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The Rise *of* **PADEL**

**Just in time for your pickleball
fatigue, there's a new racket
sport to master.**

by Ramona Saviss

P

ickleball, move over. It's padel's time on center court.

A cross between tennis and squash is the best way to describe the latest racket sport to take the world by storm. During Acapulco's golden age, the Mexican businessman Enrique Corcuera created padel in the backyard of his Las Brisas beach house. Working with the space he had, Corcuera created in the 1960s a court that was smaller than a tennis court (approximately 65 feet by 98 feet) and placed walls around it to prevent balls from flying over. (Originally it was intended for fronton, another racket-based sport.) He used tennis rules to count score, but unlike in tennis, the walls were part of padel (which is typically played with four players, as doubles with teams of two) and wooden beach rackets replaced traditional tennis rackets. The modifications helped shape a game that was easier and more enjoyable for all ages.

Today, modern padel rackets look a bit different, but the essence of Corcuera's creation remains. "The sport has the advantage of tennis," says the founder's son, Enrique Corcuera Jr. "You're playing face-to-face with your opponent, and [the court] has walls like squash or fronton—it's the best of both worlds. It's easier to learn than tennis, and you can continue to advance."

That, Corcuera Jr. says, is the difference between padel and pickleball: "Pickle is easy to learn but you can't advance to a higher level—there's no room for improvement. With padel, you get better and there's a lot of community and friendship involved. It's about people watching and socializing, too. It's a family and social game, where you could have a grandfather playing with a nephew, which in tennis you can't really do because it's more difficult."

The popularity of padel spread from Mexico's elite crowd and eventually to Europe by way of Spanish royalty. Prince Alfonso de Hohenlohe-Langenburg was introduced to padel while vacationing in Acapulco, where he played in Corcuera's backyard. He took the sport home with him when he built the first padel courts outside of Mexico, in 1974, at his ritzy Marbella Club Hotel. The Spanish courts evolved the game with wire fencing instead of surrounding walls, and from there, the Spanish King Juan Carlos I and tennis star Manuel Santana, a Wimbledon champion, played the game and furthered its popularity. In 1985, Corcuera's wife, Viviana, created the official rules for padel, which was poised for more expansion.

Mexico made the sport official in 1993 with the creation of the International Padel Federation and the first Corcuera Cup took place at the Villa Vera Hotel in Acapulco. Two decades later, the World Padel Tour made its debut, and, most recently, Qatar Sports Investments acquired Premier Padel—the global professional padel tour—in time for the 2024 season.

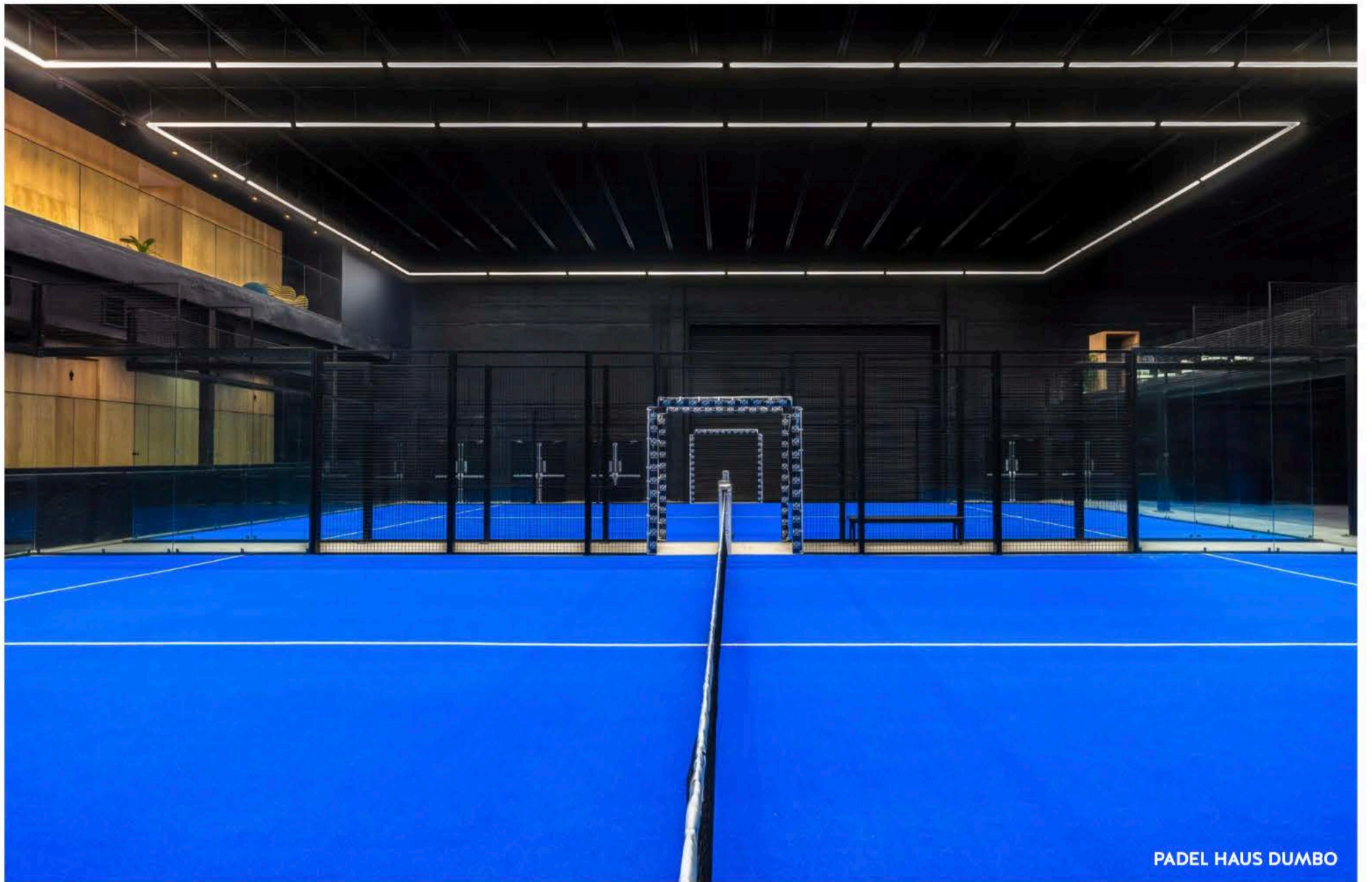


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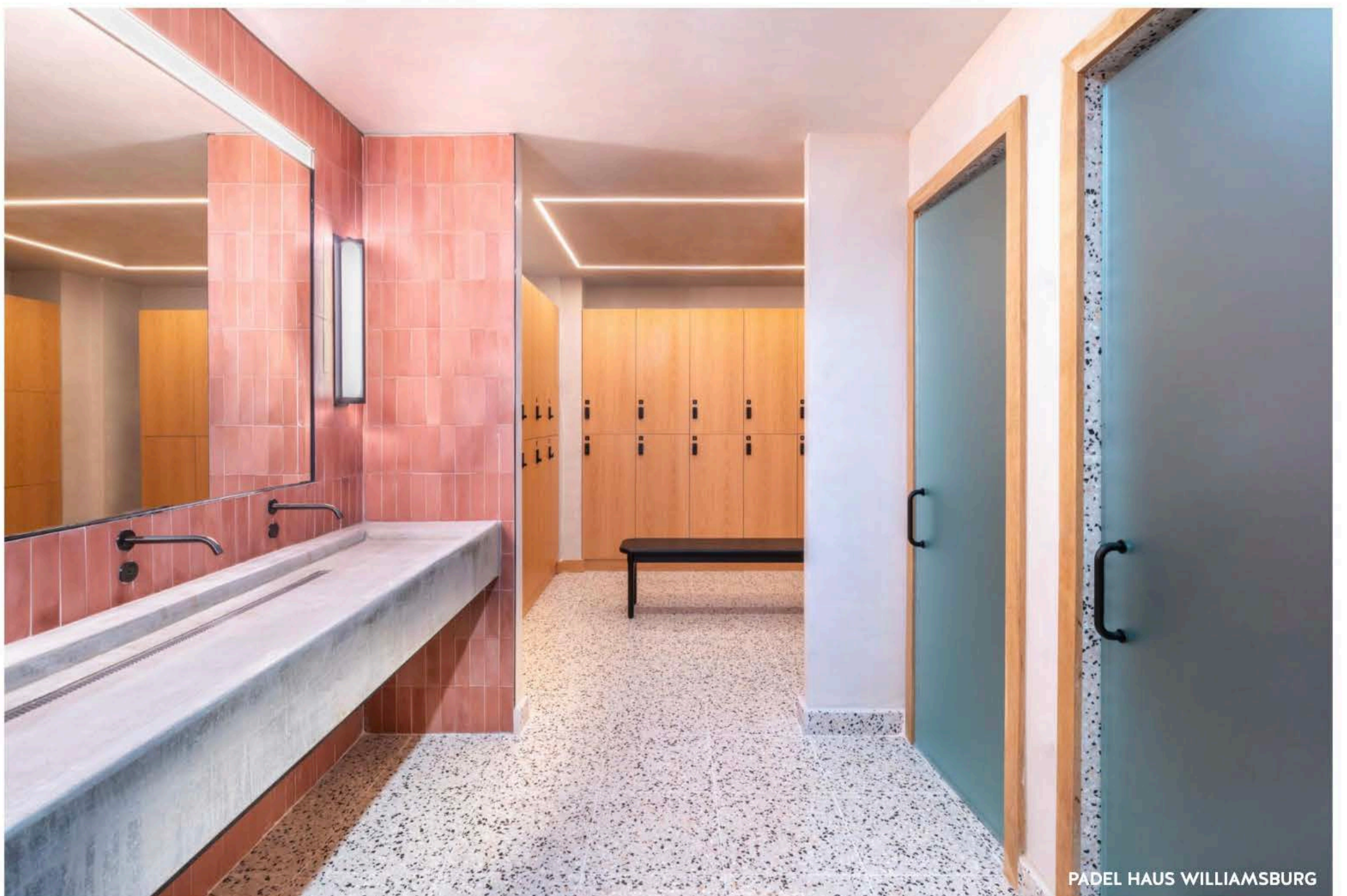
—Enrique Corcuera Jr.

These days, padel is played all over the world, particularly in the fancier destinations (think all the Saints: St. Barts, St. Moritz, St.-Tropez, you get the idea). In Switzerland, the Tennis School St. Moritz, near the Grand Hotel des Bains Kempinski, offers padel lessons with qualified trainers year-round, but come winter and summer, there's a big influx of international guests (mainly from Italy, Germany, and Arab countries) requesting padel courts and lessons, according to founder and owner Maria Laura Eldahuk. The courts have the Alps as a stunning backdrop. Eldahuk also notes that the Swiss Tennis Federation has





PADEL HAUS DUMBO



PADEL HAUS WILLIAMSBURG

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voted to establish a sports federation for padel, as it did with tennis, “under the same structure, to drive the growth of this new sport.” Over in Gstaad, Le Grand Bellevue hotel will organize its first padel tournament this summer. And at The Chedi Andermatt, guests enjoy two padel courts in front of the hotel.

Opened this spring in St.-Tropez, AREV—the latest hotel in the heart of the bustling French Riviera town—made its debut with a night-lit padel court. And, in case you missed it, the fashion house Maison Valentino took over Dubai’s chic padel spot Matcha Club for two weeks in late February.

In the most popular destinations for the sport—Mexico, Spain, and Argentina, the latter of which has more than 2 million players—there are countless places to play. In padel’s founding country, the five-star spa retreat Chablé Yucatán, set in the Maya Forest, offers padel courts for its guests, along with clinics and instructors to test their skills.

In Santa Monica, Calif., the ultra-exclusive private members club The Beach Club, or BC, has long offered its guests padel courts on the Pacific coast, and on the East Coast, July 2022 saw the debut of Padel Haus, the first members-only padel club in the States. The club opened its doors in Williamsburg, N.Y., and a second location followed in August 2023, in a 24,000-square-foot warehouse in Brooklyn’s Dumbo neighborhood. The company raised \$7.5 million in funding in 2023, and its founder and CEO, Santiago Gomez, said the company could open as many as 50 clubs throughout the country in the next five years.

Enthusiasm for the sport is clearly widespread. The Waldorf Astoria Maldives Ithaafushi offers padel courts with complimentary 30-minute sessions with a resident tennis pro who was ranked in the top 100 in the world. In November 2022, Joali Maldives unveiled its padel court to celebrate the property’s four-year anniversary. Sister property Joali Being, just 10 minutes away, debuted its padel courts last fall. In Greece, the family-owned Cali Mykonos hotel unveiled new padel courts, in place of a former parking lot, with ocean views as part of its latest wellness offerings. In Ireland, Adare Manor built the country’s first indoor padel courts, called The Padel Club. And in Gothenburg, Sweden, there’s a padel club aptly named Acapulco in homage to the sport’s birthplace.

“Right now, it’s the fastest-growing sport in the world,” says Corcuera Jr. (The global padel industry, according to Deloitte, is valued at \$2 billion and projected to surpass \$4 billion by 2026.) “We are very happy; we can’t believe it. In the upcoming Olympic Games, there is going to be padel played as an exhibition game, and in the next Olympics, people will play for medals.” ■



HIT & STUN

**Stylish wares
for on and off the
court.**

Clockwise from upper left:

TWOTWO This Sweden-based brand by Sofie Stenmark and Sofie Akerlund features modern, fun rackets and balls. twotwo-official.com

TORY BURCH SPORT Chic and sporty with nods to the '70s, the designer’s tennis collection makes a fashionable statement on any court. toryburch.com

COPA “I started Copa a year ago with some friends and family members,” says Enrique Corcuera Jr. (son of padel’s founder) of his padel-focused lifestyle brand. “The idea is to have a brand that commemorates my father’s legacy—and make people know that the sport was founded by the

Mexican Don Enrique Corcuera.” copapadel.com

MC2 SAINT BARTH The sport-inspired leisure brand launched a Padel Club collection featuring Snoopy in an array of padel prints across such pieces as sweaters, polos, and shorts, and the brand’s standard linen and terry polos and shorts are always a great option for play. mc2saintbarth.com

BOGNER One of winter’s most coveted brands is helping the activity-prone in the warmer months with its collection of country club-centric polos, slim-fitting shorts, and totes to carry anything from paddles to a postgame wardrobe change. bogner.com