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A Hideout of His Own

By FINN-OLAF JONES

ALL those flowers and designs," said Christina Hoff Sommers, a resident scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington. It's no wonder men aren't comfortable at home, with the overdesigned, "feminized spaces that are being imposed on them" by the women in their lives, she said. "They're going to want to push back."

It may be an unpopular opinion, but Ms. Sommers, who is well known for her critiques of feminism, may have a point.

According to James B. Twitchell, professor of English and advertising at the University of Florida in Gainesville, men are increasingly creating small private domains in and around their houses — in sheds, basements, attics and closets — as a way of retreating from everyday life. Professor Twitchell, author of "Where Men Hide," published this month by Columbia University Press, does not agree that women are to blame for this phenomenon, or that it's a matter of blame at all. He sees it as a positive development, and has built a shed of his own. He uses it as an office and calls it his hidey-hole. It sits on a site near his summer house in Vermont once dedicated to an above-ground septic tank.

He has plenty of company. Although the Home Depot would not release sales figures, Kathryn Gallagher, a company spokeswoman, said there was a growing trend of men putting prefab sheds to various recreational uses in a quest for "a little place to get away." Haroula Battista, marketing manager for Summerwood Products, a shed manufacturer in Toronto that mainly sells to American customers, described "a tremendous upsurge in demand," in particular for the company's larger sheds. "They're turning them into everything from workout rooms to their personal bars," she said.

Vince Jones, a 33-year-old real estate salesman in Rocklin, Calif., took on the challenge with gusto, turning a \$10,000 prefab shed into his personal fight studio. "I practice Shoshu kung fu and Brazilian jujitsu," said Mr. Jones, who stages regular bouts in his backyard retreat with other men. "I originally wanted a Shaolin Temple with a curved roof, but that proved to be too difficult." Once the drywall goes up, he plans to decorate with martial arts swords.

"It's definitely a masculine space I've made," he said, acknowledging that there was no way his wife would let the main house be used for a restaging of "Fight Club."

"This has worked out well for both of us," Teri Jones said of her husband's backyard project. "I was not at all weirded out by it."