
THE CrossFit JOURNAL

Essential Architecture

E.M. Burton muses on the nature of the CrossFit box.

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A CrossFit box can contain an infinite variety of occupations, of uses, if not unknown and unknowable at least unpredictable.

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The equipment at a CrossFit box is simple, effective and multi-functional.

Thankfully, it's also rather reductive in terms of programmatic requirements. Elegant in the mathematical sense, the nomenclature of the word "box" should suggest this simplicity. It is a space intended for temporary occupation where few things are fixed. After the permanent racks and other fixtures are put into place, it is an open space that can accommodate a wide range of human movement.

The archetype of a CrossFit box, the original from which all others are derived, is the garage gym, the formal and practical requirements of which were outlined by Greg Glassman in seminal *CrossFit Journal* articles [The Garage Gym](#) and [Garage Gym II: The Revolution](#). The invocation to hang inspirational artwork alone has generated material worthy of a large Taschen coffee-table book of beautiful imagery.

As CrossFit spreads across the globe, we are starting to see a lot of variety in the spaces in which athletes train. They're certainly inspired by their West Coast originals yet offer evidence of human ingenuity and adaptability. Some elements are common to all of them, however, and I find they all have more in common than not. In some ways, this is slightly reminiscent of 18th-century design pattern books that spread the type of church construction that originated in St. Martin's-in-the-Fields in Trafalgar Square throughout the English-speaking parts of the world.

Perhaps it's more like the influence that *Western Living* had in a later time here on the West Coast on how we defined "house" and its role in quality of life. Wherever you find it, however, a CrossFit box is still very much like a gymnasium of old. I see the traces of the lineage that leads back to Greece and Rome, but as my companion said somewhat wistfully of the box we photographed for this piece, "It's like a college gym."

The original CrossFit box was in Santa Cruz, Calif. If you never had a chance to visit, it is pictured in *The Garage Gym* on pages 1 and 10 and in *The Garage Gym II* at the bottom of Page 6, images notable for their architectural interest as well. You don't often see these places empty. It's a warehouse space, yes, a garage, sure, but it's a garage that could be anywhere. It fits in and makes use of the space at hand, adapting as it goes.



In some regards, in its reductive qualities certainly, a “box” is like a stage—an ever-evolving, transforming and then recovering space of human movement, on which the entirety of humanity can be represented, at least in part, at least in theory.

The critical detail: the equipment used in CrossFit workouts is extremely durable, and much of it is forged. You couldn’t destroy it if you tried. The material quality of that and the movable equipment—the “miscellaneous basics,” the kettlebells, plyo boxes, rope and medicine balls—combined with the traces of human occupation make being in and working out in a CrossFit box rather unique among human experiences.

Jeff and Mikki Lee Martin, affiliate owners at CrossFit Brand X and directors of CrossFit Kids programming, graciously allowed me to photograph their space in those few moments that it wasn’t being used.



The CrossFit box is set up to accommodate the full range of human movement, to help people push the boundaries of what their bodies can do.