In the early days of my career it was somewhat different. There weren't as many bodybuilders, bodybuilding media, or great places to work out, so there were good reasons for a lot of top champions to gather in Venice, California. There was also tradition. The famous Muscle Beach of the late 1940s was located right next to Venice in Santa Monica. The physique stars of that era created a whole new kind of lifestyle based on bodybuilding, sun, and fun. I can remember some fifteen years after that seeing photographs of "golden boy" Dave Draper on the beach in the pages of Joe Weider's magazines (often with Joe's lovely wife, Betty) and I became determined to go to Los Angeles someday to live and to train.

Nowadays, there are still a lot of champions in the Venice area, but most of them developed their physiques elsewhere and came to California to promote their careers—to live in a nice, warm climate, of course, but also to have access to both the bodybuilding and the mainstream media.

A lot of young bodybuilders come out to train in places like World Gym or Gold's Gym for short periods and then go back home, inspired by having worked out shoulder to shoulder with a Mr. Universe or Arnold Classic champion, and I think that's great. But I don't recommend that young would-be champions come out to Los Angeles to live at early points in their careers. While working out next to the top professionals is exciting, it can also be discouraging since most of them are likely to be years ahead of a young bodybuilder in development. For most young hopefuls, it makes more sense to train in your hometown, begin by entering local and regional contests and working your way up, and scheduling occasional visits to California just to "dip your toe in the water," get your dose of motivation, and then return home.

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## GYMS FOR NONCOMPETITORS

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A major difference in bodybuilding between now and when I started training is the number of people training like serious bodybuilders—that is, following a hard-core, muscle-building program—who have no intention of getting into competition. This category includes everyone from doctors and lawyers to accountants, teachers, businessmen, military personnel, and a lot of actors I've worked with in the movie business. The question is whether these individuals, since they have no ambition to be Mr. or Ms. Olympia, need the same sort of serious training facilities as do would-be physique champions.

The answer, of course, is not absolutely, but it really helps. After all, if you have a good swing you can play a decent round of golf with almost any clubs, but if your equipment is modern and state of the art you are going to get better results, no matter what your level of expertise might be.

The point of bodybuilding training is to develop every body part in a proportionate, balanced way. It takes a certain amount of different kinds of equipment to do that, no matter who you are or what your training goals might be. Sure, you may not need a gym with sets of dumbbells going up to 150 pounds or more. But there should be an adequate amount of free weights and benches for you to do the basic exercises. A certain gym may not have a great number of choices of machines for particular exercises, but you have to have a certain minimum or you can't do what you're trying to do. So if you're using a gym that doesn't meet these standards, by all means try to find one that does.

Remember, muscle is muscle, and *your* muscles respond to the same training techniques and require the same exercise equipment to do a full workout as anyone else's. So if you are serious about the results you want to obtain, find a gym with the right equipment, an atmosphere that suits you, and people training around you that will inspire and motivate you to do your best.

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## TRAINING AT HOME

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I have some rudimentary training facilities at home. Joe Weider has a fully equipped gym in his garage. So does Lou Ferrigno. A few years ago Hugh Hefner built a nice little gym in the basement of the Playboy Mansion. Although there is really no substitute for training at a good gym, some training at home can be useful. You can do extra ab work, for example, with just an abdominal board. With a simple bench and a basic set of weights, you can do reps and sets whenever you feel like it. This can be very valuable if you occasionally have trouble getting to the gym or if you run out of time in the gym and can't get a full workout. And, of course, aerobic work on a

treadmill, stepper, or stationary bicycle can be done at home as well as anywhere else.

For those with more money to invest, there is quite a bit of good equipment available for the home. Most sporting goods stores carry benches and weight sets starting at a few hundred dollars. Stores like Sears, Montgomery Ward, and JC Penney sell weight-training equipment as well. Also, nowadays specialty stores in most cities sell everything from dumbbells and barbells to complex multi-station machines costing thousands of dollars; they usually advertise in the Yellow Pages. Walk into a store like this and you'll see brand names like Para-Body, Pacific Fitness, Vectra, Hoist, and Ivanko. Equipment is also available by mail order through the various physique magazines.

But training at home vs. the gym is a little like working on a car in your backyard compared to a fully equipped automotive garage. Sure, you can repair simple car problems under a shade tree, but more demanding and complex repairs are much more difficult, if not impossible. In the same sense, a home gym is not going to provide you with the same training facilities as a fully equipped facility—unless, of course, your home gym is as well equipped as a World Gym, which is something that is not very common.

Most people with equipment at home do *some* training, supplementing their gym training rather than trying to duplicate a full gym-oriented workout. If you are planning to do some training at home, the questions to consider are what areas of the body you plan to train at home. Major muscles, or just things like abs? Do you want a set of free weights, or are you more interested in machines? Individual machines or a single machine that allows you to do a lot of different exercises? How much space do you have? If you plan to do cardiovascular training, what kind—treadmill, exercise bike, stepper? And, of course, how much do you want to spend? Remember, the equipment you are used to in a gym generally costs thousands of dollars for each piece. You may not need an “industrial-strength” piece of equipment, but some of the cheaper stuff doesn't give you a very good “feel” compared to the state-of-the-art equipment you find in good gyms. Make sure you try a piece of equipment before you buy it to make sure it feels right to you.

Also, the least expensive pieces, such as treadmills, for example, tend to break down more easily than you might want. If you buy a top-notch treadmill by a company like Trotter or a stationary bike by Lifecycle you can be assured of getting good quality. But if you buy a lesser brand at more of a bargain price, be sure you know where to go to get it repaired if you run into problems. Of course some inexpensive pieces of equipment work just fine. I use a simple ab-training device at home that I take with me on my airplane and do two hundred reps before I eat dinner.

Very few bodybuilders have been able to boast of making much progress training at home. And if top champions, who have better genet-

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ics, energy, and motivation than almost anyone else, have not benefited much from home training, this fact should give pause to others considering going that route. There are some exceptions, of course. Frank Zane, for example, had some success training at home during his career. Franco Columbu and I used to use his home gym for training specific body parts. But I have always preferred the energy level of the gym, the excitement and interaction with the rest of the bodybuilders. In any event, even if you've made good progress by training at home, I recommend that you get thoroughly familiar with a gym and be able to make full use of the facilities you find there. To my knowledge there has never been a champion bodybuilder who developed his physique anyplace other than in a good gym, and I recommend that you find one to train in if you have any serious aspirations.