

PURITAN PLEASURE

A spring in your step

"One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind," I yell, bounding across the studio of the cool and very funky underground gym. Flying through the air astronaut-style, arms waving, a huge grin on my face, I land and bounce up again. This is a Kangoo jumping class, and working out has never been so much fun.

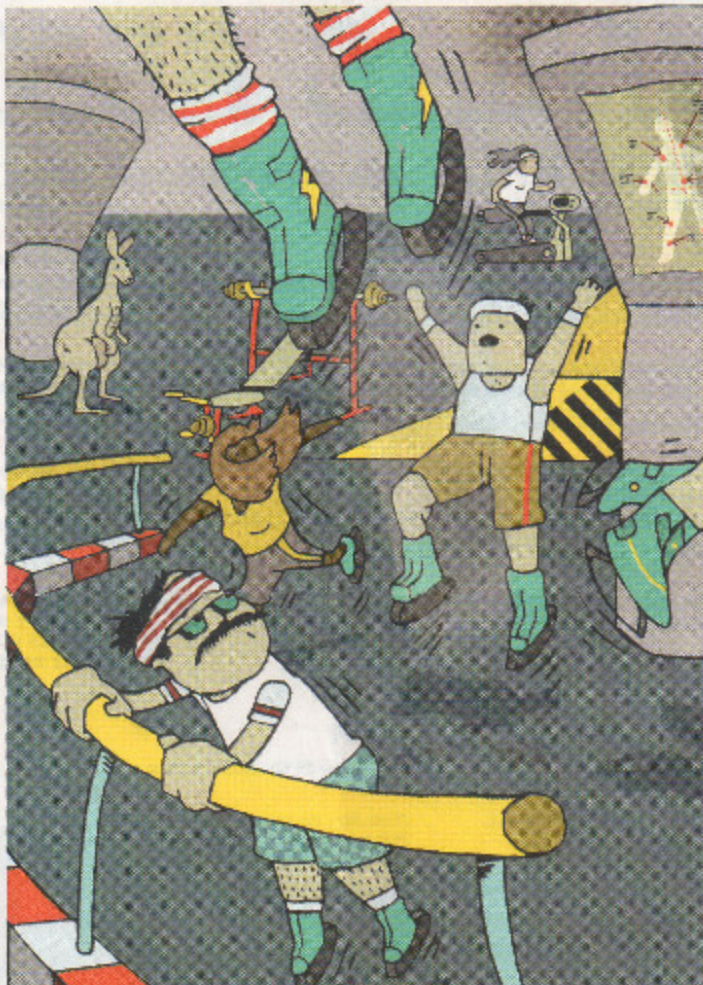
Technically speaking it's a cardiovascular work-out, but to you and me it's 45 minutes of bouncing madly around a room while burning up fat at a gratifying rate. All you need are Kangoo boots—provided by the gym, they look like rollerblades with a spring where the wheels should be—and thick socks. In my beginner's class at London's Gymbox there was much wobbling and holding of walls, but we soon found our balance and confidence. Instructor Chiraz Hasnaoui taught us a simple routine, but at one point just yelled "Run!", whereupon the whole class bounced randomly around the room.

Originally designed for rehabilitation after sporting injuries, the spring in the Kangoo boots absorbs up to 80 per cent of the impact shock to the legs and back caused by exercise. They are particularly helpful for overweight exercisers, relieving the strain placed on joints by extra pounds. The boots help muscles to work efficiently, primarily strengthening abdominals, legs and bums. Bouncing around with a class of people is hilarious, but if you prefer exercising more privately, personal sessions are available.

Gymbox is the only UK venue currently teaching Kangoo, but, until others follow suit, the boots can be bought for £129 for a basic model. They can be used indoors or out, on roads, grass or at the beach. Instruction videos are to be released soon, and Kangoo Box classes (infused with martial arts) are also being introduced. Expect to see many more of us bouncing on to this bandwagon.

Caroline Lucey

Gymbox, 100 High Holborn, London WC1, 020 7400 1919.
www.gymbox.co.uk. Classes cost £8.
Personal Kangoo Training, 07769 730222. www.kangoojumps.com



PRANDIAL PLEASURE

Feast for the eyes

I have just bitten a chunk out of an elegant Jimmy Choo boot and am about to start nibbling the hem of a delectably pretty pink Oscar de la Renta dress. No, I am not suffering from a terrible eating disorder, I am enjoying the Berkeley Hotel's new season's Prêt-à-Portea.

The Caramel Room in which this afternoon tea is served is luxurious and cosy and, in true fashionista style, everything on the table has been designed by a "name". The bespoke bone china is Paul Smith and the tall glasses, should you succumb to the temptation of rounding this tea off with a glass of Moët & Chandon, are Baccarat.

There are 15 types of tea and herbal infusions and the food arrives on a tall, tiered cake stand designed by Maryse Boxer. First we sample miniature savouries: tiny skewers of mozzarella between cherry tomatoes, slivers of artichoke and asparagus with balsamic vinegar, tiny toasts with roquefort and slices of fresh fig. There are sandwiches—cream

cheese and cucumber or smoked salmon, but all doll's tea-party size.

Then, to cleanse the palate, comes layered cassis mousse and lime jelly. And so to the cakes. They have been created with women in mind (the waiter, without a blush, tells us they are bite-sized so that "ladies need not stop talking") and even matchstick-thin models such as Naomi Campbell and Gisele have been known to indulge.

In fact, the cakes were also created by a woman, who changes the menu with the season's fashion, so it's (designer) hats off to Oda Weiss and her team for originality and quality as we tuck into Dolce & Gabbana leopard-skin lemon creams, Chloé bow macaroons, tiny Fendi "baguettes" in dark chocolate, minute éclairs with Missoni stripes, Louis Vuitton tartan cheesecakes and iced sponges in the shape of Anya Hindmarsh's "Pandora Pink" handbag. Certainly London's best tea-time treat.

Patricia Cleveland-Peck
Prêt-à-Portea (£29.00 or £38.00 with champagne) is served from 2pm–6pm. The Berkeley Hotel, Wilton Place, London SW1, 020 7273 6000.

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Wellies and waterproofs had been packed for a bracing country walk, which would in turn serve to justify a lavish supper in the evening. If Fawsley's cheese platter, we discovered later, is particularly fine. A facial in the hotel spa and tea in the firelit great hall were also on the itinerary, and a certain amount of English history was to be expected—while these days the guest list is likely to include Brad Pitt, Orlando Bloom or David Jason, Elizabeth I slept over at Fawsley too, in 1575, and it was here that she knighted two members of the family-in-residence, Ferdinando and Seymour Knightley.

The 18th-century master landscape gardener Capability Brown is also associated with Fawsley, which brings us neatly to the American history component of the weekend. Returning from a ramble that had taken in an ancient wood and the nearby village of Badby, we stopped on Fawsley's front lawn—Capability's sheep-dotted field by a lake—to visit the church of St Mary the Virgin. One of the hotel staff had mentioned that it housed an original heraldic panel from nearby Sulgrave Manor, home to George Washington's ancestors.

Armed with this knowledge, we gazed upon the stained glass windows with magnified awe. And, gratifyingly, there on the weathered stone floor, where the wintry light had filtered through the window, was a watery patch of red, white and blue. It was a sight that must warm the cockles of any number of US history enthusiasts' hearts.

Naomi Mapstone

Double/twinshare rooms start from £150 per night per person. Fawsley Hall's three-night Christmas House Party starts at £560 per person for accommodation, full breakfast and four meals. Fawsley Hall, Northamptonshire, NN11 3BA. 01327 892000. www.fawsleyhall.com