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Reborn To Run

The best marathoners don't just wing it when it comes to training. They use high-tech gadgets to hack their bodies and achieve times they once thought impossible. Here's how you can too

BY ASHLEY MATEO

I WAS FIVE MILES from the finish line of April's 2019 London Marathon when I started thinking about just how stupid it is to race one of these things. My legs were weak, my side was cramping and, to add insult to literal injury, it was starting to drizzle. Obsessively checking my watch every 5 seconds while counting down to the finish line (hoping it might be willing to meet me halfway), I felt stuck in slow motion—at a point when it was time to pick up the pace. Luckily, I had prepared my body for just this moment.

For average runners, signing up for a marathon is mostly about surviving to the finish—after all, the very first guy to run one barely did, dying shortly thereafter. The popularity of the challenge has grown precipitously, with the number of marathoners jumping by nearly 50% over the last decade, reaching 1.1 million finishers in 2018 according to the International Association of Athletics Federations. In the same span, average times have also

ballooned. In 1986, amateur racers typically crossed the final time stripe in 3:52:35; now that's up to 4:28:56—almost exactly the time I crossed the finish at the 2016 Boston Marathon, the first of my six 26.2-mile finishes.

But I don't run to be average. I run to push my limits, so ever since Boston I've been aiming to break the 4-hour mark—an arbitrary yet achievable goal I deem brag-worthy. "World-record racer Eliud Kipchoge can no longer complete two marathons in the span it takes me to finish one," I imagined telling people after I broke the barrier.

In my races and in my preparation leading up to London, however, my times had plateaued about 11 minutes short of that goal. Standard training protocols—run a ton, eat right, rest well, repeat—didn't seem to be enough anymore. And at 33, it's not exactly easy to become more fleet of foot. I figured I'd have to try something drastic: not just logging extra miles but hacking my body's cardiovascular and muscular systems with elite, next-level tech.

That's how, for months leading up to London, I found myself doing all kinds of odd things to unlock my fitness

potential, including lounging for 40 minutes a day, my ears popping, in a tiny, pressurized spaceship-like pod.

"There are three things that limit endurance performance," explained Brad Wilkins, Ph.D., an exercise and sports physiologist who in 2016 worked with Nike to train the world's fastest runners in a bid to break the 2-hour marathon barrier (coming up 26 seconds shy). "There's VO2 max, or the maximum amount of oxygen you can consume, which translates to the maximum amount of work your body can do; your running economy, or how much energy is required for you to run a given distance at a given speed; and your lactate threshold, the physiological intensity that you can sustain for a long period."

You can improve all three by running harder. But that's, well, hard. So I gladly decided to take a shortcut, starting by improving my VO2 max with the Krypton-like "CVAC" pod, short for Cyclic Variations in Adaptive Conditioning, which fluctuates air-pressure levels to flush post-workout waste out of your cells. "The CVAC allows your cells to ex-

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PATRICK ROSCHE

DESIGN & DECORATING

**TURN ON MODERN LIGHTS**

Of the pivoting bedside sconces Mr. Jayne said, "They're relatively simple, functional and contemporary. And putting something new next to vintage and antique pieces added depth." For your own beacon in the night, try the Graves Pivoting Sconce, \$449, circallighting.com.

**ADD CALMER PATTERN**

A striped throw pillow sits on two simply bordered white shams. With colors stronger than the quilt but less busy than the canopy, it enhances without overwhelming, as does this Garrettson Pillow in Clearwater Blue and Sunset Red, \$150, onekingslane.com.

**GROUND YOUR DREAMS**

The tranquil blue four-post frame quietly anchors the fanciful riot of textiles adorning the bed. Moor your own fancies with a Fluted Post Bed, \$6,915, thefederalistonline.com and Cook's Blue paint No. 237 in Dead Flat, \$110 a gallon, farrow-ball.com.

**ANATOMY LESSON**

Beyond the Sail

A boathouse that transcends seaside design clichés with maximalist flair

VACATION HOMES—beach houses, especially—tend to be "stripped back and practical," explained New York interior designer Thomas Jayne. But when a Manhattan-based psychologist/artist and her husband—with whom she co-founded a prominent sailing-training center on Long Island—asked him to decorate a boathouse on the pier near their Oyster Bay home (also on Long Island), he saw an opportunity to give the waterside retreat a personality as interesting as his clients'.

"It's informal but not casual," Mr. Jayne said of this beachy-bohemian bedroom, which doubles as a studio for painting and sculpting. "There's a rich-

ness that's not concerned with wet bathing suits, and though coastal-color cues are taken from the boardwalk, you won't find gratuitous arrangements of seashells anywhere." That said, some "sea" cues in the room are certainly familiar—white shiplap walls and ceilings, model sailboats and notes of bay-water blue and coral pink—but Mr. Jayne and Egan Seward, a senior designer at his eponymous firm, mixed antique, vintage and new furnishings to give the space a layered intimacy that defies predictability, a maximalist coziness chilled out for summer. Here, the key elements to a lush beach house. —*Tim Gavan*

**CONTAIN THE COMMOTION**

The side tables are just "old American occasional tables whose low-key style leaves the exuberance to the bed," said Mr. Jayne. "Their symmetry also contains that exuberance." Frame flamboyance with two Lacquered Rattan Bungalow Side Tables, \$328 each, serenaandlily.com

**GIVE IT A REST**

A 19th-century American quilt with a calming white backdrop is visually interesting but considered. The scale of the pattern is similar to the valence's, which keeps chaos at bay, said Mr. Jayne. Of a like stitch: Flying Geese Quilt, \$795, laurafisherquilts.com



PUT DOWN ROOTS At the foot of the bed—and in contrast to its verve—is a wooden bench "probably made for a workshop," Mr. Jayne said. "Over time it developed this interesting patina, and the shape looks appropriately modern." It and the antique Persian rugs "give a sense of collection." Similar: this Simple Antique Bench, \$1,350, jaysonhome.com.

FLOAT AN IDEA

The model sailboat is one of about two dozen dispatched throughout the house and dwarfed by the real ones outside. "The sculpture and shape of the model boat adds a curviness to an otherwise hard space," Mr. Jayne noted. Equally seaside-worthy: Vintage 40-inch Sailboat Model, \$399, chairish.com

**EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS**

Mr. Jayne based his color scheme on the Balinese-style canopy valence. White and blue—beach-house staples—go with everything, but the canopy's hues led to a less expected palette. The tassels are whimsical and bohemian, and the Indian wall hanging behind the bed adds another blast of print but, in its calming symmetry, doesn't overdo it. Make a multihued canopy of Perigold's Lola by Pollack Fabrics (\$291 a yard, perigold.com) and add ordered pattern with this Susani Embroidery Wall Hanging from Enrica Pasino. \$2,046, 1stdibs.com

THAT'S DEBATABLE

Should Bathroom Tiles Be Chatty?

YES**THE CHARMING**

verbal expressions one finds set into penny tile in the entrances of 19th and early 20th-century commercial establishments are piping up in people's bathrooms today. In an apartment on Manhattan's Upper West Side, blue-gray tiles on the lavatory's white floor spell out "Unicorn Trainer," a reference to the little girl who uses the room. Across town, a rousing "Howdy" greets visitors who walk into a guest bath.

"I think it's a playful, interesting way to add character to a space," said Britt Zunino, of New York's Studio DB, who designed the bathroom for the young urban handler of mythological ponies. "I'm not sure I'd do it in a more-public space, but it's fun in a limited area." Houston-born designer Emily C. Butler, now based in New York, decided with her clients that the cowboy greeting, set into navy hexagonal tiles, would nicely complement a more-formal powder room walled in navy lacquer.

"The family wanted a cheeky solution for what could otherwise be so boring," she said. "Howdy" spoke to their roots, and it's a nice surprise when you open the door."

For a bathroom that a teenage girl and her little brother share in a typically small Manhattan apartment, Ms. Zunino plotted out a Jack and Jill arrangement. The pair's individual chambers include a toilet and vanity, and they both use a two-doored shower in between that expresses their common goal when it comes to soaping up: "Fresh" is scribed diagonally across the penny-tiled floor.

Though cementing words and phrases into walls and floors might affect a property's resale value, some people don't care. "A lot of clients have embraced the idea that their home is their home and they are going to create what they like," said Ms. Zunino. "If they sell, the buyer is probably going to renovate anyway." Why not personalize the space? And, as Ms. Butler noted, hexagon tiles are relatively inexpensive.



LANGUAGE ARTS Floor tiles spell out a greeting in a New York guest bath designed for fellow Texans by Houston-born designer Emily C. Butler.

NO**IN THE SAME**

way that you can't stop yourself from needlessly reading English subtitles you've lazily left scrawling across the bottom of "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel," language set into tile can be too distracting, others argue. "When you first come into a room, instead of allowing you to take in an entire space, it forces your eye to one place," said Atlanta-based designer Tish Mills Kirk. "It doesn't give you permission to have a first impression about a space." To some designers, homeowners who opt for decorative words of any kind—whether it's "love" in pink cursive neon or a wooden plaque exhorting you to swim out to the ship you've been waiting to come in—are misdirecting their design energy. "The idea of saying something in words in the tile rather than in the choice of tile itself as an expression drives me a little bonkers," said Marika Meyer, a designer based in Bethesda, Md. (It doesn't help that many chatty floors

speak sappy platitudes like "You're Beautiful" and "Keep Moving Forward.")

It's all too easy to grow bored of a daily affirmation that seemed cute in concept but isn't easily erased. And Ms. Mills Kirk points out that it's more difficult to change a bathroom's design mood cosmetically (via bathmats, towels, even paint) when it's permanently committed to perkiness. "It's hard to make light changes around such a specific design direction," she said.

And in the haven of your house, away from digital billboards, a barrage of texts and a million other bits of language vying for your comprehension, words as décor can feel like a home invasion. "My father, whom I adore, has this habit of sending emails in all bold letters. He just doesn't realize he's hit the caps lock," said Ms. Meyer. "I feel like I'm being yelled at or assaulted with words. I feel the same way when I see words in tiles, in murals. I feel accosted."

—*Catherine Romano*