

Fitness after dark

Lights down, music up. Nightclub-inspired fitness spaces offer an energising, playful way to work out, where you really can move like no one's watching.

Rebecca Howden

In the dark, you feel electric – vibrant, warm and exhausted in the best kind of way. '90s R&B is pulsing through the sound system, and strobe lights shimmer with the beat. You're moving freely, your hair and skin sweaty. You close your eyes and feel the music surge through your body like a current.

You could be in a club, except it's 7 pm. You're dressed comfortably in your compression tights and Nikes. And you're intoxicated with the feel-good rush of endorphins, the energy jolt of a protein bar, and the pleasure of cool, pure water.

From dance classes to spin and even yoga, nightclub-inspired workouts are popping up everywhere. For anyone who's bored of the typical gym studio, glow-in-the-dark fitness classes inject a bit of playfulness and novelty that can get you feeling reenergised about working out.

It's super dorky, but that's what makes it so fun.

There's something about the dark space that's really freeing. When you can let go of any thoughts of what you look like, the experience becomes more about how your body feels. Alice Glenn, co-founder of dance community No Lights No Lycra, says this can provide vital relief in a world where we're constantly on Instagram and focused on visuals.

"We live in a very image-based society. Having a place in the dark where you are encouraged to be silly, free and completely yourself is very liberating," she says. "It's a rare thing to be in a room surrounded by people all looking wild and uninhibited."

Michaela Fellner, founder of spin studio Bodhi & Ride, agrees the nightclub-style darkness helps to get you in a brighter, more fiery headspace. "You find your inner badass, so all you need to do is focus on what you're here for – your workout."

Dancing in the dark

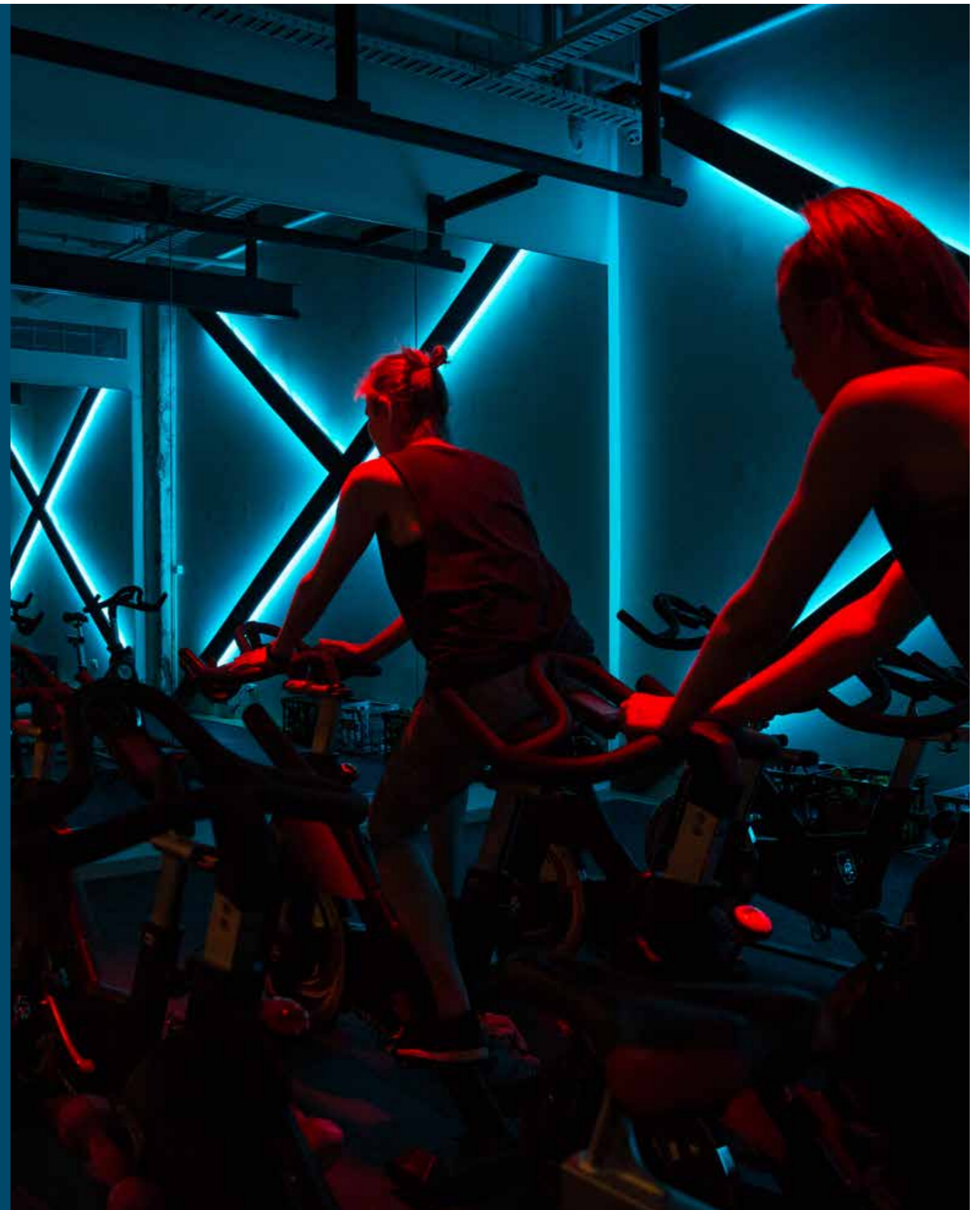
No Lights No Lycra was created by two dancers, Alice Glenn and Heidi Barrett, in 2009 in Melbourne. There are now dance nights held all around the world, bringing people together to let loose and express themselves in the freedom of a dark room.

"It's a place where people can completely let go and shake out the stresses of the week in a friendly, non-threatening atmosphere," Glenn says. "It's an opportunity to experience new music and revisit old favorites – a time to lose yourself in the music and enjoy the way your own body moves."

It's nothing like a dance class, where you have to think about steps and technique and coordination. There's no teacher, no instructions and no pressure to dance 'properly'. Whether you want to do the robot, practice your best Beyoncé moves, or just jump around, it's a safe space to let go and do whatever you like.

Dancing around for an hour will definitely get your blood pumping. But the real allure is the exhilaration it gives you, and the feeling of community. "The connectedness that you feel in a dark room at NLNL is really powerful," Glenn says. "It's time out from our busy world, and it's silly and joyful. The happiness in the room is quite infectious."

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Let’s get physical

When it comes to aerobics, the more retro and dorky the better. At Clubbercise, neon Lycra is encouraged, feel-good club anthems are blasting, and everyone gets a pair of flashing LED glow sticks to get into the groove.

“Clubbercise combines fitness and clubbing in one high energy workout,” says founder Claire Burlison. “Classes are a fusion of dance, toning and combat moves, taught with nightclub-style lighting. It can be as challenging as you want it to be – routines can be done at high or low impact.”

The concept started in London and is growing in popularity around Australia, with classes held in all different spaces, from gym studios to community centres to actual nightclubs.

“For those who love to dance the night away clubbing, or who feel self-conscious in a brightly lit gym environment, the darkened room combined with pumping tunes – from the 90’s to the latest chart hits – strips away all inhibition,” Burlison says.

“It’s perfect for anyone who likes the idea of a healthy alternative to a night on the town. You can enjoy clubbing without alcohol and hangovers.”



Spin like you mean it

Let’s face it – traditional spin classes can be misery. At boutique fitness studio Bodhi & Ride, a fierce cardio workout is combined with a vibrant party atmosphere. “It creates an energetic – and sweaty – fitness experience where riders can find a release,” says founder Michaela Fellner.

The ride chamber is dark, with pulsing neon lights and bikes nestled close together like a crowded dance floor. The music is an essential part of the experience, with DJ-mixed soundtracks set to themes like Lady Gaga vs Madonna and R&B Tuesdays.

“We ride to the rhythm of the music and the beat is our guide, so when the music speeds up, we speed up. When it slows down, we do too,” Fellner says. “Our badass tunes and thumping bass push you to ride and work harder than you ever thought possible.”

By the end of the class, you’re flushed, breathing hard and dripping with sweat – but strangely full of energy. “There’s a magic that happens when the doors close, lights dim, and music turns up. There’s a palpable energy in the room that pushes you one step further.” •