

# Bella Magazine

## WHAT'S A *BODY POSITIVE* GYM?

The ideals and concepts behind the gym of the future



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*Photography by Aaron Schorch*

Gyms have certainly evolved over the past 25 years. From large, packed gyms with machines and equipment galore to indoor stadium-styled classes and small boutique spaces for specialty fitness like Pilates, Barre, and more, it's easy to miss what may have been overlooked—the actual space in which that gym resides. Have you ever considered the actual gym environment and what it gives us while we are there?

Since COVID-19 hit, this is something many are beginning to seriously consider, specifically when it comes to cleanliness, air purification, and the sheer physicality of what an environment has to offer.

That's where Matt Finn, the founder of Cognitive Design, comes in.

*"We are an architecture firm that utilizes psychologists, researchers, and designers to create places where people thrive. While we recognize different aesthetics appeal to different people and tailor that aspect of our designs to our clients, the core of our designs focus on innate human commonalities with a compassionate and empathetic sensitivity to personal history and circumstance."*

As Matt explains, if there's one thing all people have in common, it's that we're all unique, yet it's his team's designs



*Clarity is designed to facilitate social cohesion, which can promote positive perception of exercising and enjoyment of exercise.*



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that endeavor to bring people together and highlight their shared goals and experiences.

Matt and his team were recently able to flex their muscles in that area as they signed on to help the Decatur, Georgia-based Clarity Fitness create something new. The concept focus that founder Abbey Griffith wished to achieve: A holistic gym that helps its members look and feel their best.

Here are some highlights of how the Cognitive Design team approached the transformational design:

### Symbolism

Matt and his team took antiquated bathroom scales and smashed, torched, and then proudly hung them on the wall in a taxidermy display cabinet. This is a way to show that continuously checking your weight is not a body positive way to move forward. Seeing an exhibit of smashed scales reminds people that their weight is not their worth and challenges them to find a powerful, personal "why," explains Matt.

### Placement

The team also made it a point to move most of the equipment closer to the windows to be as close to nature as possible. It's also way to encourage people to look outdoors rather than stare at themselves in a mirror, says Matt.

### Out With The Old

The fitness industry's conventional body messaging depicted super fit individuals, a message that is extremely flawed, explains Abbey. "We're bombarded with images on

social media about what we're 'supposed' to look like, yet every single one of us is built differently. "My core mission for Clarity Fitness is, to help people appreciate themselves a little more, find a few more friends to add to their sphere, and bring the fun back to their wellness routine."

### Founder's Inspiration

Abbey explains that she kicked off their new concept gym in January 2020 to rave reviews. After the pandemic forced her to shut her doors, however, she eventually found a way to rebound. She says that it was Clarity Fitness's holistic approach to the gym experience that ultimately inspired her new clientele to return—and more so than even before.

Abbey's personal story behind the creation of her body positive gym is punctuated by her own health scare suffering from eating disorders and bulimia.

"When I learned about body positivity in my eating disorder recovery, my life changed. I started to work out to take care of and respect my body, not to force it to change or punish it for what I had eaten. In a world that celebrates achievement largely brought on by a perceived sense of control, everything about body positive practices felt absolutely terrifying, but so, so good!"



*Space is divided into a number of distinct areas, each with a unique character, creating a variety of novel shared experiences.*

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*Cognitive Design is a curated network of experts working together to improve people's lives through design of the built environment.*

*For additional information, please visit: [www.cognitive.design](http://www.cognitive.design)*

*Matthew A. Finn AIA, NCARB, LEED AP is an Atlanta-based architect and Founder of Cognitive Design.*

*Matt is passionate about how the built environment influences human health. As a social entrepreneur and architect, Finn founded Cognitive Design in 2016 - a consulting and design firm that fuses architecture and health.*

*Matt's interdisciplinary research and innovative thinking have been recognized by Healthcare Design magazine, who named Matt the 2016 HCD 10 Researcher. Additionally, Matt's work has been featured by numerous academic institutions, media outlets and conferences including the U.S. Green Building Council, Academy of Neuroscience For Architecture and the American Institute of Architects.*

*With every project, Matt brings his contagious enthusiasm to architecture for health.*