

From retail anchor to wellness destination: Former LA Bloomingdale's gets new life

Fitness International's premium gym concept opens at Santa Monica Place



Club Studio has opened in the former Bloomingdale's at Santa Monica Place, replacing traditional retail space with a fitness destination. (AO)

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CoStar News

September 3, 2026 | 11:37 AM



For decades, the three-story Bloomingdale's building at Santa Monica Place helped anchor one of Southern California's highest-profile shopping spots, drawing customers to apparel, cosmetics and luxury goods a block from the Pacific Ocean.

Today, the building is being reinvented for a very different purpose. Fitness International has opened a 48,000-square-foot Club Studio fitness club on the ground floor, while the upper levels are being converted into a children's museum, transforming a traditional department store into an experience-driven destination and offering a glimpse of how shopping centers are replacing retail anchors with attractions designed to keep visitors engaged for hours rather than minutes.

The shift also reflects Fitness International's own evolution. After spending four decades building one of North America's largest gym operators through LA Fitness, the Irvine, California-based company is betting that consumers increasingly want something more than rows of treadmills and weight machines.



Club Studio offers a series of fitness and recovery spaces, combining multiple boutique concepts in one location. (Club Studio)

The timing is hardly accidental. Americans spent \$132 billion on beauty, wellness and specialty fitness services in 2025, up from \$86 billion in 2020, according to CBRE. Boutique fitness operators alone are expected to open more than 700 locations this year, creating demand for roughly 1.5 million square feet of retail space. As consumers spend more on looking better, feeling better and living longer, shopping center owners increasingly are turning to fitness and wellness concepts to backfill large boxes once occupied by legacy retailers.

"Everything's in such a transition right now in the retail world," said Bruce Greenfield, a partner at architecture firm AO, which worked on the Santa Monica project. "There's a shift away from standard retail to more experiential lifestyle-driven destinations."

Fitness International's next act

Fitness International traces its roots to 1984, when founders Chinyol Yi and Louis Welch opened the first LA Fitness in Covina, California. The company expanded nationally through acquisitions and new development, eventually operating hundreds of locations under the LA Fitness, City Sports Club and Esporta Fitness banners. But as consumers increasingly flocked to specialty operators focused on Pilates, boxing, yoga and other fitness niches, the company began developing a different model.

Club Studio debuted in Irvine in 2022 as what executives describe as multiple boutique fitness experiences combined into a single membership. Rather than competing directly with low-cost gyms, the concept targets consumers willing to pay more for variety, convenience and wellness services.

Unlike other gyms, Club Studio is designed as a collection of specialized offerings under one roof. Members move among dedicated studios for boxing, cycling, hot yoga, Pilates reformer classes and high-intensity interval training before heading to recovery amenities that include cryotherapy, red-light therapy, HydroMassage, compression therapy and infrared saunas.

"It's like a menu of activities," Greenfield said. "You can go in and work out, do a boxing, spin or Pilates class, and then you can relax and do active recovery. You can sample two or three different things as opposed to going to separate studios with differing fee or membership structures."



Santa Monica Place is steps from the Santa Monica Pier in the heart of Santa Monica's beachside district. (CoStar)

Inside, the Santa Monica club feels more like a boutique hotel or wellness resort than a gym. Studio spaces branch off a central corridor rather than opening onto a single workout floor, while dedicated recovery areas and premium finishes reinforce the company's effort to compete not only with usual fitness centers but also with standalone boutique operators and luxury brands such as Equinox and Life Time.

The concept has quickly become Fitness International's primary growth vehicle.

"They're prioritizing the Club Studio brand, dedicating much of their real estate strategy and search for new locations to its expansion," said Steve Griego Jr., senior associate at AO. "It's been very successful."

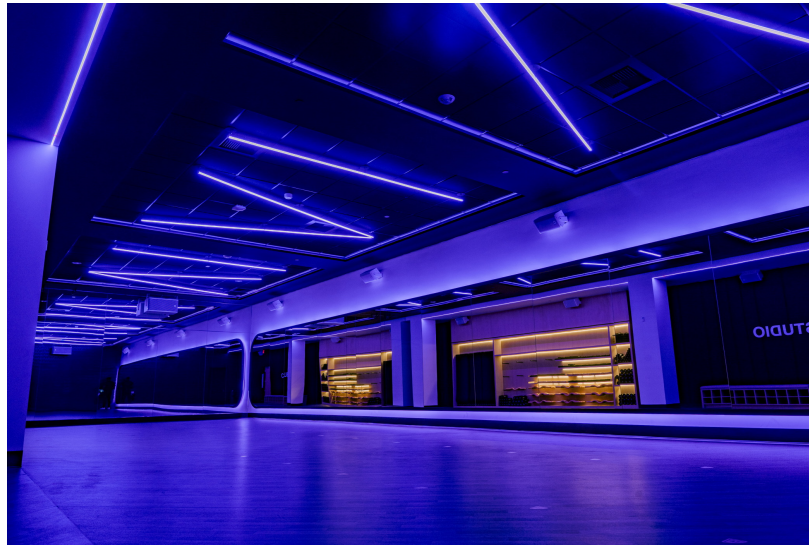
Why former department stores work

The Santa Monica Place location illustrates why.

Occupying the first level of the former Bloomingdale's building overlooking the Third Street Promenade and Santa Monica Pier, the

club occupies space that once sold apparel and home goods. The project took roughly 18 months to two years to complete and required converting a department store into an entirely different use.

Former department stores increasingly provide fertile ground for experiential concepts. Their large floor plates, central locations, visibility and parking infrastructure make them attractive candidates for fitness clubs, entertainment venues and other draws built around repeat visits rather than one-time purchases.



Neon lighting accents a Club Studio fitness studio, part of the transformation of Santa Monica Place's former Bloomingdale's. (AO)

"It's a good model and a good use for this type of building," Greenfield said. "Outdated anchors and former department stores are the right size for these types of large-scale projects."

For shopping center owners, the appeal extends beyond replacing a single tenant. Fitness operators generate traffic from early morning to evening hours, helping support restaurants, retailers and other businesses nearby.

"The idea is to give people a reason to stay," Greenfield said. "They might go to the gym, shop at a few stores, spend time in a courtyard and have a drink, then stay for dinner. It becomes an enjoyable experience, where people want to spend time, instead of just running an errand and leaving."