



TOM MOOS

The founder of Amsterdam-based boutique operator, Saints & Stars, talks to Kate Cracknell about new studio and class concepts – and about growing up in one of the best-known families in fitness

“A

business like this isn't based on spreadsheets, on business models, or on copying this and that, because you can only copy so much before the whole market gets stuck," says Tom Moos, founder of boutique fitness operation Saints & Stars. "The only way to build a business like this is to do what you love, focus on what you can be really good at, and then put your whole soul into it.

"I'm not the sort of guy who's going to stand there and say 'we're the best' and that we're not going to look at what others are doing," he says. "I'm always there to learn, and I know how important it is to be flexible and adapt to the market; our target group like to constantly change things up, so we have to be ready to move quickly at all times. However, we won't simply copy others. We will always have our own flavour around we do at Saints & Stars, because a copy job will never, ever work."

DOING THINGS DIFFERENTLY

True to his word, Saints & Stars – which launched its first studio in summer 2018 in a "trendy neighbourhood of Amsterdam" – is more than just a name. It's a philosophy that's unique to the Saints & Stars business.

Moos explains: "Our members are our Saints, the people we're there to take care of. Our trainers are our Stars. But underpinning this is a focus on two words across everything we do: totality and belief. Totality is about delivering everything to the



Tom Moos launched
Saints & Stars in
Amsterdam in 2018





► highest possible standard. Belief is about being so much more than just a place to work out.

"When our Saints and Stars come together, they create a total experience based on a belief in something greater than fitness alone."

The club design, too, comes with a Saints & Stars hallmark. "I like owning one specific style. I didn't want to be the next 'industrial chic' boutique," says Moos. "So, we teamed up with one of the most famous interior designers in the Netherlands to focus on a New York glamour look. We use a lot of natural materials. A lot of marble. It's comparable

to a really high-end hotel. We didn't want it to look, feel or smell like a regular gym – it needed to be way more than that.

"Then, once you step into the studio, it's a nightclub feel, created in collaboration with an experienced nightclub specialist."

The programming too, while at face value adopting familiar formats – Holy Box is a boxing-inspired workout, Holy Shred a HIIT-inspired workout, and there's a PT studio too – has been designed to have a distinctive, signature feel. "Everything we do is formatted, with fully structured workouts based on

The Saints & Stars club is designed to feel like both a high-end hotel and a night club



maximising results and safety," says Moos. "It ensures you get the same experience each and every time. The only difference in each class is the trainer's personality.

"I believe this is a real strength for us. Our training philosophy is absolutely on-point, designed by specialists in their field – running experts and so on – and we don't leave anything to the individual trainers in terms of the programmes themselves.

"We even give our trainers the cues and the phrases we want them to use, and they're all coached regularly: we have mandatory

meetings every week where we continue their education, focusing not only on the 'what' but also the 'why'. Our Academy is probably the thing I'm most proud of in the whole business."

"We have a voice specialist, too," adds Moos, "who coaches our trainers in using their voice, changing tone and pitch and emotion to maximise the workout experience and effectiveness. That's been incredibly valuable."

CREATING A TRIBE

On the theme of trainers, Moos continues: "One great thing about being part of a bigger ►

The boxing-inspired workout, Holy Box, is formatted to maximise results



► group with a strong history in the sector: we already knew all the best instructors, and we have them all as trainers at Saints & Stars.

"We have 14 rockstar instructors, all freelance but all working for us on an exclusive basis, and haven't lost a single one of them since we opened. We pay them well – they can earn €100+ for a full class. But even more important than that, they all feel involved in the business. They have a say in what we do and what the brand becomes."

And how is the brand evolving? "It's going really well for us right now, with our second studio opening this month in arguably an even better location than the first.

"Ideally, I'd like every new Saints & Stars to offer the same workouts, so we can create the same feeling and people know what to expect. However, it's so hard to find great locations, so you always have to be creative with them. For example, this second site is even bigger than the first, which means our Box and Shred studios can be bigger – a maximum of 50 people per class, rather than the 40 we can cater for in our first site, which isn't enough."

Interestingly, however, the lounge space in the new club will be smaller this time around. "People don't actually like space," explains Moos. "They want to be close to each other. They want to be in contact with each other.

Moos is opening a second site this month, also in Amsterdam, which is bigger than the first

WE HAVE 14 ROCKSTAR INSTRUCTORS, ALL FREELANCE BUT ALL WORKING FOR US ON AN EXCLUSIVE BASIS, AND HAVEN'T LOST A SINGLE ONE OF THEM SINCE WE OPENED. WE PAY THEM WELL – THEY CAN EARN €100+ FOR A FULL CLASS. BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANT THAN THAT, THEY ALL FEEL INVOLVED IN THE BUSINESS

A FAMILY AFFAIR

For any readers not aware, let's mention the elephant in the room: Tom is indeed the son of Rene Moos, founder and CEO of low-cost megabrand Basic-Fit. He laughs when I suggest he is, to all intents and purposes, fitness royalty, but acknowledges that his family background has significantly shaped him.

"Dad founded his first club, under the HealthCity brand, when I was about eight years old. It was located in the small town where we lived. In fact, we were actually living within the club! We didn't have any neighbours or many local friends, so as a young kid I spent lots of time in the gym and dance facility."

"I witnessed HealthCity grow from one to many clubs and got involved in the business from a relatively young age. We all did: my mum was in charge of childcare at the clubs, and was part of the group exercise team. And I developed a love for all things fitness."

He continues: "While studying international business administration – both in Amsterdam and San Diego, US – I spent time working for the likes of 24Hour Fitness and GoodLife Fitness. By the time I finished my Masters, I knew what I wanted to do. I wanted to come back to the Netherlands and take on the club manager role within HealthCity's largest and toughest club, located just outside of Amsterdam. But I wanted to do it in such a way that I was doing my own thing inside of the company."

"By this point, Basic-Fit had already been established and was my dad's primary focus, but we did still own a number of HealthCity clubs. And what we did was we split this club from the rest of the estate and treated it like a standalone club, so I could implement the business plan I'd developed for my own club."

"We transformed the PT model and the group exercise model, bringing across things I'd seen in the US. For personal training, that meant standardising things much more, so all of the PTs in the club had the same education, the same philosophy, the same sales approach. For group exercise, it meant introducing club-in-a-club, boutique-style concepts."

"And we took huge steps forward with the business. During the two years I was in that role, we grew EBITDA by a multiple of four



Tom's father, Rene Moos, is the founder of HealthCity and Basic-Fit

or five. We hit 60 per cent of all new members sitting down with a PT. At that point, I became regional head, implementing the model across the remainder of our Dutch HealthCity clubs, and I still hold that role today, alongside my work with Saints & Stars. We now have 10 HealthCity clubs in the Netherlands, which we will keep, plus six in Germany which we will be selling."

The one brand he has steered away from involvement in is Basic-Fit. "I mean, of course I hear a lot about it. Whenever I sit down with my dad and my younger brother – who is involved in Basic-Fit – we talk about it. That's probably every couple of weeks. But we all believe in keeping things separate. Other than accounting, HR and our service centre, all our brands operate totally independently, and while the overall group has invested in Saints & Stars, it has to deliver as a separate profit centre."

"That works for me, because I really like working in a high-end service industry, giving people that something extra. I'm very passionate about Saints & Stars and am in it for the long run."

■ SAINTS & STARS IN NUMBERS

Clubs: One (1,200sq m), with a second opening this month

Classes per week: 140 at site #1

Average class capacity: 82 per cent

Average member satisfaction score: 9.2/10

Target market: 25- to 40-year-olds

Percentage of users taking membership: 10–15 per cent

Membership prices: €129 for four weeks / €109 a month on an annual contract, otherwise €20 PAYG or a class pack

Secondary revenue streams: 12–15 per cent of overall revenues come from juices, waters, bars. "Apparel hasn't taken off yet though. We hoped it would be as big for us as it is for Barry's Bootcamp, but it seems – and not just for us, but across other brands too – the appetite just isn't there in Europe as it is in the US!"

The bigger the space, the smaller the sense of community," Moos observes.

He continues: "We'll also include a new concept – a strength-based workout, inspired by the likes of Tone House in the US, which we're calling Holy Build.

"Holy Build will be available only to our Gold members – those who have signed up for full membership, which is currently around 10–15 per cent of our user base – and those on bigger packages. It won't be a huge revenue generator, as the class will cater for a maximum of 16 people, but I do see it as a big retention driver and sales driver for our memberships. It will give people a reason to commit to us, giving them all they need in the one studio – Holy Build is the perfect complement to the HIIT of our other concepts – as well as offering them something they can only get as a member."

"We therefore plan to retrofit Holy Build into our first site too, in the PT studio space. There will still be personal training – we have an excellent philosophy based on personalisation and long-term results – but if