

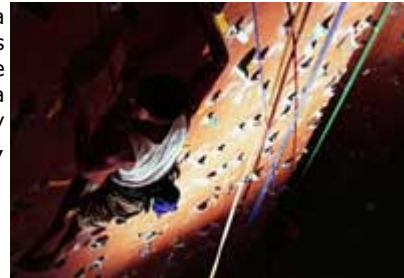
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Adventure

I wanna rock

The last hand-hold was nearly three stories up. At a stretch, the go for the grip would leave just two fingers and a big toe with the responsibility of keeping the climbing guy climbing. Fingers screamed for release, a glute spazzed a jiggle in his shorts and the flipping tiny climbing shoes were killing him. His body urged action, his mind wasn't convinced. "But how?" It pleaded.



It seemed impossible.

Spattered and quivering against the wall, I was fresh out of ideas.

"You are knotted and strapped into a climbing harness, and I have got you on belay at the bottom. Go for it, you can't fall," encouraged the instructor. His voice of reason had been playing a stuck record inside my head for an eternity. But it didn't help. When fatigue creeps over the body, the mind invests all logic in the bank of self preservation. Ironically the only return on investment from this point is failure. You have to go for it. Sweat pooled. I felt another drag of gravity. "Put your weight over your legs and push."

I vaulted. It was me against the mountain... and darn, bugger, blast it! I missed. Grade 17 (of 32) got the better of me. What? You can do better? Go and take it to the next level.

Climbing instruction is safety based and meticulous. Nobody is allowed to climb without being harnessed to a rope. It only takes a 90-degree squint at the top to realise why. After learning how to tie the perfect figure of eight (knot) and perform a credible recital of the laws of belay, the world of indoor climbing is laid at your feet. For your first stab at the sport, all the hand grips are in the game. Using every hold-option available (a myriad exist), climbing is a cinch for beginners. Just enough to stir the broth of challenge: "Please sir, may I have some more?"

There is more, but we suggest you follow the set routes. At the CityROCK indoor climbing facility there are 40 routes on top-rope and another 40 for lead climbers ranging in difficulty from grade 12 to 32. The wide route and grade range provide challenge from the first hand-hold for novice climbers right up to an overhanging roof for more batty folk.

Climbing is the thinking man's workout. "It's a game of physical chess," explains Leonhard Rust, climbing instructor. "You need a strategy to progress."

Every route at CityROCK is possible to accomplish - with equal measures of physical ability and mental strength. I'd started the day with teenage confidence - exuberant and bulletproof. But progression through the grades demands dedication and practise. Bullet-proof I was not.

Get a grip

In his instruction, Rust emphasises the importance of technique: "Top climbers may need to balance their entire weight on a foot-hold the width of a coin. If you do not have accurate footwork you will never climb to your full potential. When watching top climbers you will notice that they use their bodies economically and always try to get their weight onto their feet. Using your feet takes a lot of weight off your arms, which are not nearly as strong as your legs. Climb efficiently rather than just powering your way through moves."

The workout

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Form: Climb one-handed. This forces you to get your weight over your feet and is a form of technique training that also vastly improves your hand-eye co-ordination. By grabbing a hold accurately, you climb more efficiently. Mind muscle: Break a given route down into manageable parts by taking a rests before you exhaust yourself, allowing enough time to recover. The best rest points are at large holds or less than vertical sections which allow you to take the weight off your arms. This provides physical and mental recovery. In the end, climbing is a mental sport; you have to figure out the next sequence of moves while dealing with the stress of fatigue.

By Andy Ellis

Wail at a wall near you

Facilities offer climbing instruction from beginner to advanced levels.

Equipment is available to rent.

- **Cape Town**
CityROCK, Observatory
Tel: (021) 447 1326
E-mail: info@cityrock.co.za
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- **Johannesburg**
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