

Guys reclaim space at home

Call it the new men's room. Men are staking claim to space at home for tricked-out hobby rooms, ultimate party pads and workspace. Here's how several men created these 'manspaces' -- and tips for creating your own.

By Christopher Solomon



A century ago, male-centered rooms were common household features among the well-to-do. Billiards rooms and so-called "snuggeries," or cozy places, were a man's respite from an otherwise domestic(ated) life.

Since then, the male space has been absorbed into the rest of the home, filled as it often is with chintz curtains, kids and, well, lots of stuff that has nothing to do with creating a Fortress of Solitude, let alone a place to hang out with the boys.

What's a guy to do?

More American males seem to be responding by making a concerted effort to reclaim their space. "Ninety-eight percent of men want a space of their own -- and the other 2% lie about it," says Sam Martin, author of the forthcoming book, "[Manspace: A Primal Guide to](#)

- [Sidebar: 6 tips for creating a 'manspace'](#)
- [Slideshow: An inside peek at 3 manspaces](#)
- [The lowly shed goes upscale](#)

Marking Your Territory."

Statistics seem to support Martin's hunch. [Tuff Shed](#), the Denver manufacturer of storage sheds and garages, has seen its sales shoot from 20,000 in 2003 to 50,000 in 2005. Somewhere between 12% and 15% of those are being used for more-male-oriented activities, according to company surveys, says spokesman Phil Worth. While it doesn't break out data by gender, the American Institute of Architects found that 30% of surveyed residential architecture firms reported an increase in popularity of hobby and game rooms last year.

These "manspaces" aren't Dad's corner of the garage of yesteryear, says author Martin. "Dad's hobby shops were wherever Dad could find a space," he says. "These days, men seem to be reveling in their space; it's not part of the garage, it's the whole garage." In his book, Martin features 53 different manspaces, from a full-on, English-style pub in a basement to a thoroughly Zen-infused Japanese tea room over a garage and a bowling alley (complete with scoring console) in a Texas backyard.

Want a room of your own? Here are some great guy spaces and what they cost -- and some tips about how to start your own:

The TV room's final frontier

Don't get Gary Reignn wrong; he's no Star Trek geek. The 49-year-old from suburban Philadelphia is a "sci-fi nut," though, "and I wanted to build a room in the house that was really dedicated to enjoying movies." And when he noticed the similarities between a movie theater and Star Trek's ship, the U.S.S. Enterprise -- the stair-stepped seating, the big screen -- he used that as his model.

The resulting male fantasy is what Reignn calls "The Bridge," which has a 102-inch screen for his Sony LCD projector; surround sound; five plush chairs; and faux computer screens on the walls that resemble the Enterprise's consoles -- all of it installed by Reignn on weekends in the family's unfinished basement. (The rest of the house is country Colonial.)

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"My son (16) and I are down there almost every night," Reign, 49, says. "It's time together and we talk about the films." His wife drops down for a movie about once a week. "My wife was supportive about the room, but she knew it would be mine," Reign says.

Cost: "Everything, including the construction materials and seating and carpeting, probably cost about \$16,000, which I consider pretty good," Reign says.

A cabana that rocks

When he bought it several years ago, Scott Frost's Falls Church, Va., home had a pool but lacked one thing in his estimation: a tricked-out poolside cabana. While still a bachelor, he bought a five-sided "Catalina" cabana from [Summerwood Products](#). But Frost didn't stop there. He raised it himself, ran electricity to it, installed a refrigerator, then fully stocked it with beer and liquor -- "pretty much everything you need in there for a cool summer pool party," says Frost. He hung racks for wine and margarita glasses, and put bar stools out front so friends can sit in the shade while another friend pours drinks. He also wired the cabana for his beloved Sirius satellite radio, which is often tuned to reggae.

Frost adores his creation. "It's kind of cool to say, 'It's my cabana,'" says Frost, who's now 32 and works for the Discovery Channel.

He admits that the cabana has "morphed" somewhat: He's since married, and his wife brought a child to the marriage, so the cabana is now about half-filled with toys. Yet Frost is comfortable with the shift, and says the cabana still emanates a great guy vibe when called upon. "Usually, the guys will change out there, not the women, because it's got glass windows." And does he still have pool parties? "Absolutely," he says. "A friend's coming in from Atlantic City this weekend and we're gonna be out there by the pool; we're gonna move the poker table out there, smoking cigars."

Cost: Frost estimates that the whole setup cost him between \$5,000 and \$6,000 -- nearly \$3,500 for the cabana about six years ago, plus all the extras he added. Summerwood's sheds, cabanas and cabins range from \$3,100 to \$11,000. (Some other popular makers of small sheds/cabins are [MetroShed](#) and [Cedarshed](#). You can read more about how sheds have gone upscale, [here](#).)

The ManHouse

"It is my pride and joy," gushes John Morgan about his hangout. When he and his wife, Natasha, moved into their Austin, Texas, home six years ago, Morgan was curious about the junk-stuffed carriage house out back. The more junk Morgan, now 40, removed, the more he could tell how cool the 200-square-foot space was, with its pushed-out dormers and casement windows.

So he acted fast, moving in an old bar that he and his wife had been given as a wedding gift. "Once that bar slipped into that space, it was like a hand in a glove; it just took," he recalls. "My wife was like, 'We're sharing this space, right? You came in here and lifted your leg and peed on it like you own it.' "

But soon the place his wife dubbed "The ManHouse" had taken on a testosterone-soaked life of its own. Friends brought over the guy flotsam banished from their own houses. Today the space is festooned with surplus University of Texas furniture, a dartboard, Christmas lights -- and a shapely leg lamp like the one in the movie, "A Christmas Story." The décor is more roadhouse shack than roadhouse chic: "It's centered around two things: music and beer," Morgan says.

One thing the ManHouse doesn't have, however, is air conditioning, despite Austin's withering summers. Curiously, men don't seem to mind the heat, Morgan says, though women do. "My 2-year-old, when he gets home from daycare, that's where he wants to go. And it's hot out there -- it's 90 degrees," he says. "(My wife's) dad and brothers would come in from San Diego and the minute they came in they'd head out there and smoke cigarettes and cigars."

Would he ever add A/C? "I don't want to make it so friendly" that women will want to hang out there, Morgan says.

Cost: Morgan estimates that he spent less than \$2,000. The only big-ticket items were the pinball machine, stereo, refrigerator and "a couple of neon signs that I did pay a few bucks for."

The lure of a hobby room

You don't have to leave the house to carve out a cool space. Take collector Larry Moellman, 60. After his father -- the father he'd fished with much of his life -- died in 1985, Moellman inherited his tackle box. Collecting old fishing gear and lures became his new passion.

When Moellman and his wife moved into an 1880s farmhouse in Camp Cole, Mo., his burgeoning fishing-gear collection began to squeeze out even his hunting gear. So he moved the stuff into a ground-floor room that formerly had been a parlor. "I can't say she was happy, but she didn't have any other plans for the room," Moellman says of his wife.

To decorate it, Moellman trimmed the doors and windows with timbers from an old barn he'd disassembled and he covered the lower walls with real-looking brick vinyl wainscoting. On the ceiling he nailed up thin boards to look like beams, painted them barn red and hung fishing rods from them. Today, big displays of Wizard Wigglers, Detroit Glass Minnows, yellow birds, aluminum phantoms and other lures -- some of which go back to the 19th century -- share wall space with trophies like an 11-point buck, a 12-pound walleye and a 17-pound lake trout. The place feels, says author Sam Martin, like an old country bait shop, albeit one with a computer and a few electric guitars.

And what does Moellman's spouse think? "As my wife said, you could be doing a lot worse things."

Cost: "It really didn't cost me a lot. I tore down the barn, that was free," Moellman says of the wood he used to build much of the interior. The ceiling wood cost "maybe a couple hundred," and a big rug for the floor cost perhaps another \$100. And his collection? That's another matter, he chuckles. But he did decide to put a security system on the house.

The workspace as escape

The home office certainly isn't a new feature, but it is an increasingly popular one. According to the 2005 American Institute of Architects survey, the demand for home offices was up 47%.

Among the men setting up shop at home is James Twitchell, a professor of literature and advertising at the University of Florida, and author of the new book, "[Where Men Hide](#)." About five years ago at his summer home in Vermont, Twitchell built his workspace, a hermit's one-room shack, atop a cement pad that once held a 2,000-gallon septic tank. "What more do I need?" he asks. "I go there about an hour a day. What I like about it is that it has a door. It's not connected to the rest of the house. If someone comes out there they have to walk out there, and pound on the door.

"My wife and my daughters call it 'the hidey-hole,'" he says. "It's sort of a rat's nest," he adds, "but I'm the rat."

"Manspace" author Sam Martin has done the same -- a place apart, but not too far away -- to get work done. He, too, created a little work shed behind his home. He did all of the work, from framing to bringing electricity to it. It has bat insulation and a plug-in heater and air conditioner and ceiling fan.

Cost: Martin's shed, which he didn't build from a kit, cost about \$3,000 to construct and outfit.