



September 23, 2016

Your Basement Gym Is No Match for These \$10 Million Wellness Amenities

By Cheryl Wischhover



Photo: TriggerPhoto/Getty Images/iStockphoto

These days, people aren't above paying \$40 several times a week to ride a stationary bike to nowhere, followed by another \$8 to cool down with a watermelon juice. In this context, it makes sense that real-estate developers have started adding so-called wellness amenities to new buildings.

The days of putting an elliptical machine and some rusty weights in a basement room and calling it a residential gym are long gone. Home buyers in New York City and beyond are settling for nothing less than 10,000-square-foot gyms with pools, hydrothermic regeneration areas, and rooftop meditation rooms.

[Fredrik Eklund](#), a NYC-based broker at Douglas Elliman and a star of the real-estate reality show *Million Dollar Listing* (a.k.a. the only reality show worth watching), says, "Before, wellness was a bonus. You picked a location and you got a great doorman, and on the side you had a gym or a pool. Now people's lives center around health and wellness."

He credits [Jay Wright](#), who designed the fitness center at 15 Central Park West (the “[most powerful](#)” building in NYC, home to Sting and Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein), for starting the over-the-top wellness amenity arms race in buildings. The 14,000-square-foot fitness center there, which includes a 75-foot pool, two steam rooms, and spa treatment rooms, was a standout when apartments hit the market in 2008.

Wright, who has since helped design and program more than 70 buildings throughout the world, says that the change began when people started embracing boutique fitness and training methods that he calls “functional performance” — meaning doing exercises that reflect real-life full-body movements rather than, say, working on a weight machine pumping your legs in one place just to look swole. Now they expect more from their fitness amenities. He also says NYC’s proliferation of international buyers has increased demand for wet spaces like spas and saunas.

“Once you’re in someone’s home and it’s a high-end luxury experience, it’s more about hospitality. You’re curating an experience the whole time people are there, not just checking them in at the front desk,” Wright says. “The biggest barriers to what we call functional longevity are time and proximity.” (“Functional longevity,” the best I understand it, means being able to run up and down subway stairs in your 60s and 70s without a cane.) “Proximity is no longer an issue,” he continues. “These are fortresses of solitude.”

Wellness fortresses don’t come cheap. Wright estimates that developers spend about \$600 to \$1,000 per square foot of amenity space to build them. If a pool is involved, it’s on the higher end of that range — so a 10,000-square-foot complex with a pool costs about \$10,000,000 upfront to build.

Wellness spaces are replacing other amenities that used to be hot. [Ryan Serhant](#), a broker at Nest Seekers International and another star of *Million Dollar Listing*, says screening rooms used to be the No. 1 amenity in Hamptons homes, but “now people are ripping out screening rooms because people are watching streaming movies on 52 different types of platforms. They don’t just want to go down to the basement anymore. That room has been replaced with a gym or a massage room or a meditation room.”

Serhant is bringing a building on 19th Street to market soon that features a pool in every unit. He says that wellness was not the motivating factor in the early to mid-aughts when these amenities first started popping up. “It was less about the importance of wellness than it was [developers thinking], *In order to get the next record price per square foot and sell out my building, I need to*

not just have one pool; I need to have two pools, plus a hot tub, plus a sprinkler room.”

But now buyers are demanding these amenities. “People will pay more to be in a building for the gym,” Serhant says. He estimates a state-of-the-art fitness facility will increase an apartment’s value by 10 percent or more. And it’s no longer an extreme luxury perk for people who have \$15 million to drop on an apartment. Ecklund says that even apartments with “affordable” starting prices of \$1.5 million now often come with a full amenity package, like the [Steiner](#) in the East Village, which offers a pool, gardens, and a gym.

The desire for mental wellness is also driving amenity offerings. With [commercial meditation studios](#) on their way to becoming as big as SoulCycle, it’s not surprising that multifamily residential buildings are offering them as well. Serhant has a building in Soho going on the market soon with a rooftop glass-enclosed meditation space. “It’s soundproof. No cell phones will work in there. You just work on your breathing and you meditate and think about life. It’s an entire room for that,” he says. “Mental health and well-being is the No. 1 most important space for people who can afford it.”

It’s unclear why a person buying a 2,000-plus-square-foot apartment may need an extra meditation room. One can only assume it’s to contemplate, in a safe space, the frightening mortgage they’ve just taken on. Serhant acknowledges it’s the most over-the-top wellness amenity he’s seen recently.

Related, Ecklund says that outdoor green spaces are in demand for those who need to unplug. “It’s about Zen and being calm within beautiful, big, lavish common gardens, which you can’t usually get in buildings in NYC,” he says. Buildings like [150 Charles](#) in the West Village boast 40,000 square feet of private green space. The building at [443 Greenwich](#) in Tribeca features a landscaped roof deck with showers for sunbathers, a pool inside, and a hammam. Serhant says that in Miami, which has a lot of condo buildings, private outdoor space is the No. 1 amenity request.

Then there’s what Wright calls “hydrothermics,” which includes hot and cold wet elements — yes, like a hammam — to promote regeneration and relaxation after you work out in your enormous gym. Wet heat, dry heat, and “experience showers to get circulation going” are now the norm. The building at [1 Seaport](#) describes its pool area, the Water Club, like this: “The hydrotherapy circuit includes rejuvenating hot and cold elements, a steam room, a misted water passageway, and a teak detailed sauna with a floor-to-ceiling window overlooking New York Harbor.”

When is a gimmick too gimmicky, though? Serhant is selling a single-family home in L.A. that was completely EMF-proofed by its current wellness-obsessed owners. (EMF stands for “electromagnetic field,” as anyone who watches *Better Call Saul* knows. A certain segment of the population [believes](#) that EMF is toxic.) “The internet is all hardwired, so there’s no cell signal, no Wi-Fi signal,” he explains. “There’s nothing in the house that can permeate their baby’s brain waves.” The rooftop meditation room in Soho is also EMF-proof, for those concerned about sitting in a glass box on a roof like some sort of human antenna.

Back in 2013, a building at [66 East 11 Street](#) made headlines in 2013 when [Leonardo DiCaprio](#) and wellness guru Deepak Chopra bought units there. The building was designed by Delos, the company focusing on making buildings “well” that’s behind the “[Stay Well](#)” program several hotel chains have adopted. Amenities include flooring that supposedly supports your posture, vitamin C–infused showers, and a circadian-rhythm lighting system. The penthouse, originally listed for \$50 million three years ago, finally [sold](#) a few months ago for \$26 million.

This proves that there is perhaps a limit to how much people will pay for wellness amenities. Of vitamin C showers and the like, Serhant says, “People are not paying more for that house because of the vitamin C shower. At the end of the day, they’re paying more if the shower has really good water pressure.”

If you are near Cambridge, Massachusetts, and this sounds appealing, though, Delos provided the same types of amenities to the new [Fuse Cambridge](#) rental apartments for a much more reasonable rate. For an extra \$125 to \$225 per month (a two-bedroom is currently available for \$2,500), you can add on a wellness package and enjoy things like aromatherapy and air purification à la DiCaprio, without the high-roller price point.

Wright is confident that fitness amenities especially will continue to sell homes, though. “I think some people will look at it as an affectation, but it’s not. It’s got a lot of perceived value but also real-world value,” he says. “You don’t want to live to your 80s or 90s if you can’t get off the couch.”

<http://thecut.io/2cwcqd3>