

# FIGHT CLUB

For a workout that makes you look (and feel) both strong and sexy, you just can't beat kickboxing.

BY NICOLE CATANESE

Kickboxing is *hot* right now. Models like Cara Delevingne, Gigi Hadid and Elettra Wiedemann (pictured here) are fans—and their toned physiques show they're making all the right moves. Chain gyms have had kickboxing on their schedules forever, but now New York City boutique studios are taking the sport to the next level with an authentic, old-school vibe borrowed from the world of boxing (think punching bags, sparring partners, even boxing rings). There's Punch Fitness Center, which recently launched a summer pop-up in the Hamptons, and ModelFit, the buzzy downtown class frequented by famously toned, long-limbed women like Karlie Kloss, Taylor Swift and Rosie Huntington-Whiteley. Meanwhile, boxing gyms have sprouted up on both coasts—like just-opened Shadowbox and Overthrow studios in Manhattan, and Gloveworx in Santa Monica, California.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY BEAU GREALY  
STYLED BY LINDSEY FRUGIER



## KICK-STARTER

"It's like a mental break from real life, but your brain is engaged the entire time," says Wiedemann, who trains twice a week at Anderson Martial Arts in New York City.

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## PUNCH IT UP

"Getting comfortable with throwing a punch is important," Wiedemann says. "Once it clicks, you stop tensing up—it feels so good."

VEST Victoria's Secret

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A big part of the allure is kickboxing's unexpected yin and yang: You give it everything you've got—intense focus, fierce movements, lung-searing aerobic effort—and you're rewarded with the long, lean, sculpted muscles typical of dancers and barre-class devotees. "The benefits are huge," Wiedemann says. "You get strength and definition, plus it takes you to a mental place where you feel focused and accomplished."

Kickboxing's rhythm is all about quick, darting movements. Hops and hooks fire up fast-twitch muscles and require rapid bursts of energy, boosting calorie burn. "A boxing round is a classic high-intensity interval—three high-exertion minutes followed by one recovery minute," says Raymond Montalvo, master instructor at Shadowbox, where students learn traditional boxing techniques (striking a punching bag or pads with your fists) rather than the type of no-contact cardio kickboxing (air kicks and punches) traditionally taught in gyms.

Training with a bag—à la Gisele in Under Armour's "I Will What I Want" video—boosts the sport's body-sculpting benefits even more. The extra resistance puts kickboxing into a category that exercise physiologists call "impact cardio," which differs from, say, running, where only your legs pound the pavement. It's also why kickboxing workouts create a ballet-esque physique instead of bulky muscle.

"Constantly changing direction to execute each kick and punch activates teeny-tiny muscles all over," explains ModelFit founder and trainer Justin Gelband, who sometimes has students perform kickboxing moves while balanced on a step, knees slightly bent, to activate even more glute muscles.

You can even skip crunches: Kickboxing earns you abs definition, too. "You have to brace your core three-dimensionally, from the front to the back, from the sides and even from your hips," says Jinger S. Gottschall, Ph.D., associate professor of kinesiology at Penn State University, whose research found that each set of jabs in a kickboxing sequence is the equivalent of doing 1.6 crunches.

Sound like hard work? Maybe. But a kick-ass body is certainly something worth fighting for.

## THE WORKOUT

This routine, created by ModelFit founder Justin Gelband, sculpts lean muscle and torches calories. Using a bag is optional; if you do, kick or punch it with each rep. Do each move 15 times, then switch sides. To really amp up the workout, repeat the entire sequence one or two more times.

1

### LIFT AND HOOK

Stand with right shoulder near bag (if using one), feet shoulder-width apart, knees soft. Hold fists at shoulder height in front of you. Keeping knees slightly bent, lift right leg out to side. Quickly lower leg as you punch left fist across body, turning hips, torso and head to right while twisting on ball of left foot.

2

### KICK AND HOOK

Stand, facing bag, with feet shoulder-width apart, knees soft, fists at shoulder height. In one quick motion, kick right leg in front of you, leading with knee and snapping foot out and in, no higher than waist level. Quickly lower leg and punch left fist across body, turning hips, torso and head to right while twisting on ball of left foot.

3

### ONE-TWO PUNCH

Stand, facing bag, with feet shoulder-width apart, knees soft, fists in front of you at shoulder height. In one quick motion, kick left leg across body at a 45-degree angle, leading with knee and snapping foot out and in. Quickly lower leg and punch left fist across body, turning hips, torso and head to right while twisting on ball of left foot. Now punch right fist across body, turning hips, torso and head to left while twisting on ball of right foot.

4

### KICK BACK

Stand with bag behind you, feet shoulder-width apart, knees soft. Hold arms in front of you at chest height, elbows bent, fingers touching. Squeeze butt and lean forward, lifting right foot. In one quick motion, kick straight behind you, leading with heel and snapping foot out and in. Quickly lower leg and twist right on balls of feet, turning hips, torso and head to right as you punch left fist behind you.

5

### PUNCH THINGS UP

Stand, facing bag, with feet hip-width apart, knees soft, fists at shoulder height in front of you. Kick right leg in front of you. Quickly lower leg and rotate hips right as you punch left fist upward. Now punch right fist across body, turning hips, torso and head to left while twisting on ball of right foot.

6

### CROSS HOOK

Stand, facing bag, with feet hip-width apart, knees soft, fists at shoulder height in front of you. Lift right knee, then kick out to side, leading with heel and snapping foot out and in. Quickly lower leg and rotate hips right as you punch left fist upward. Now kick left leg in front of you. Quickly lower leg and punch right fist across body, turning hips, torso and head to left while twisting on ball of left foot.

# HOW TO STAY INJURY-FREE

Kickboxing's twisting, turning and contact (if you use bags and pads) can hurt if you don't take precautions like these:

**WRAP UP** Protect your wrists and knuckles with cotton or synthetic hand wraps. (Doing so will also keep your joints aligned.)

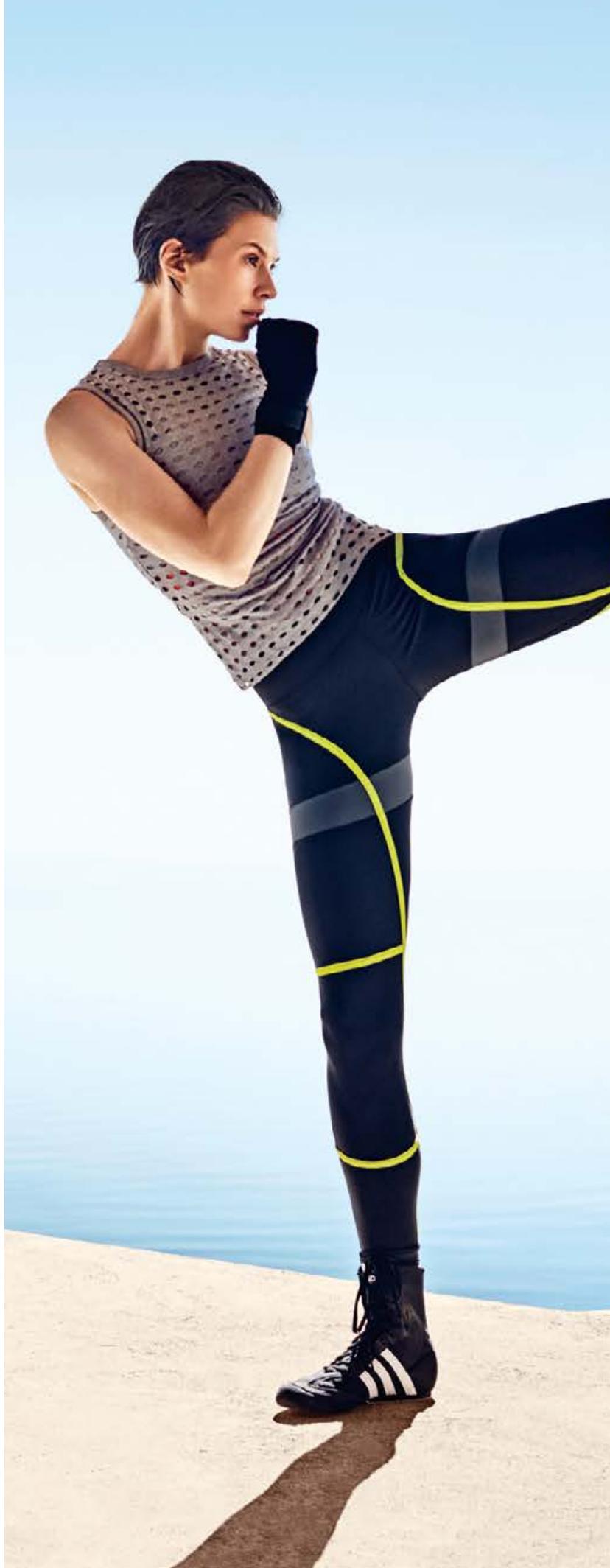
**SNAP IT** After a punch, pull your fist backward as fast as you extended it forward—“like snapping a towel,” Montalvo says. And make sure your hand hits the pad or bag straight on, with the front of your fist. “It should make a pop sound, not a thud.”

**DIG DEEP** Use your hips and core to generate more speed and maintain balance as you move. Staying light on your feet (and wearing supportive boxing shoes or ankle guards) helps prevent ankle sprains.

**DON'T OVERDO IT** “Don't go so hard that you can't walk for three days after a class,” Gelband says. “You should never strain something to punch or kick harder.”

## THE MENTAL PAYOFF

Any workout can relieve stress—but making contact during a high-intensity kickboxing session may be especially cathartic. “When there's pushback from the bag or pads, you get a sense of fulfillment with each individual motion,” says Carl W. Cotman, Ph.D., a neuroscientist at the University of California in Irvine. And unlike elliptical sessions that let you zone out, kickboxing requires coordination and memory to execute complex moves and sequences. When it comes to brain health, “learning plus exercise is better than either alone,” Cotman says. “It boosts production of BDNF, a molecule that's considered brain fertilizer.” In addition to strengthening brain cells, BDNF has antidepressantlike characteristics—in fact, some anxiety medications are designed to bolster BDNF. Plus, let's be honest: Punching something feels *good*.

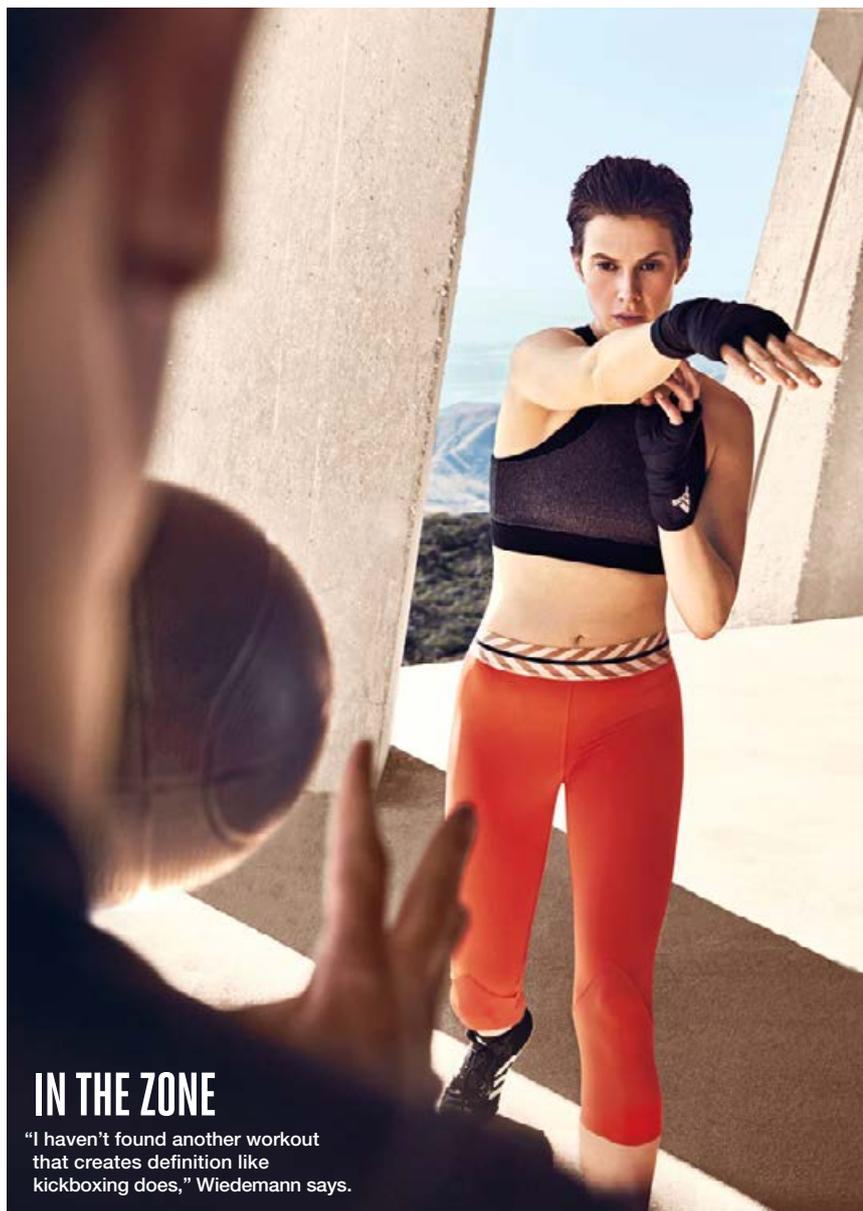




## FORM FIT

To give side kicks more power, lift your knee in front, then rotate hips as you explode your foot out and back in. Keep your foot flexed and lead with your heel, not toes.

**TANK T** by Alexander Wang **PANTS** Tully Lou



## IN THE ZONE

"I haven't found another workout that creates definition like kickboxing does," Wiedemann says.



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Hair, Dennis Gots for Kérastase; makeup, John McKay for Chanel Les Beiges Powder; manicure, Maya Apple at Nailing Hollywood; prop styling, Colin Donahue; production, 3Star Productions. See Get-It Guide.