

BODYBUILDING AT HOME

BUILDING A COMPLETE HOME GYM:
A STEP BY STEP GUIDE



BONUS!
Includes beginner
through advanced
home gym
workouts

Craig Cecil

Bodybuilding at Home
Building a Complete Home Gym
A Step By Step Guide

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ISBN: 978-0-9847414-6-5

ISBN: 978-0-9847414-7-2 (ebook)

First edition: October 2015

Manufactured in the United States of America

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Warning: This book stresses the importance of proper technique and safety when using bodybuilding and strength training programs. Regardless of your age, before beginning any exercise program consult with your physician to ensure that you are in proper health and that it is appropriate for you to follow such programs. Proceed with caution and at your own risk. This book does not provide medical or therapeutic advice; you should obtain medical advice from your healthcare practitioner. Before starting any new exercise program, check with your doctor, especially if you have a specific physical problem or are taking any medication. The author, publisher or distributors of this book cannot be responsible for any injury, loss or damage caused, or allegedly caused, directly or indirectly, from following the instruction given in this book.

Cover design by Jaelyn Urlahs.

Cover photo by Nikolay Suslov (NiDerLander).

This book is for all the guys who pushed, pulled, strained and bared their souls with me over the past quarter century. And most importantly, for just showing up—week after week, year after year. I've tried to immortalize as many of you as possible within these pages.

Thank you to Eric Uhland of InstaSigns (www.instasigns.net) for the great photography in this book.

A special thanks to the following training partners and friends who graciously offered to pose for some of the pictures: Andrew "Arms Like Jesus", Jake "The Original Chin Strap", Tyler, Jay "The Prototype", John "Mad Dog" Bosley, "Crazy" Matt, and Katherine ('Kit').

This book is also for Leslie, who now has the finest gym just beyond the laundry room door, and for Kayleigh, Alexa, and Julia, who watched their dad transform half of their garage into this strange place with mirrors, weird apparatus and cast iron. Girls, the possibilities are endless...and the transformation is beyond the physical.

Contents

Freedom & Purpose	1
A Bodybuilder’s Gym	9
Location, Location, Location	13
Planning the Layout	23
Budget, Economy & Luxury	27
Setting the Stage	29
Flooring	29
Lighting	34
Mirrors	37
Climate Control	39
Sound, Video & Visual Appearance	43
Miscellaneous Items	47
The Equipment	49
General Equipment Strategy	51
The Baseline Setup	62
Dumbbells—Minimal Investment, Maximum Returns	65
Plates—The Currency of Weight Training	89
Benches	103
Barbells—The Key to Maximum Development	109
Racks—Lifting to the Limit, Safely	133
Machines—What is Really Necessary?	155
Cardio Equipment	173
Training Journal	193

Accessory Equipment	195
Maintaining Your Equipment.....	238
Adding It All Up: What's It Gonna Cost?	241
Home Gym for Under \$100.....	241
Home Gym for \$100-\$250	242
Home Gym for Under \$500.....	242
Home Gym for Under \$1000.....	243
Core Equipment	243
Home Gym Checklist.....	245
If You Build It, Will You (They) Come?.....	247
My Gym: One Man's Story	249
Inspiration, Perspiration and Desire	255
Beyond the Home Gym	257
Beginner, Intermediate & Advanced Bodybuilding Workout Routines	259
Beginning Bodybuilding.....	261
Intermediate Bodybuilding.....	283
Advanced Bodybuilding.....	311
Adapting Workouts for the Home Gym.....	315
Integrating Cardio into Your Workout Routines	318

Home is where the heart is.

— Gaius Plinius Secundas

Once a man has made a commitment to a way of life, he puts the greatest strength in the world behind him. It's something we call heart power. Once a man has made this commitment, nothing will stop him short of success.

— Vince Lombardi

1

Freedom & Purpose

My uncle Ray was a rugged outdoorsman, raised in the Appalachian mountains of western Maryland. I remember visiting him when I was a boy, wandering around his remote home and staring at the mounts of past adventures and the reflections of his craft. Deer, elk, and other conquests adorned the walls of his house and the high rafters of his spacious garage. A trained taxidermist and humble realist, Ray made use of every resource, including that garage. Part workshop, part smokehouse and a part I didn't yet understand. I remember staring at two things in particular that day—all the cast iron weights and my uncle's arms. Standing five foot seven and weighing almost two hundred pounds, dressed in cowboy boots, jeans that hugged the legs and a short-sleeved t-shirt tucked neatly at the waist—a shirt that barely contained those enormous arms. Arms immortalized in my memory. What I didn't realize until years later, is that he forged that forty three year old body—a body that won the Maryland State Bodybuilding Championship—right there in his garage gym.

A decade later, spurred on largely by that memorable day and those memorable arms, I started down a similar path. Initially, like most young men, I started lifting weights at home, eventually migrating to a commercial gym when I outgrew and out-lifted my meager equipment. However, I gained my first twenty pounds of muscle in that makeshift home gym, in a back room behind my parent's garage. I was hardly alone in this type of endeavor.

In the southeastern Alaska island city of Ketchikan, only accessible by boat or plane, another man made the daily, ritualized trek to his unheated backyard shed. After chipping away the ice that had accumulated on the bar in that unforgiving winter environment and loading on some cast iron plates, Dennis Weis began yet another grueling workout—one in a long

30-year tenure that would mold the Yukon Hercules into one of the legendary bodybuilders and powerlifters of the west coast. Necessity sometimes drives a man.

At eighty years old, five-time Mr. Universe Bill Pearl still rises at 2:30am each morning in Talent, Oregon, grabbing a hot cup of coffee and quick breakfast before walking briskly from the house to his converted barn to engage in another test against the weights—a test and testament that’s been ongoing for over half a century. Pearl quickly asserts that he did most of his fundamental training and built the bulk of his award-winning physique in the nine years he spent in the basement gym at his parent’s house.

At the turn of the century, while circus strongmen entertained with feats of strength and the era of physical culture was birthing, youth across America were getting stronger, leaner and more muscular in our original gym—the farm.

Today, much of the world lies to you.

You don’t need state-of-the-art, modern equipment and machines to build muscle and transform yourself. You don’t need a membership at a commercial gym. Let’s take a look at this.

The number of health clubs in the U.S. has increased by more than 200% over the past 25 years, fueled by the growth of big-box facilities such as Planet Fitness, Golds Gym and L.A. Fitness, in addition to independent franchises such as Curves and CrossFit gyms. However, over the same period the increase in the number of overweight, obese, diabetic, and unhealthy individuals has grown significantly as well. If supply exists to accommodate demand, does that sound right? And what does that tell you about results?

While initially shiny and tempting, after succumbing to the New Year’s siren song of change and opportunity, problems with commercial gyms become evident. These issues are legion and growing.

Foremost, commercial gyms sap your time. Time spent driving there, changing clothes, waiting on equipment. You already spend a large portion

of your life just waiting. Waiting in traffic, in lines at the bank, grocery store, movie theater, etc. When you just calculate your travel time to and from the gym for a year, it's often eye-opening. With a home gym, that opportunity cost immediately goes to zero and you reclaim all that lost time into your life.

Second, commercial gyms try to fit you into their schema—their hours, their equipment, their rules—regardless of your schedule and your individual goals. In essence, you are effectively leasing their space and equipment within a cauldron of rules and people you may or may not like, in an attempt to improve in an environment not necessarily conducive to progress. A home gym flips this on its head, because your goals, your schedule, your resources and your wallet drive the whole operation. Your gym meets your specific goals. Commercial gyms offer shaky promises and hope. Home gyms demand it.

Third, and perhaps most insidious is what's actually happening in these gyms today. Steven Covey, among others, tells us in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* that successful people study, emulate and extend what other successful people are doing. Success breeds success. Results breed results. Aspirations foster inspirations. Noted strength coach Pavel Tsatsouline (*Easy Strength*) tells us what he encountered:

“A few months ago, I trained at a gym once known for strength. Not anymore. The biggest “feat” I saw there was a 315 squat—by a guy who weighed about that much. It was a nose-bleed high squat, too...a dude was faking lunges...Horrified, I went to the corner and started deadlifting.”

Sure, you can work out in similar environs, but chances are, especially if you are in the novice or intermediate stages of progress, your results may be restricted by emulating or being affected by the flagrant ignorance of the masses.

Furthering these illusions and restrictions, commercial gyms offer a landscape ripe for working out, and not for training. There is a big difference. Training, especially intermediate and advanced training requires a specific, planned execution of exercises, weight increments and rep schemes—programming—conducted over some predetermined period

to affect the desired adaptation. It also requires concentration. That's something that commercial gyms, with their unpredictable influx of patrons cannot guarantee. They can, however, almost guarantee programmed failure. One day, the squat rack or all the benches might be occupied. Those dumbbells you were going to use for a back-off set are there—one of them. You've seen this. Home gyms guarantee a training environment. Just this difference, between working out and training, over an extended period, can have a dramatic effect on your physique.

The final damnation is the most obvious. Big-box gyms are built for the masses and mediocrity, tilting toward cardiovascular fitness, with standard floor configurations dominated with treadmills, bikes, rowers, steppers and any other cardio de jour equipment they may be offering. Beyond the cardio, low-load isolation machines line the floor. The free weights are relegated to the back, not unlike some lunch counter patrons in the deep south of 1960s America. Deadlifts and chalk are either discouraged or prohibited. Sweating is obscene and noise, such as grunting during heavy exertions, is offensive.

Almost a century ago, Ayn Rand wrote about a future where we have become the same—stripped of our individuality, thought, dreams and desire. A future hindering progress at every step. Today we call that Planet Fitness. As our society becomes increasingly restrictive, commercial gyms have mirrored this descent. Powerlifters have faced this stark reality for decades now. It's here that home gyms offer the libertarian solution—the le' resistance—to the marching boots of conformity and the assembly line of mediocrity. Resist the urge, free yourself and ascend to the true limitations of the physique that God gave you.

This is the clarion call. I hope you answer it.

• • • •

So, based on all you've read so far, we finally ask the most important question—what do the majority of people want to accomplish by “working out”?

I know the answer because I've witnessed it a thousand-fold over a quarter century.

You want to build some muscle, lose some fat, and in general, look a helluva lot better than you do right now. Well, ladies and gentlemen—that's called bodybuilding. We're not talking about the drug-addled physiques bulging from the bodybuilding magazines at the supermarket check-out line. Those are the outliers, the freaks and the cheats. No, what we are defining is the essence of the word itself—*bodybuilding*. To build the body into something greater. Often, that requires a concerted combination of fat loss and muscle building (hypertrophy), something that most find appealing and that represents the true fountain of youth.

So, where does the answer lie?

For many, it's right at home.

Now is the time to take a stand and make some decisions for yourself, instead of allowing others to dictate the arc and destination of your progress. As former judge Thomas Penfield Jackson noted, "When you discover you are riding a dead horse, the best strategy is to dismount." Let us venture back into our homes, garages or basements, not as hermits, but as part of a holistic approach to an intelligent, determined, and defined training regimen. Free yourself from commercial constraint and allow your physique to develop into the image you aspire to.

I've trained in commercial gyms for more than 25 years, as many of you have, so it may appear contradictory for someone like me to recommend the move to a home gym as a desirable alternative. However, if you take a moment to really look around, to remember how it used to be, you'll realize that the true gyms, the places you could always count on to transform yourself, these places are quickly disappearing. The era of the cast iron in the big-box, commercial gym is passing.

A home gym is freedom. The freedom to work out your way (think deadlifts), freedom to work out when you want and the freedom to help your kids work out, regardless of their age (the minimum age for membership in most commercial gyms is 13, due to perceived liability

issues). Here, everyone in the family can become physically fit—no one is prohibited, regardless of age, time of day, geographic location or even income. Especially for kids, home gyms can really pick up where our government schools have failed us over the past decades in general physical preparedness (and the benefits can far surpass the physical). For others, like our Yukon Hercules, living in remote or less populated areas, a home gym may be the only alternative. Home gyms really are the worldwide workout—the great equalizer in the fitness equation. This combination of freedom and convenience can be a powerful motivator.

My home gym has allowed me, my wife and kids, and even occasional visiting relatives and friends to get productive, intense workouts at all hours of the day and night, on weekends and holidays, even during snowstorms. Throughout this book, I'll show and describe to you how I built, organized and extended mine over time.

At this point, you might be thinking, “I don't have the money, space or time to create my own gym.” Wrong. As I'll explain, you can start with as little as \$50—that's one or two month's membership dues at most gyms—and be ready to go in a day or two. From there, you'll see how to expand on that intelligently and systematically to provide more options and results.

Goals for this book

You can find lots of information in various books and magazines and on the Internet about setting up your own home gym. However, they tend to focus on outfitting a home gym for general fitness goals, powerlifting or CrossFit-type training, and lack substantive depth to the information. This book focuses on building a home gym for bodybuilding purposes and then showing you how to use it to maximum effect. To that end, it's hypertrophy and fat-burning focused and a mile deep in details.

This book also has some additional goals.

- To guide you through the process of assembling a home gym with the minimum amount of equipment that produces maximum results for bodybuilding purposes. We want the training trifecta here—combining

safety, effectiveness and efficiency while minimizing space and cost. We're talking less equipment, more focus, and more efficient training. Here, less truly is more. For many, building an excellent training facility in a garage, basement or spare room is daunting. Strategic planning is the key here and this book will guide you through this process. Be smart about the location, layout, equipment and price. Combine all these aspects and you'll have friends asking when they can join "your gym".

- To make the workout safe and simple to do alone, regardless of the exercise or the amount of weight used. We want to avoid being pinned under bars and dropping barbells on your head. When obtaining equipment for the home gym, always err on the side of safety.
- To maximize the number and variety of bodybuilding exercises you can perform, given the constraints of location, space, and budget, while providing a stepwise approach that enables a systematic extension of what you have.
- To save you thousands of dollars by avoiding bad or sub-optimal purchases. The Chinese have a proverb for this—"One step in the wrong direction will cause you a thousand years of regret." Well, it might not be that bad, but you don't want to keep correcting for missteps. The equipment recommended in this book represents high quality, safe, and effective instruments of adaptation that will last a lifetime and won't lead you astray. Some of the equipment you should buy (new or used) and others you can make, if desired. If that sounds like you, I'll show you how. What is the payback period? Often, it's a moving target as your equipment costs climb. However, as I've mentioned the payback is immediate in time savings.
- To save you time. We've touched on family and relationships, so time is a precious commodity, often undervalued when you're young.
- To provide you with some solid bodybuilding workouts and training plans, regardless of your experience and adaptation level, that you can use immediately in your home gym *as you accumulate the equipment*. These workouts and training plans can take you from absolute beginner

all the way to the competitive stage. One of my foremost goals for this book was not to leave you hanging, especially if you don't know how to train yourself. I don't want to just show you how to put this gym together and then say "you did it, now good luck". I want to provide you with the info to use it effectively. I'll try to light the fire—it's up to you to keep it burning.

- A final goal—and if you've read any of my other books, you know this—is to provide you with some history, because, well it's important, it helps put people, places and things in context and learning can be fun and it lets you show off to your friends.

I have a quarter century of experience with gyms, gym equipment, and bodybuilding training that I think will be instrumental in providing you with insight, monetary savings, and paving the road to success in home-based bodybuilding. With the systematic process in this book, you can build an excellent strength and conditioning facility in your home or on your property—one designed to get you stronger, build bigger muscles and a leaner body—transforming yourself in the process.

Let's get started.

2

A Bodybuilder's Gym

Unlike the commercial, big-box gyms, a home gym distills the essence of physical transformation without drowning the truth in a sea of irrelevance. We need to strip away our infinite appetite for distractions—most of the machines and unnecessary apparatus—and get to the things that produce the most adaptation. Lucky for us, that saves a lot of money and space.

Someone once said that bodybuilders are just frustrated powerlifters—maybe so. However, all good bodybuilders, people who really know how to physically transform their appearance, start with a solid base in fundamental powerlifting movements. That means squats, deadlifts, rows and presses. Pushing, pulling, squatting and hinging. Training those basic human movements in a progressively overloaded environment requires a bare minimum of equipment and space—a barbell, some plates, a bench and a rack.

A powerlifter's gym is the essence of progress, following Pareto's Law where 80% of the results come from just 20% of the efforts (squats, deadlifts and presses using the rack, bench, bar and plates).

A *successful* bodybuilder's gym is a natural extension of a powerlifting gym, allowing the bodybuilder to start with Pareto and eventually progress to a 50/50 ratio of basic/accessory movements (but never abandoning the powerlifting core). While powerlifting focuses on a limited set of exercises, often with little to no direct cardio work, bodybuilding extends this baseline through derivatives of these core lifts, thus extending the equipment requirements as well. The training also differs.

A powerlifter is concerned with moving the most weight possible, hence the body operates as a unit. The bodybuilder, in contrast, has the additional

concerns of maximizing muscular tissue size, ensuring muscular symmetry and reducing body fat. These added concerns require a complete overload and exhaustion of every muscle fiber type—attempting to coax, conjure, and shove the adaptive hypertrophic process. This requires time under tension, muscle isolation and apportioning of the body in order to maximize development of every facet. Over time, the seasoned bodybuilder, like any successful athlete, understands the importance of accumulation of movements, intensity, and allowing those things to transform their physique, all within a limited adaptive capacity. Eventually, every successful bodybuilder becomes concerned with not only strength, but toward the qualities of hypertrophy (size), shape, symmetry, muscular endurance and lean body mass.

These extended concerns—this accumulation of movements—lead to the need for some additional equipment.

Of course, we need the barbell and the plates. But the dumbbell rises in this pantheon of hypertrophy to new heights, and the importance of cables and their duality of constant tension and freedom of movement emerges as a major participant. The standard flat bench requires an inclined brother. Finally, we must concern ourselves with some type of cardio machine that we can perform indoors throughout all seasons and weather concerns, as necessary.

Therefore, to sum up, bodybuilders need a barbell, plates, dumbbells, an adjustable bench, a rack, some type of cable/pulley system and a piece of cardio equipment. We've just distilled 90% of the equipment in any commercial gym down to about six things. These six things will allow you to perform every essential (and even non-essential!) compound and isolation exercise devised in the bodybuilding universe. These tools will make the greatest impact. Everything else is just icing on the cake.

This final setup, occupying not much more space than the Spartan powerlifter's bench and rack, creates a maximum transformation chamber, optimized for compound, multi-joint movements affecting entire muscle systems to single-joint, isolation exercises designed to produce fearsome adaptations in the tiniest muscle. It's a stark reality that it doesn't really

take much to construct a real, results-producing gym that outclasses the contemporary Gold's Gyms, the encroaching Borg-like Planet Fitness, or even the post-modern YMCA in result potential. The devil, however, is in the details.

Bringing the Gym Home

Beyond the equipment, what we want to do is bring the gym experience home. Not just any gym, but the best parts of every gym you've ever trained in or wanted to train at. Maybe you want to imagine yourself at Gold's Gym in Venice, CA during the golden age of bodybuilding in the 1970s—the place where Arnold, Franco, Frank and Dave trained. On the other hand, you might want to go completely hardcore and emulate the dungeon-like atmosphere of Temple Gym in Birmingham, England, where Dorian Yates forged his muscles under the illumination of a few light bulbs. The point is, you decide and move forward with that overall theme. So, we need to concern ourselves with both the stage and the equipment in order to pull off a great show.

It's Your Gym—How to Get Started

We'll use a three-step overall strategy to build a great home-based training facility:

1. Select and prepare the location.
2. Obtain baseline equipment.
3. Enhance the experience.

Much of the rest of this book describes this process in detail, starting with the first and often most important decision you need to make.

3

Location, Location, Location

From the onset, Ray Kroc, the progenitor of McDonald's, realized the importance of location to his success in selling hamburgers. Similarly, the decision regarding the location of your home gym will become a determinant factor in your ultimate success as a bodybuilder. Where you decide to put your gym is just as important as what you put in it—maybe more so. Let's see why.

The variety, effectiveness and safety of a bodybuilding gym requires three key architectural items—a solid, level foundation (the floor), adequate size and an appropriate ceiling height. Combined, these aspects will largely determine the success of your eventual location.

The Floor

Squats and presses demand a level, solid floor for safety and effectiveness. Every other movement likes this as well. Sure, we've seen the pictures and read the stories about our troops stationed in Iraq or Afghanistan using makeshift lifting equipment, standing in dirt or sand. In fact, much of the third world that lifts (and they do), often lifts in the same substandard conditions and they do get results. But what we are looking for is an environment conducive to optimal results—a level, solid floor, preferably on the ground floor, constructed of cement, or at the least, thick, heavy wood in order to provide safety first, and an unforgiving base for effort. That's why basements and garages do so well for home gyms.

The critical factor here is one of simple physics—force transfer—we don't want any of the force transferred into the floor (or your shoes—I'll discuss that later)—and that's what happens with less than solid surfaces, such as sand, dirt, gravel and thin wood. Existing wood floors can be reinforced

with additional wood, such as $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood, so that's always an alternative if the basement or garage is not available. Placing wood reinforcement on top of an existing, unstable structure (carpet) is not a viable safe option when dealing with progressively heavier loads. In fact, if the underlying floor is not cement (such as a spare room, shed, covered porch, etc.) I strongly suggest laying down sheets of $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood right from the start to reinforce and protect the underlying floor. There is a reason that powerlifters use a lifting platform. So now you know.

For those wondering if fully loaded racks may strain the load-bearing capabilities of your floor, you can stop worrying. Think about the amount of weight your floors already support. Beds, furniture and people quickly add up to over a thousand pounds. Some fish tanks filled with water can weigh over 500 pounds. Because you won't be putting your rack in the middle of the room, the load will be placed near a wall where the structural engineering of floors is greatest.

One additional note here. If your concrete floor is uneven, try applying self-leveling concrete to correct this issue. It's a cheap fix (about \$30-\$40) and may save you from injury.

The takeaway lesson here, if you haven't already learned it, is to follow the parable of the wise and foolish builders. Be wise and build your gym on upon the rock—not foolish by building it on the sand. Everything flows from this.

Room Size

You don't need a lot of space for a home gym. At minimum, at ten foot square room will work. Because Olympic barbells are seven foot in length, racks are not as wide as bars, and you need to load the bars with plates, this becomes a rote math exercise. A room at ten feet in width allows 1.5 feet of loading space per side and horizontal bar play when in movement. This is the minimal safe environment for handling bars and plates. A one hundred square foot room also allows us just enough space for the baseline equipment I'll discuss below. Because space is often our most limiting dimension in the home gym, this book shows you how to use it wisely.

Ceiling Height

High ceilings are one of the holy grails of a home gym.

Racks and standing presses demand adequate ceiling height. In fact, anything that extends over your head, including extensions for your triceps, jumping rope for conditioning, and step-ups will require something higher than the standard eight foot ceiling height in most homes. If you're lucky or well-off you may have nine foot ceilings in a master bedroom (how's that for intimacy? Honey, let's use the power rack tonight) or all the rooms. Hooray! You're all set. Otherwise, that garage starts looking even more inviting with its nine-foot ceiling. If nine feet is out of reach and out of the question, then your toolbox of exercises becomes more limited. Presses will need to be performed seated. You won't be jumping rope and step-ups will have to step-off. In addition, you'll need to be extra diligent when purchasing a rack, so that its height will fit your ceiling's limitation. But racks that fit within an eight-foot ceiling structure are plentiful.

Because we aren't Olympic lifters or Crossfitters, lack of a nine-foot ceiling is not a deal breaker. So, don't sweat this one too much—just keep the ceiling height in the thought process of selecting a gym location.

Bonus Item: A Door

Doors are underrated. The mere existence of a door assumes an environment physically and mentally separated from the rest of the universe. As Kevin Costner so adeptly illustrated in the baseball movie, *For the Love of the Game*, successful effort is often about “clearing the machine”—working with a clear head, free of distraction. Let's hear it for the door.

Super Bonus Item: A Garage Door

If doors are good, garage doors can be great.

In the 1940s, the fusion of sunshine and cast iron at Muscle Beach showed the world how invigorating it could be to work out in nature's gym. Later,

the Russian town of Lyubertsi famously followed suit in the 1980s. Many of us, who have lugged the bench, bar and plates outside in the summer, can attest to this. It's how teen boys used to spend much of their summer, between games of Wiffle™ ball, peeking looks at the older girls sunbathing in their bikinis, riding bikes and swimming (how's that for cross-training). Garage gyms allow a glimpse into that earlier era, more so than any room's open window or big-box gym can offer. On the other end of this spectrum, basement gyms seem so distant, cold and withdrawn, much like the dwarves toiling in Tolkien's mines of Moria.

Garage doors are also the great opportunity cost. For much of the year, they allow you to train in a semi-open environment, with fresh air, cool breezes and sunlight. Remove a wall—get invigorated all over again. Getting the equipment into the garage is a snap. However, when old man winter arrives, that same door offers the barest of protection from the plummeting temperature. Wind has a way of finding you. But hey, that's what sweatshirts and bulking season is for, right?

Speaking of heat and cold, what about electricity?

Electricity

Sure, it should feel exhilarating and electric when you enter your home gym, but that's not what I'm referring to here.

You'll need sufficient access to electrical outlets and wattage if you want things like fans, music, additional lighting or air conditioning. (Don't neglect to check the total wattage available—I discovered that I couldn't run my garage gym's A/C, fan and the pool pump out back at the same time, because they were all on the same garage circuit.) Many of the typical locations for home gyms I'll talk about don't necessarily have central A/C, such as garages, sheds, and older homes. Pay attention to the location of the outlets and your total amps available on the electrical circuit associated with your gym's location.

••••

At this point, you should know your location options. You'll need one of the following:

- Garage or portion of the garage
- Basement
- Spare room
- Shed
- Covered porch

Let's see how each stacks up against our three key architectural aspects—floor, ceiling height and overall size. Additionally, we need to start considering some other modern amenities, such as electricity.

Garage

Starting something in your garage has taken on an almost mythical aura over the past century. Amazon, Apple, Harley Davidson, and Disney started life in a garage. While e-commerce, personal computers, motorcycles and damn good entertainment are lofty aspirations, ours is no less humble—to transform ourselves, in the physical sense initially, and like so many others, come out the other end a changed person.

World-renowned strength coach Marty Gallagher writes about his garage gym in his book, *The Purposeful Primitive*:

“My home gym [is] in the unheated garage out back of my country home in South Central Pennsylvania. Our coldest training session was conducted in 19 degree weather and our summer warmest was 102 degrees. The power rack...is the heart and soul of my gym. I have barbells, dumbbells, a few benches, and a single pulley device used for pushdowns and pulldowns (our one machine). Many a World Champion has trained here and the sessions are manic and intense.”

Garages and basements are the best locations for a home gym, because they pass muster for floor, ceiling height and size. Most likely, you are starting with a solid concrete floor, which doesn't require any

reinforcement before you even pick up a weight. In addition, these locations are tucked away from the main part of the home, helping to nullify noise and providing a clear mental break between work and play. Once past the beginner stages of training, mental focus really becomes the largest dimension in bodybuilding achievement, so let's assist in that area right from the start.

The big downside to garage gyms are the lack of environmental control (it gets either real hot or real cold—or both—sometime during the year). But we can mitigate this to some degree as I'll show you.

Typically, you have two options here—have a garage with a gym in it—this works best with two-car garages, or a gym occupying the entire shell of a former garage. The first option, the one I opted for, allows you to maintain a portion of your existing garage for a vehicle, storage and other miscellaneous use, such as a workbench, tools, etc. When you enter this type of garage, one side is your run of the mill garage, while the other side screams “gym”. The second option dedicates the entire garage to exclusive gym use. If you live alone, that's your call. My wife and practicality insisted on the first option. That gave me a 12'x20' space from which to work—luxurious panoply for a powerlifter, and just enough for a couple battle-tested bodybuilders.

Regardless of which garage option you choose, you will need to organize and store items efficiently in order to keep your garage stuff out of your gym. I went from a two-car garage, which housed two cars, five bicycles, two large upright storage cabinets, a workbench, two large wheeled toolboxes, a scrap wood pile, hand truck, two ladders, a snow blower, various sporting goods equipment and kids toys to a single car garage and a gym with all that “stuff” organized efficiently on the car side. It can be done.

The first step was to throw some things out, give others to charity and have a garage sale—, which helped to finance some of my gym equipment purchases. The second car had a new life sitting in the driveway, but the rest of the “stuff” I described found a new home relocated to the “other” side of the garage via strategically rearranging the placement of the

cabinets, toolboxes, and woodpile. This second step, of storage and reorganization, allowed the bikes and ladders to be stored vertically via wall hooks, and a couple bike storage systems using cables. When organizing the “garage” side of your garage, use the wall space and ceiling to maximum effect. Home improvement centers sell a large variety of hooks, hanging storage systems and wall-mount shelves for just this purpose. If you’ve got a lot of scrap wood taking up space, think about how you can repurpose that into some DIY storage solutions. Use the commercial options and the Internet (search for “garage storage” or “garage organization”) for inspiration here.

This general procedure of elimination and reorganization works just as well for basement and spare room setups.

Basement

I’m not a fan of basements. They remind me of darkness, dampness and isolation. However, they typically offer plenty of unimpeded room (after elimination and reorganization), good environmental control, easy access to outlets, a door to the upstairs and cement floors, so home gyms often find their natural birth here.

Unless you have a finished basement, this is probably your easiest option. Basements provide the floor and size requirements. Ceiling height may present an issue for racks and standing presses, unless you have nine-foot ceilings.

If your basement is completely finished, what you have is a spare room situation.

Spare Room

Spare rooms are always a good thing. Typically, you probably don’t have any “spare” rooms, but maybe one that you can spare—for the required lifting space. Again, elimination and reorganization are big helps here and after some effort, you may find yourself with an open 10’x10’ area and a door.

Here, as in the basement, pay attention to ceiling height. Those twelve inches make an awful lot of difference. Ask anybody.

Shed, Carport or Other Structure

All of these offer the possibility of FRESH AIR!

But alas, they also present some unique challenges.

Sheds need to have adequate size (most do), ceiling height (most don't) and a solid floor (may or may not need reinforcing).

A carport or covered porch is our last alternative—and I mean last. If all you've got for gym space is a covered deck, carport, back porch or patio, then it'll be you and the elements. You shouldn't have a problem with the floor (if it's concrete, you're good; otherwise, reinforce it with $\frac{3}{4}$ " plywood, preferably coated with outdoor stain protection), ceiling height or size. It's climate control you will need to deal with.

Sheds, carports, porches, patios and decks are not ideal, but hey, if a man on a remote island in Alaska can train in a shed for thirty years (30!) and produce world-class results, you can certainly improve, no matter the location.

A final thought about location. Throughout the remainder of this book, consider the amount of alteration or permanence you are creating. People move. You may be renting. Families expand and contract. These things limit (or expand) how much you can or want to alter the location for your gym. As you'll see, the way I built and equipped my garage gym allows me to convert it back into a garage for an automobile with minimal effort, if that need arises. Heed the story of the fool, and don't build a boat in the basement and not be able to get it out the door. A little foresight can go a long way here.

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Regardless of your home gym's eventual location, being at home realizes additional muscle building advantages, particularly with performance

nutrition. Your kitchen is right there, so pre- and post-training nutrition becomes effortless and immediate. After taking a quick shower, you can actually have a real meal of solid food (in addition to your quick-acting whey) a couple minutes after your workout, instead of driving home. Things like this provide tiny, incremental optimizations to the overall transformation process. Don't discount it.

Now, once you've decided on the location for your home gym, before you put in any equipment, you need to take a moment and think about the overall layout. Planning the layout will allow you to maximize the space you have for things like—training efficiently, effectively and safely.

4

Planning the Layout

It's always wise to plan before acting. You know, ready, aim, fire. Firing before aiming is always less likely to produce the results you want. Don't dump your workout gear in a room like you bag your groceries at the checkout.

The key to the layout of your home gym is to plan and execute versatility and efficiency. When planning the layout, sketch it on paper (graph paper really helps), draw it on a whiteboard or tape it out on the floor.

For the sake of this discussion, let's assume our minimal 10'x10' room. Larger rooms will obviously have more space, but the logic of our planning still holds.

First, think of your space as divided into three zones. This logical breakdown helps to frame both the planning process and your eventual workouts.



Zone 1: The Heavy Stuff

Your rack will live in Zone 1 and occupy half the room. The barbell and bench can live in the rack most of the time and you should be spending about half of your workout there as well.

Zone 2: Storage

Zone 2 is against one of the other walls. This is where you'll store your dumbbells, bars and accessory equipment. This is also where you'll want to eventually get this stuff up off the floor into some type of vertical storage solutions. I'll discuss your options here as we go along.

Zone 3: Room for Activities

Zone 3 is the remaining open floor area where you'll perform your dumbbell exercises, deadlifts, standing presses and/or cardio. While powerlifters spend the majority of their time in the cage, bodybuilding training often thrives in the open floor area. Expect to spend about half your workout in Zone 3.

This is a simple plan, but it always works, regardless of your location or available space, so don't discount it.

Speaking of discounts, I need to talk about how I'm going to categorize the things you put into your gym, based on the amount of money you have in your wallet.

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