



**Ethan Kopsch, owner of Bird Rock Fit in La Jolla, California, furnishes his studio with a wide variety of the most relevant and versatile training tools available today.**

## **IDEA authors, experts and colleagues share insights on top training-tool picks.**

What equipment would you include in your dream studio?

You certainly have plenty of choices. The fitness equipment industry sold \$4.3 billion worth of gear in 2010—a 4.1% increase from 2009—according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association. While a substantial chunk of that revenue came from high-dollar devices like treadmills and elliptical trainers, a vast variety of specialized pieces of exercise equipment have also made their mark on the fitness industry.

Which ones add the most challenge and variety to customer workouts?

We reviewed our latest programs and equipment survey results and informally polled IDEA members, authors, presenters and fitness professionals at large about equipment they couldn't live without. Here, we present (in no particular order) 30 essential pieces of equipment for a successful fitness studio.

### **Dumbbells**

Dumbbells are the workhorses of the fitness world. And despite technological advances, they appear destined to remain a fitness mainstay—currently, 97% of personal training studios offer them, according to the 2011 IDEA Personal Training Programs & Equipment Trends report. If you don't have an array of dumbbells, it may be time to pick up a set, says Boston-based personal trainer Nicole Pizzi, MPH. “Compared with other pieces of equipment, dumbbells are fairly inexpensive, allowing [a] studio to offer a large variety,” she says. “Dumbbells are also a way for clients to track their progress, by comparing their starting dumbbell weight with their current weight.” >>

PHOTOGRAPH: MONICA KOPSCH





sandbag

## Pull-Up Bar

The nemesis of many a young physical education student, the pull-up bar is often considered a tool to measure true fitness—it's one component of the President's Challenge Physical Fitness Test. It also takes up very little space, a boon for smaller fitness studios. "If I could pick only one piece of equipment to have in my arsenal, it would hands-down be the pull-up bar," says Mike Fitch, creator of Global Bodyweight Training in Miami Beach, Florida. "Without the pull-up bar, you're missing out on two of the most important patterns: pulling and rowing." He also finds that the pull-up bar makes a great anchor point for suspension systems or for bands.

## Body Weight Leverage Training

Speaking of suspension systems, tools like the TRX® Suspension Trainer™, CrossCore® and jungle gym have skyrocketed to the top of many must-have lists. The 2011 IDEA personal training trends report found that 73% of respondents offer body weight leverage training to clients and members. The concept is simple: Attach the device to an anchor point like a tree branch or pull-up bar and use gravity and your own body weight to get a challenging full-body workout.

"Suspension Training" is a studio owner's dream come true," says Leigh Crews, ACE-certified fitness professional, owner of Dynalife Inc. in Cedar Bluff, Alabama, and 2011 IDEA Fitness Instructor of the Year. "For under \$200, I have provided my clients with a piece of equipment that we can use for cardio, strength and flexibility. I don't need much space to use it, and when bagged and stowed, it takes less space than a pair of shoes."

## Flooring

Flooring might not be top of mind when people think about fitness

equipment. But it should be, says Jimmy Pedro, vice president of flooring at mat manufacturer Zebra™ Mats in Maple Grove, Minnesota. "Flooring is the most important piece of equipment you can have in a studio," he says. "Quality flooring is about safety, performance, hygiene and durability. If you're having clients or members get down on the floor to stretch, hold a pose or exercise, you need great flooring." Here's what Pedro looks for in flooring:

- **antislip** surface for improved grip
- **vinyl** for easy cleaning and improved hygiene
- **temperature-proof material** to avoid expansion, contraction, warping or bubbling
- **durability**
- **insulation** for heated training formats and reduced energy costs
- **shock absorption** to reduce sound and lessen impact should a member or client fall

## Sandbags

Sandbags aren't just for protecting against rising waters. Josh Henkin, CSCS, chief executive officer of Ultimate Sandbag™ Training in Phoenix, believes sandbags offer trainers and clients tremendous versatility. "Sandbag training can be one of the most powerful tools for a fitness professional or program," Henkin says. "We can use sandbags for corrective exercises and for teaching people—in 30 seconds or less—to squat properly." What should you look for in a sandbag? Consider vinyl options that are less abrasive to skin and can be easily cleaned. Whether or not the manufacturer offers education should factor into your purchase, adds Henkin.

## Boxing Equipment

Doug Balzarini, CSCS, ACE-certified fitness professional, and mixed martial arts (MMA) conditioning coach in San Diego, relies on boxing/MMA



VIPR



equipment. “My ‘dream’ studio would absolutely include boxing/MMA equipment. And you don’t need to be a professional fighter to benefit from using it,” Balzarini says. “It’s been proven that punching and kicking target mitts and bags is an excellent option for calorie burn and stress relief.” His list of must-haves includes these items:

- **16-ounce gloves** for basic boxing drills
- **target mitts** for the trainer/coach
- **heavy bag** for striking
- **headgear and shin guards** for partner drills

### ViPR™

Vitality, performance, reconditioning: these three concepts are what led IDEA author and presenter Michol Dalcourt to invent the ViPR, a rubber tube designed to “allow training and exercise to be purposeful and free.”

“We don’t move as much as we should in conventional weight training,” Dalcourt says. Billed as “the evolution of free weights,” ViPR challenges people not only to learn to shift weight appropriately but also to develop rhythmic motion, which Dalcourt says is missing from traditional strength training. “Learning to move load rhythmically will train the nerves, muscles, fascia and skin to be more efficient and effective at producing force and stability.”

### Kettlebells

The kettlebell is an old-is-new training tool whose recent resurgence may not have peaked yet. According to 2011 IDEA personal training trends data, the percentage of survey respondents using kettlebells rose from 53% in 2010 to 65% in 2011. Del Wilson, an International Kettlebell & Fitness Federation–certified kettlebell trainer in Rushden, England, understands why. “Working the body as a unit, as in real life, instead of separating it out

into parts results in an increase in calorie expenditure, cardiovascular fitness, real-world functional strength and flexibility,” he says. “Kettlebell training is tough but will bring about fantastic results when applied with appropriate supervision. And, the best thing of all, one kettlebell caters to every aspect of fitness. It really is a training tool that does it all.”

### Self-Myofascial-Release Tools

Foam rollers and small balls, which hold the number-three spot for top equipment trends in the 2011 IDEA Personal Training Programs & Equipment Trends report, are part of a burgeoning arsenal of self-massage tools appearing in the fitness setting. “Using these devices to release trigger points, break up adhesions and hydrate neural fascial tissue can be extremely effective for increasing a client’s movement efficiency and function,” says Daniel Lucas, co-founder of Nimble Fitness in New York City. “These devices benefit the trainer by adding self-massage to their scope of practice, which for certain clients can be extremely important. Clients benefit by being the recipients of this simple technique that often delivers immediate results. The right client, using self myofascial release for the right reason, can experience great results.”

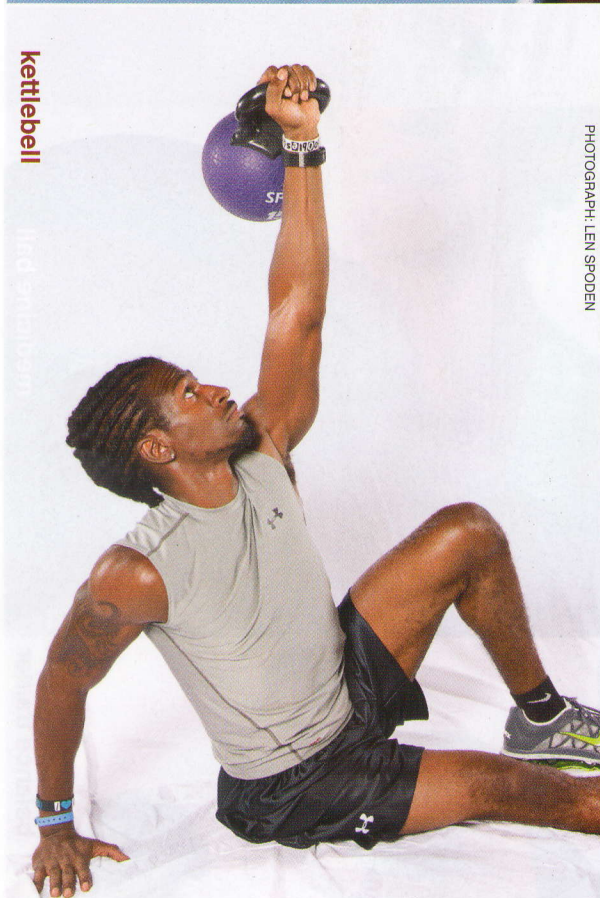
### Sound Systems

Cameron Chinatti, ACE-certified fitness professional and owner of Sounds Fit Solutions LLC in Nashville, Tennessee, makes it her business to improve sound quality in fitness studios. “There is an entire field of study regarding acoustics and the subconscious impact these have on people’s emotions and general sense of well-being,” Chinatti says. “If an audio system is malfunctioning and creating noise, distortion, feedback or the like,



boxing

PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN



kettlebell

PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN

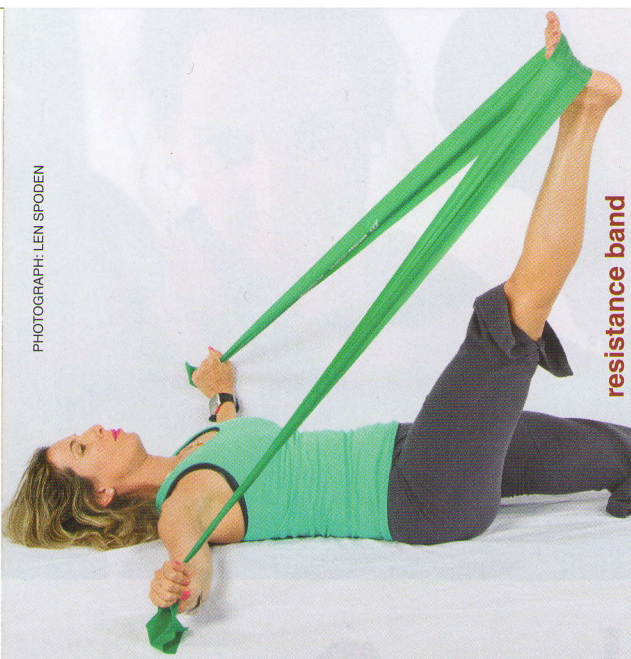


foam roller

PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN



PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN



resistance band

PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN



medicine ball

PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN



balance trainer

the mercury—i.e., your participants' tempers—starts to rise." Here are her suggestions for creating the best possible audio experience:

- Invest in acoustic foam treatments for rooms that echo.
- Pay for a consultation with an audio/visual specialist with fitness studio experience.
- Buy a feedback exterminator to circumvent unpleasant noises.
- Get a backup microphone in case the primary one goes down unexpectedly.

### Steps/Platforms

While steps and platforms with risers are especially beneficial for group training programs, they can be helpful to solo exercisers as well. Yoav Avidar, IDEA presenter from Tel Aviv, Israel, says that the step can be an inexpensive addition to any fitness studio. "The main benefit it brings is the height difference, which can be used for greater range of motion and increased intensity for exercises like squats and push-ups," Avidar says. "Also, [if you don't have] training benches, you can use the step to perform chest presses or other similar movements."

### Stability Ball

Stability balls continue to reign supreme as the piece of equipment used by most IDEA personal trainers, according to the 2011 trends data. Shannon Fable, IDEA presenter, ACE-certified fitness professional and owner of Sunshine Fitness Resources LLC in Boulder, Colorado, favors the BOSU® Ballast® Ball. "The Ballast Ball does everything the stability ball can do and more," Fable says. "It's my go-to stability ball because not only can it function for the typical supine and prone core exercises we all know and love, but more importantly, you can move on and off the ball without it rolling away. Moves that are linked together, requiring you to use your

core to transition from seated to standing, prone to standing and supine to standing, are my preferred moves for clients of all ability levels."

### Resistance Bands/Tubing

Tied with stability balls for the top spot in the 2011 IDEA Personal Training Programs & Equipment Trends report, resistance tubing and bands are lightweight and easily transportable. Kristen Horler, ACE-certified fitness professional and founder of Baby Boot Camp® and Karna™ Fitness in Sarasota, Florida, calls tubing her favorite piece of equipment. "Because of its functionality, studio owners can include resistance tubing in their arsenal of equipment for personal training as well as group fitness classes," she says. "If your boot camp classes take clients outdoors, the portability of tubing enables clients to take their equipment with them." It can also be sent home with clients. "We teach our clients how to use their resistance tubing for a full-body workout, enabling them to work out on their own or while traveling."

### Medicine Balls

They come in all weights, sizes and densities. But no matter which variations you choose, medicine balls can add versatility, and maybe even a bit of play, to clients' sessions. "Regardless of your clients' goals, the medicine ball should be a vital piece to help them along their journey," says Balzarini, who regularly uses medicine balls with all his clients, from the average Joe to high-performance MMA athletes. But what kind is best? "Bouncing medicine balls are great for reaction drills, for deceleration training and for replicating many common exercises you would do with dumbbells—like curls, presses, squats and lunges. Heavier, nonbouncing balls can be used for more explosive movements, such as throws and



slams. They allow us to really drive up the kinetic chain—feet to legs to hips to shoulders to hands—and throw the ball as hard as possible without having to worry about it coming back.”

### Balance Trainers

Balance trainers come in various forms—half-balls, balance and wobble boards, disks and sponge pads. Among the top 10 equipment trends identified by IDEA’s 2011 survey respondents, balance-training devices placed third. Of the options, Fable prefers the BOSU Balance Trainer. “The BOSU Balance Trainer is one of the most versatile pieces of equipment at [our] club. This one product allows you to train with dynamic or static moves, standing, seated, kneeling, side-lying, prone or supine. Training your clients three-dimensionally is of utmost importance when you are striving to instill better movement mechanics before adding load. With the Balance Trainer you have access to cardio, strength and core [training], as well as a comfortable, assisting platform for many stretches, and all the while you are improving balance and coordination. If I could have only one thing, it would be a Balance Trainer.”

### Vibration Plates

Whole-body vibration training has become more widely used by fitness professionals in recent years. “A vibration plate is a unique piece of equipment that can train all levels of fitness,” says Hayley Hollander, ACE-certified fitness professional and co-owner of Advanced Training Performance in Las Vegas. “When you add vibration to the workout, the soft tissue is reflexively stimulated to contract more times than it would on regular ground, giving the exerciser more bang for his buck in a short amount of time.”

What should you look for when purchasing a vibration machine for

your facility? “Look for a plate that vibrates on all three axes, X-Y-Z (front to back, up and down, and right to left),” Hollander says. “The machine should also offer a multitude of frequencies and amplitudes to select from, so the force and acceleration applied to the body can vary.”

### Battle Ropes

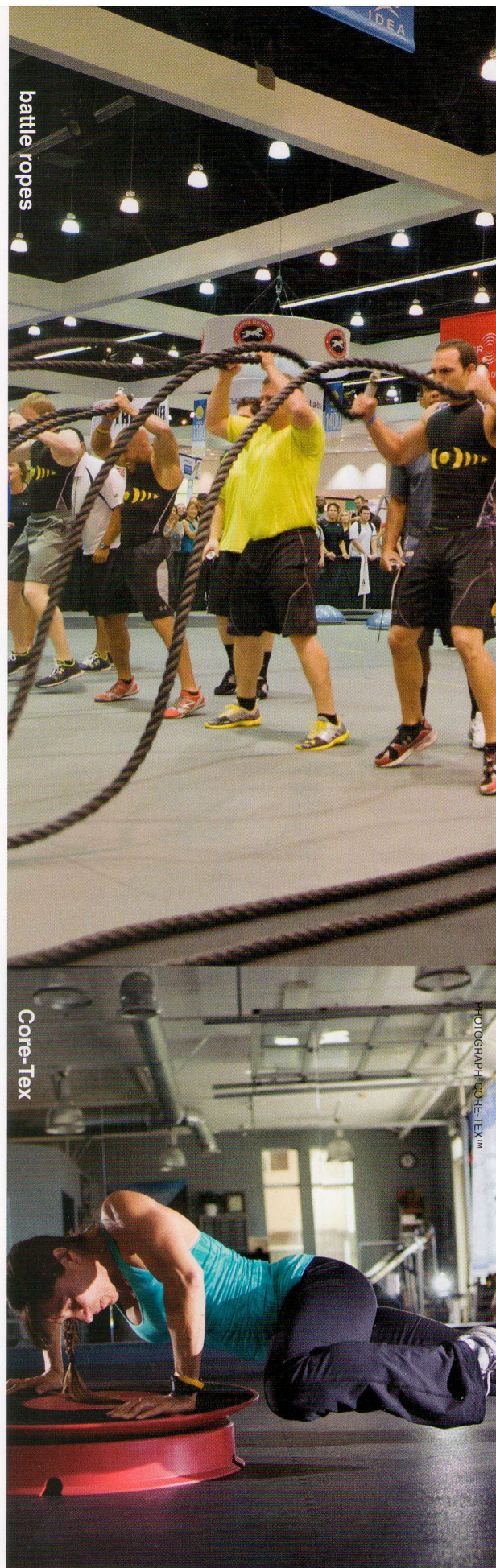
Although Fitch focuses most of his training on body weight-only exercises, he admits that the battle rope is one of his favorite pieces of equipment. “Minimalism is the key, and you won’t find a lot of toys and gadgets at the Global Bodyweight Training gym, but I still consider battle ropes an invaluable tool for conditioning,” says Fitch.

Battle ropes come in a variety of lengths and thicknesses—the longer and thicker the rope, the heavier it will be—and are made up of various materials, such as manila, nylon and polyester. Which type of rope is ideal? “It’s always tricky to make an overall recommendation without knowing the specific training environment, but if we had to pick one, we’d recommend the double-braided nylon version because it is as heavy as manila but is softer on the hands, it won’t shed and the double-braiding prevents stretching and holds up [well] both indoors and outside,” he says.

### Rip Trainer

The TRX Rip™ Trainer is a fairly recent release. It consists of a bar with a resistance cord extending from one end that attaches to an anchor point.

“The Rip Trainer is a great complement to the Suspension Trainer,” Crews says. “If you are already set up for Suspension Training, you can offer Rip for not much more than the cost of the equipment. You get an entirely different workout on the Rip Trainer than you do on the Suspension Trainer, so it

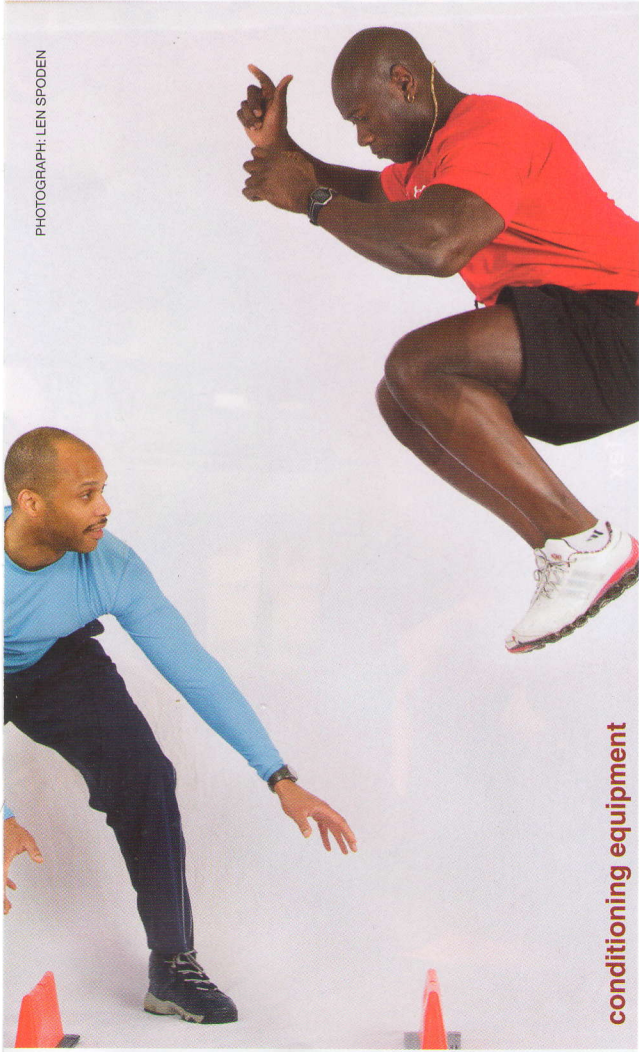






PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN

Lebert Equalizer



PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPODEN

conditioning equipment

adds variety and interest to your clients' programs."

Crews adds that the tool is easily transportable and takes up very little space, which can benefit all personal training studio owners.

### Conditioning Equipment

Cones. Ladders. Hurdles. These tools might bring sports conditioning to mind. More frequently, personal trainers use them to improve clients' general agility, stability, power and athleticism. Incorporating sports conditioning-style drills can set you apart from the competition, says Las Vegas-based personal trainer Tony Cress.

"Every studio should have agility equipment for a multitude of reasons," he advises. "Most people go into a gym, run on a treadmill, lift some weights and call it a day. The majority of people are never going to challenge the aspect of movement training. When I go into commercial gyms, I rarely see people doing shuttle drills or using speed ladders. Agility equipment will differentiate you from a run-of-the-mill gym and also train your clients to be physically well-rounded. Not just strong, but quick. Not just fast, but agile."

### Squat Rack

Squat racks may not be new, but they're holding strong, especially among the strength and conditioning set. Rich Mejias, strength and conditioning coach at the Leverage Training Center in Wyckoff, New Jersey, appreciates the safety squat racks offer his clients and athletes. "The horizontal brackets on the side can be set to a specific height so that if a weight drops, it will not come crashing down on us," he says. "Safety is always first when it comes to training."

Mejias suggests going for versatility when purchasing a squat rack. "The squat rack offers attachments for pull-ups, dips, battle ropes, TRX

Suspension Trainers, etc. As a small-business owner with a small facility, I need to make sure that every piece of equipment has multiple uses to ensure that each client gets the best training experience."

### Core-Tex™

Taking 3-D training to the next level, the Core-Tex, invented by Anthony Carey, ACE-certified fitness professional and owner of Function First in San Diego, consists of a 30-inch-diameter flat platform that moves along three ball transfers, challenging balance and stabilization, no matter what exercise you're doing. "The stimulus to the body is constantly changing and continually engaging the user," says Carey. "Every studio should have it because of its versatility. It's an environment that can be used for rehabilitation or corrective applications all the way up to explosive, full-body moves for the most elite clients and athletes."

The Core-Tex is also available with an optional handrail for extra stabilization.

### Lebert Equalizer Total Body Strengtheners™

Marc Lebert, IDEA presenter and ACE-certified fitness professional from Mississauga, Ontario, invented the Lebert Equalizer for one purpose. "One of my clients wanted to do chin-ups but was not strong enough," Lebert recalls. "[Because of cost and space concerns], she did not want a lat pull-down machine, so I welded up the first set of Equalizers." Since its creation, the tool has become highly versatile, offering users a way to do a multitude of exercises in a very small space. "With such a small footprint, [this equipment allows] the personal trainer to do many compound body weight exercises—like vertical rows, which are so important for clients—and many push-up and dip varia-



tions. Plus, it can be used for agility drills, abdominal work and stretching. The Equalizers can literally take the client from warm-up to cool-down stretching—and [through] everything in between.”

### Discs

Gliding™ discs, Valslides® and even paper plates or Frisbee® disks have entered the fitness world as alternative space-saving tools for challenging the body. Pizzi finds they can be used to bust boredom. “Gliding discs can introduce an element of ‘play’ into a workout,” she says. “Clients feel like they are ‘slipping and sliding’ (in a controlled manner of course) and are less restricted by reps and sets. If clients feel they are having fun, they are more likely to keep coming back.”

She adds that discs deliver a big challenge without a big price tag. “Discs are extremely inexpensive and can be purchased in bulk, making it very easy for a studio to offer group training sessions and classes. Discs are made for both carpet and hardwood flooring, therefore accommodating almost all studios.”

### Pilates Equipment

Pilates equipment could have its own article, given the wide variety of options available. But as Lauren DuBeau, Toronto-based communications director, education and master instructor trainer for Merrithew Health & Fitness™, points out, Pilates-specific education is a must when using these tools. “It is extremely important that the studio owner has an understanding of how the equipment is used before making the purchase,” she advises. “There are a lot of things available and you want to make sure you are setting yourself up to get the best return on investment.”

### Cardio Equipment

Treadmills, elliptical trainers, up-

right and recumbent bikes, stair climbers . . . the list of cardio equipment is lengthy. Of the many options, treadmills and ellipticals rank among the top 10 pieces of equipment named in the 2011 IDEA Personal Training Programs & Equipment Trends report. Personal trainers may not work with clients one-on-one on these machines; however, they offer clients solo-workout options and can be used for warm-ups. Cardio equipment options are usually quite costly and may take up precious space. While often more expensive than home models, commercial equipment tends to be sturdier and is designed to handle frequent use.

### Total Gym®

Founded in 1974 in San Diego, Total Gym was originally designed for home use, but in 2003, the incline body weight trainer stepped into commercial fitness with its GRAVITYSystem® training program. Since then, it has become a staple of fitness industry trade shows and fitness facilities worldwide.

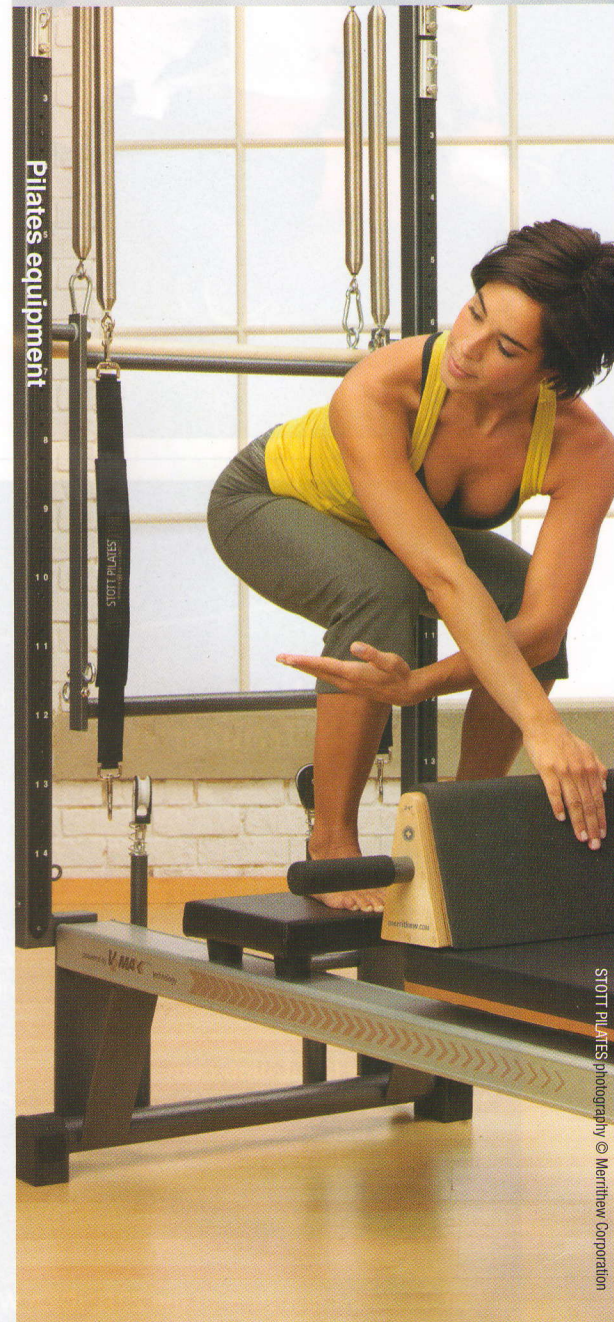
“Total Gym is a multifunctional body weight training product allowing users to vary the resistance and load whilst working out,” says London-based Michael Steel, director of international business for Total Gym. “Total Gym offers unlimited range of movement through all three cardinal planes and can meet any training requirement from postrehab to athletic training. It is portable, requires little space and folds away for easy storage, which means space is not an issue.”

### Indo-Row®

It might just be the closest thing to rowing on an actual body of water: the Indo-Row studio rowing machine is fitted with a WaterFlywheel that mimics the dynamic resistance of a boat gliding across water, while also providing a wavelike sound. The faster you row, the more resistance is created. >>



PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPRODEN



STOTT PILATES photography © Merrithew Corporation





“Jay Blahnik and I created the Indo-Row/ShockWave programs to bring the sport of rowing and its tremendous benefits to the fitness world,” says co-creator Josh Crosby, ACE-certified fitness professional, of Venice, California. “A full-body, low-impact and calorie-killing workout is delivered by the Indo-Row machine. [For everyone from] cross-training triathletes to older folks, this machine improves range of motion and builds cardio and strength, all without hammering the joints. The water, which acts as the resistance, gives the feel and sound of rowing in a boat.” When not in use, the machine can be placed upright and pushed aside to save floor space.

### Cable Crossover

The cable crossover helps clients escape the rigid world of single-track exercise machines. Most crossover machines are fitted with adjustable arms to allow for

multiple exercise options. “Incorporating cable crossover exercises into your routine can help not only define your muscles but also increase your strength,” Mejias says. “The tension in the cable is continuous throughout the entire exercise; this allows clients to get more bang for their buck.”

Mejias warns that some machines can be cumbersome, taking up a great deal of studio space. “At Leverage Training Center, we have a Keiser® Functional Trainer Crossover Machine. It offers all of the benefits of a normal Crossover, without killing your floor space.”

### Power Clubs

Also known as Indian Clubs, power clubs date back to the late 19th century. “They strengthen the muscles of the arms, and, incidentally, those of the body and legs; they expand the chest and induce full and regular res-

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piration; they impart firmness of balance and grace of motion,” author William Brisbane Dick wrote in *Dick’s Dumb-bell and Indian-Club Exercises* (Dick & Fitzgerald 1887).

Available in a range of lengths and sizes, power clubs are designed to be swung in various ways. While the arms and shoulders are primarily responsible for the movement, the entire body works together to maintain stability. “The constantly changing variety of movement develops the strength of the arms and expands the chest, at the same time bringing into full play every muscle in the entire body, and imparting ease and elasticity of motion, perfect equipoise and firmness to the step,” wrote Dick.

### Jump Rope

When it comes to fitness, simple is sometimes best. Jump ropes exemplify simplicity—and effectiveness. “I have

a special place in my heart for jump ropes,” Cress admits. “You can get an amazing workout with a jump rope in about 10 minutes. I have 12 in my own studio because they take up almost no room at all.”

Cress adds that he often will send a client home with a jump rope as a no-excuses tactic to improve solo physical activity. “Jumping rope develops hand-eye coordination, which will also enhance your performance in other areas of your life. I have 90% of my clients jump rope at some point in their programs.” ■

*Ryan Halvorson is the associate editor for IDEA Health & Fitness Association and a performance specialist at Bird Rock Fit in La Jolla, California.*

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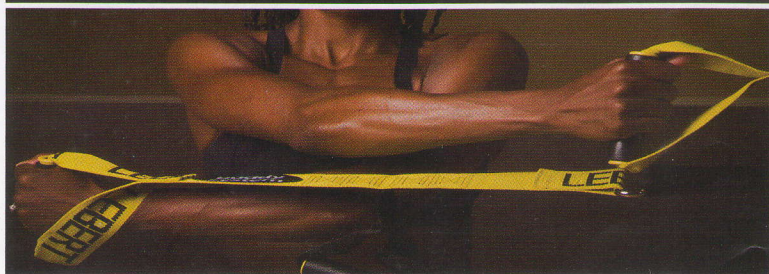
Jump rope



PHOTOGRAPH: LEN SPIDEN



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