

INVESTING IN EXERCISE FACILITIES IN YOUR HOME COULD HELP YOU TO SHED POUNDS WHILE ADDING POUNDS TO THE VALUE OF YOUR PROPERTY. LUCY DENYER REPORTS

It's January and you've resolved that this will be the year in which to shed some excess pounds after the excesses of the festive season. You are on a health drive. The only trouble is, it's pouring with rain outside and the thought of revealing your Lycra-clad self to members of the public down at the local gym is not necessarily a nice one.

So why not make a good investment, and buy your own indoor exercise space?

"There is an increasing trend with buyers today – especially when looking at larger properties – to ask for some form of leisure space," says man-in-the-know Richard Cutt, a director in estate agent Knight Frank's Mayfair office.

"As a nation, health is becoming more of an issue and there are more and more gym users. But wealthy people want to exercise in private, and that is what is generating this trend."

Mayfair-based developer Paul Davies agrees. He says that he has seen an increasing number of people who own property around the world ask for fewer bedrooms in favour of gyms. And as the plasma screen becomes larger and more available, they are even asking for gyms instead of dedicated media rooms.

Mr Davies is working on a project in Mount Street where he has been asked by a security-conscious Russian for an air-conditioned "gym room". The same client also wants to turn a bedroom into a dedicated

massage room. The celebrities love their gyms too. Mr Davies is finishing a Park Street mews property for *Friends* actress Jennifer Aniston that will have a gym area, complete with plasma screen TVs next to a full-length swimming pool and Jacuzzi.

Meanwhile, Power Plate's exercise machines are becoming de rigueur for any self-respecting owner of a home gym. The company has a database of celebrity clients. Its consumer sales figures are currently around £2.5 million a year, and look set to increase this year with the launch of a new model.

Designating a room as a fitness facility can have certain advantages, even if you don't invest in a Power Plate to go in it. It's a very good use of basement space, for a start – Mr Cutt refers to this as "legitimising a space that doesn't have value". Gym space will also almost always be listed on an estate agent's property description details as a special feature, which makes the property seem more desirable when you come to sell.

It's not always necessary to install a lot of expensive equipment if you are selling up, as most people will want to buy their own, but designating the space by installing air conditioning, wall mirrors and so on is a good idea.

If you do want to invest in equipment, Mayfair-based personal trainer Matt Roberts will visit clients to design, fit and install a gym, so you can make sure you're getting what you need.



Healthy homes



**ABOVE: WARM TO THE IDEA
OF AN INFRA-RED SAUNA**

For a more serious investment, you could think about installing a pool – especially if your house is large. “There are certain expectations that a house of a certain value and type should have a pool”, says Peter Mackie of Property Vision. But he warns that a pool will only add value if the house is of the right size and proportions – anything from 4,000 sq ft up is his recommendation.

Tony Line is managing director of the London Swimming Pool Company, which won an award in 2006 for a pool it designed in Mayfair. He reckons that a pool in Mayfair is definitely an investment – primarily because international buyers often demand them.

There are quite a few considerations to take into account, however – running a pool is expensive, and it’s not just about filling it with water, either – air handling and water treatment systems and lighting all have to be thought about too.

Peter Wetherell, of the eponymous Mayfair estate agency, reckons that a pool investment is “a house-keeping chequebook, not a hard-nosed negotiating chequebook”. By that he means it is a personal preference, rather than a guaranteed investment. He recently sold a house where the pool had a retractable dancefloor on top for multiple use – that’s “the way forward,” he says.

If a pool is too much or a gym too little, a whole new world of fitness options is opening up for the property owner wanting to exercise at home. Nordic, which claims it was the first to bring the sauna into the UK, has just launched an infra-red version, which

is said to bring with it health benefits such as fat burning, speeding up the healing process and cellulite reduction. The infra-red saunas cost from £2,600 up to £4,300, plus VAT, and the company also offers steam rooms and hot tubs .

One thing’s for certain – the backlash against the sweaty, noisy and often unpleasant atmosphere of the gym means that, whether you choose to take a run around the park with some weights or work out in your own state-of-the-art fitness room, investing in some sort of gym equipment for home use is worth it – if only for your own sanity.

Unless, of course, you choose to heed the pragmatic advice of Mr Mackie, who poses this question to homeowners with enough room for fitness facilities: “If they’ve got seven floors and no lift, do they really need to put a gym in?”

**BELOW: FOOTBALLER
PETER BEARDSLEY TRIES
THE WATER ROWER HOME
EXERCISE MACHINE**

