

Welcome to the Hotel California

Black House is one of the most recognizable gyms in MMA, but a day spent at their L.A. location showed that the team's practice space is more than just offices and heavy bags. It's also a crash pad.

BY T.R. FOLEY // PHOTOS BY MIKE LEE

Guilherme Trindade emerges from a lofted room in the rear of the Black House Gym. He's a tall fighter, weighing about 180 pounds, and like many of the cardboard cutouts that line the hallways, he's Brazilian.

Black House is a unique place for fighters to visit. It's not a public gym—there are no membership cards or fancy T-shirts for sale, and your girlfriend can't take kickboxing classes from the resident Muay Thai master. The gym is a repository of equipment used by a rotating roster of MMA badasses. For Trindade, it's also become home.

"Ed, he tells me I fight in November. Now, me and my wife, we live in the gym," says Trindade. "I win, and then we'll see what happens. I might stay until December."

He takes me into the back room where his wife is cleaning the dishes after a meal of noodles and grilled chicken that she prepared on an electric skillet. The room, like all the walls of the gym, is painted flat black. There are no windows, but natural light pours in from exposed space between the top of the lofted wall and the 25-foot industrial-size roof. Trindade and his wife have made the space livable—there are knickknacks on the stove and a computer charging on their bed—but they're a young couple, and any marital-life privacy would require a clean sweep of the building.





Not the best accommodations, but it will do in a pinch.

Unfortunately for Trindade and his wife, they're usually never alone. On this warm morning, the world's newest most feared man—Glover Teixeira—woke up on the couch in the lobby. The 33-year-old Brazilian is visiting the gym for a few days to work on his striking and take in a wrestling practice with UFC Hall of Famer and closer friend Chuck Liddell. Teixeira is loyal to John Hackleman and The Pit in San Luis Obispo, Calif., but here in Compton, four hours south of the beaches of SLO, are fresh bodies. Teixeira will travel for new toys.

Former Iowa University wrestler and longtime MMA coach Kenny Johnson starts the day's workout with a series on "how to clear out of underhooks." It's a room of impressive physiques learning remedial wrestling, but they pay attention and absorb the lessons quickly. Glover, who actually wrestled for a brief time before immigrating to the States in 2001, finds no issue in reviewing the technique. I peek out the door, as I wait for the 30 students to pair off for sparring.

Black House is located in an industrial area south of downtown Los Angeles, sandwiched between the nefarious alleyways of Compton and the \$1200-per-square foot homes of Manhattan

Beach. The street in front of the gym isn't too busy, mostly absorbing a battering of lumber trucks and tractor trailers carrying large cement cylinders. I watch as one backs into a nearby loading dock, only to have my attention stolen by a black Cadillac Escalade zigzagging through traffic and into the parking lot in front of me. The SUV ends up blocking a portion of the gym's driveway, while its front end double-parks Teixeira's full-size pickup.

Out hops Ed Soares. He's the mastermind behind Black House, and he looks in real life exactly like he does on television. Short, slightly frumpy, with cropped facial hair and a warm aura. In between a text message and phone call, he walks past and offers his hand in an un-introduced handshake. It's the gesture of a likable person, or the opening ploy of a salesman.

Back at practice, I pull Johnson aside to ask him what the plan is today. "Dude, don't worry, you're not gonna be throwing hard punches. Guys are just working on their hand speed and combos." There was judgment in his eyes.

Nathan Gable, the Black House lawyer, walks over and hands me a clipboard with a form to sign, freeing the gym of any liabilities. Like Soares, he's both bald and immensely likable, though, at six-foot-two he's tall enough to reach the top shelf. I sit on the stairs in front of the somewhat famous graffiti image of a black-eyed Barack Obama and sign away any chance of becoming a millionaire via broken back.

Johnson assigns me to a smaller fighter, who he says has won several Brazilian wrestling titles. It's an attempt to either offset our talents—allowing me to get punched—or an invitation to have a wrestling-centric spar. My opponent, no taller than my chin and weighing 30 pounds less than me, felt prompted to throw on a headgear before our bout. I cinch XXL gloves across my undersized knuckles and wait for the buzzer. When the round starts, I do my best Chris Weidman impression and dive for a high-crotch. That action propels us into a five-minute grappling match, with fun submission attempts and a pattering of fists to each other's head and body.

The Black House sparring session is a carefully groomed process meant to draw the most out of each guy training in the room.



Glover Teixeira wings a right hand during sparring.

As Teixeira would later tell me, "I like this gym because these guys know what they are doing. Any guy here, when I'm tired, he knows to push me but not hurt me."

My sparring session continues with Strikeforce fighter Kevin Casey, a 195-pound Rickson Gracie black belt with serious man-strength. I'd hoped that the cameras following him around that day (in promotion of his October 15 BJJ super-fight against Dean Lister) would distract him, but like a new girlfriend keeping tabs, the cameras only increased Casey's pace. By the end of our sparring session, I had a few small cuts on my face and lungs eager for even a brief respite. This shit is tiring.

My goal had been to get punched by Teixeira, but Johnson hadn't paired us off. And who was I kidding? After 10 minutes of sparring, I wasn't interested in any matchup, much less Teixeira and his lunchbox-sized fists. Ducking the former farmer is nothing to be ashamed of—plenty of former UFC champions, all with well-fitting gloves and personalized fight camps, have done worse.

Shogun Rua, the former UFC Light Heavyweight Champion, flat refused to fight Teixeira when offered the chance at UFC on FOX 4, telling Dana White he'd rather be cut. In late September, former UFC Light Heavyweight Champion Rashad Evans turned down a fight with Teixeira for UFC 153 in Brazil, claiming short notice. Teixeira's originally scheduled opponent for that card, former Light Heavyweight Champion Rampage Jackson, suffered an injury weeks away from their fight. After plenty of name-dropping, the UFC and Teixeira finally settled on fellow Brazilian Fabio Maldonado.

The sparring session ends and the fighters gather for a "team" photo. Mike Lee, the social media coordinator and Black House photog and videographer, documents everything, and a session-ending team photo seems fairly common. It's a warm gesture that is either expertly crafted for this one day, a wild circumstance, or indicative of the gym's emotional aesthetic.

Teixeira is leaning against the black wall padding, enjoying his post-workout protein shake and bullshitting with a few fighters. Teixeira is settling into a high-paced banter with Lew Polley, the wrestling coach to Junior dos Santos on *The Ultimate Fighter* 13. You might remember him as the loud mouth that managed to rile up the consis-

House of Champions

Ed Soares has groomed this trio of Black House fighters from talent-rich scrappers into UFC champions and some of the most marketable and profitable fighters in MMA.

• Anderson Silva

Dana White's choice for "Greatest Fighter of All Time," the Brazilian UFC Middleweight Champion is the most famed fighter to have been associated with Black House. Soares' relationship has proven key in protecting Silva from his own demons and promoting him to the highest rungs of the sport.

• Lyoto Machida

The former UFC Light Heavyweight Champion has used the Black House facility for some of his U.S.-based training camps.

• Antonio Rodrigo Nogueira

The former UFC Heavyweight Champion and his brother opened up an extension of the Black House brand in San Diego, but they still make it up to the L.A. location to train on occasion.



Lyoto Machida trains with middleweight Kevin Casey.

tently cheerful dos Santos enough to be booted off the show. He's engaging, but it's apparent why even the lighthearted Cigano wanted to disembowel Polley after only a few weeks on set. What's unclear is where Teixeira will draw the line, but it's an exciting tightrope to watch.

Polley continues peppering Teixeira with questions about Rampage and joking that he looks like dos Santos (he doesn't). The topics vary, but after several pivots, Polley and Teixeira land comfortably on a shared annoyance—the culture of inter-gym, multi-trainer jealousy.

"It's simple. I stay with Hackleman, but I come here to train with Machida," says Teixeira, who is managed by Black House but splits his training time between gyms. "I like it, because it's good guys to train with. Different bodies."

The gym's exclusivity guarantees that the stars have the anonymity they want and that a close eye is being kept on any new fighters cycling through. "You have to know sum-bahdee to train here," says Teixeira. "Makes it better for me."

After Teixeira heads to the showers, Soares take his own shot at explaining why Black House has an open-door policy toward elite fighters. He's bouncing on a Bosu Ball, and his charm and storytelling ability quickly attracts a following. Casey, Gable, Polley, and Trindade all listen to his sermon.

"It's crazy how some gyms and trainers react to fighters coming through different gyms. I love to have guys like Kevin in the gym. Glover, too." Soares asks Casey when he fights next, and the fighter explains he's

being put on ice. Soares offers that, legally speaking, that ain't legal—Casey has to at least be offered fights. Casey isn't clear on if that's been happening, but with Soares as his recently hired manager, there is a confidence in their banter. Sweet, Ed'll figure it out.

Moments later, Soares regales the scrum of fighters with talk of his newest venture, the Resurrection Fighting Alliance—television deals, big purses, and total mobility. Soares talks about "guys like Trindade," who can fight under the banner and make the jump to the next level with no restrictions. "I tell the guys at RFA, I tell them that they can go at anytime, bro. Anytime. You get called up to the UFC, that's awesome, bro. Go."

Trindade is 8-0, with six of his fights ending by knockout and the other two by submission. Only one fight has gone to the second round. If he keeps that up, he will get a call up. He looks to Soares as the man to give him everything, the guy saving him from the ho-hum life of a Brazilian farmer. But it won't be free, and like saloon doors, the money within the partnership will eventually swing both directions.

There is no altruism in the fight business, every manager and fighter and journalist is out to get something—a bigger purse, more clients, a solid lead—but there are gradients and there are nice guys. If you are interested in witnessing both, and happen to know a professional fighter making the rounds through SoCal, Black House is the place where you can check out any time you'd like, but you may never leave. 🍷

