

THE  TIMES

# LUX

Fashion forward



# Meet your new trainer – he just got out of prison

Francisca Kellett on the fitness revolution coming to London

**Y**OU WANT TO shape up, but you can't get motivated. The gym bores you, you're crap at competitive sports and you'd rather pull out your toenails than go for a jog. So imagine this: you've just had your mugshot taken and are doing squats in a concrete room. You're being shouted at by a large, intimidating man who you know spent a good deal of time in prison for dealing crack cocaine. Feeling bored? No, I didn't think so.

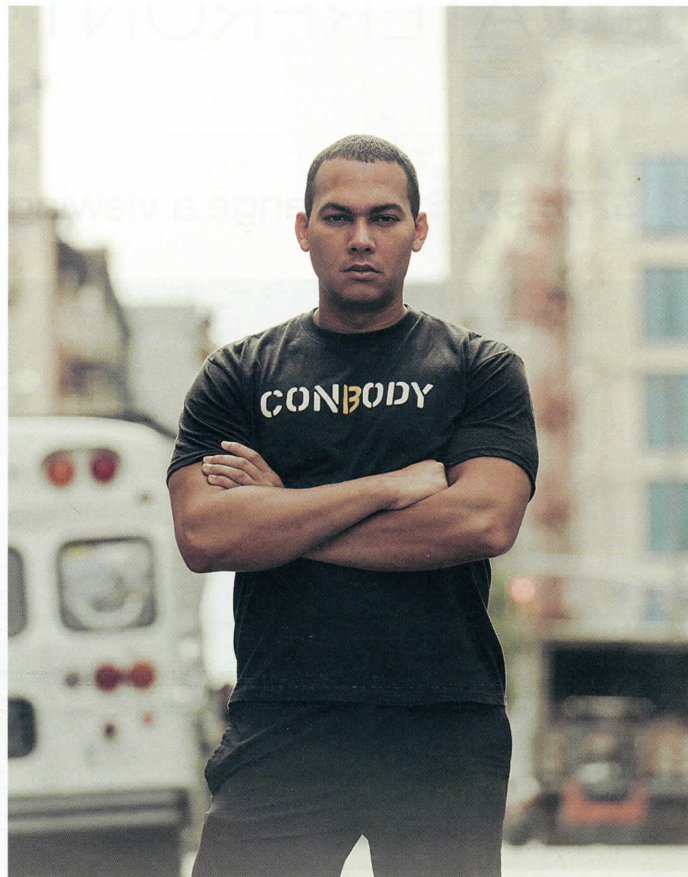
This is Manhattan's latest fitness craze – a hardcore workout taught by former prisoners. It's called ConBody and is coming to London in May, part of a new wave of ethical and sustainable workouts where you do good while you sweat. The concept: short, sharp prison-style bootcamp workouts, taught by ex-cons who have been given a second chance in life. Coss Marte, the founder, came up with the idea while serving seven years for dealing drugs worth \$2.2 million.

"I found out I had a lot of health issues in prison," Marte tells me. "I was told I'd die of a heart attack in five years." He started working out in what little space he had: push-ups and dips in his cell, running in the yard. He lost 70lb in six months and was soon asked by fellow inmates to help them to shape up. It was during a stint in solitary confinement (after an "altercation") that he decided to change his life, coming up with the plan to turn his new-found fitness expertise into a business.

"When I came home, no one wanted to hire me, no one wanted to give me a second chance," he says. "I've felt the pain." He trained other former inmates to teach the equipment-free classes in local parks, and it worked. Trendy New Yorkers loved it, and not one of his 24 instructors has reoffended. He opened his first studio in 2015 in the Lower East Side – his old drug-dealing neighbourhood – followed by a pop-up in Saks Fifth Avenue, and is about to open in Los Angeles.

Over here ConBody's home will be the Stratford, a hotel that is part of Manhattan Loft Gardens, a new residential building in east London. ConBody works with local non-profit organisations to select and train prison inmates, so they're ready for the job on release. There's a tongue-in-cheek nod to the prison theme – the tagline is "do your time" – but, crucially, classes get results, and clients like that they're helping people while they sweat.

If you're not one for bootcamp, a new breed of socially conscious gyms is moving away from dark,



*"Not one of his 24 instructors has reoffended"*

pounding basements to airy, plant-filled spaces flooded with natural light. Biofit designs sustainable gyms – cork wall panels, eco-rubber floor mats, rice straw matting – that bring the outside in; plants and natural materials replace strip lighting and plastic. Matt Aspiotis Morley, its founder, has designed gyms in Calgary, Stockholm, Montenegro and South Africa for corporate and private clients.

Gym hardware is evolving too. Eco Gym in Brighton was the first in the country to install ECO-POWER by SportsArt, a range of equipment that turns 74 per cent of the energy created by workouts into electricity. When Eco Gym members run on a treadmill or pump away on a bike, their energy is fed into the local grid, which means the screens and lights are powered by them. Ten machines used for an hour – a spin class, say – would run a washing machine for six hours or your laptop for 40 hours.

## BOOTCAMP WORKOUT

Coss Marte, the founder of ConBody, where classes are taught by former prisoners

Eco Gym (which is also plastic-free and zero-waste – its motto is "be green and get lean") is expanding in the southeast this year and is franchising the concept to the US.

"People are worried about climate change and don't know how to tackle it," says Michal Homola, the founder of Terra Hale in Shepherd's Bush, west London. The former professional snowboarder opened his stylish gym last year, kitting it out in recycled and sustainable materials; the floor is made from old tyres, the rowing machines are water-powered and SportsArt bikes help to power the building. It's going like the clappers: Homola has opened studios in Notting Hill and Fulham, with plans for Kensington and east London, and has built private gyms "in Notting Hill, the Hamptons, Italy". He is also talking to Google about creating sustainable corporate gyms.

For those who prefer to stride out alone, a new California-based app, AtlasGo, lets you raise money for charities while you run. The app charts your progress and for every mile you complete, money is released from corporate partners, such as Lululemon, and goes to not-for-profit organisations, including Big Against Breast Cancer.

Running in old polyester leggings? Millennials would be appalled. The next gen of workout gear uses sustainable fibres, such as bamboo and seaweed, or recycled material.

Carrot Banana Peach is great for bamboo leggings, while Starseeds creates gear from recycled fabric and coffee grounds. Back Label makes luxurious jerseys using milk protein, bamboo and seaweed; RubyMoon does a good line in sports bras made from recycled fishing nets.

Buying a pair of bamboo leggings might not sound world-changing, but when you look at the figures – 9.9 million of us have gym memberships in the UK, according to a 2018 report, and the industry is predicted to be worth £22.8 billion by 2020 by the research firm Statista – it all stacks up. As Roger Eldergill from SportsArt says, so many of us work out on commercial equipment, why not work out and at the same time reduce your carbon footprint? Why not get yelled at by someone whose life you have helped to turn around? It may be all the motivation you need.



**LOFTY IDEAS**

A flat designed by LSI Architects.  
There are 248 apartments in  
the 42-storey building

# Commune in the sky

A revolutionary luxury  
high-rise created  
only for renters.

By Anne Ashworth



**I**F YOU THOUGHT that all the most desirable properties in London were occupied by homeowners, think again. This year the 42-storey Manhattan Loft Gardens in Stratford, east London, opened its doors only to renters. And, given that the building is owned by Harry Handelsman, the chief executive of Manhattan Loft Corporation, whose other key projects include Chiltern Firehouse and the St Pancras Renaissance Hotel, it's not just any old rental block, either.

The furnished flats, or "lofts", will be serviced by the onsite hotel, The Stratford, when it opens in May. With its two restaurants, three sky gardens, a triple-height lobby designed by the hip Danish studio Space Copenhagen, cool Scandi-style interiors and a fully fledged community to keep loneliness at bay, who would prefer a Kensington block where everyone else is somewhere else?

It is not only the look of the building – by SOM, the celebrated American architect – that is unlike any other. The high-rise was created to reproduce the vibe of a 1950s Manhattan hotel where guests checked in and then didn't check out. Each of the 248 flats, which vary slightly in layout and size,



can be let for a week, a month or a year, terms intended to make their inhabitants feel as if they were leaving behind their dull existence and joining a new ready-made community.

Given the arty feel of its East Bank neighbourhood, which is undergoing a £1.1 billion makeover and will soon have an outpost of the Victoria and Albert museum, a Sadler's Wells theatre and a new University College London campus, many tenants are tipped to be high-profile names in the arts, including the choreographer Wayne McGregor, who has already moved in and will stage shows at the building.

This "vertical commune" will be closely watched because the building was meant to be yet another luxe block, until Handelsman learnt that most of the buyers would be foreign investors, meaning it would loom dark and empty above Stratford station: a monument to the capital's dysfunctional property market. The developer is taking a big bet on the continued resurgence of Stratford, the revival of which began with the 2012 Olympics and the opening of the Westfield mega-mall, but remains a work in progress. Pretty and gentrified it is not. Yet its transport links are excellent, meaning that you could nip back from the office to have lunch with your new commune friends "at home" in the ground-floor brasserie or the seventh-floor Allegra restaurant.

It's not quite what Karl Marx would have envisioned as communal living. But in the London property market, it is certainly revolutionary.

*"The block was created to reproduce the vibe of a 1950s Manhattan hotel where guests never checked out"*