

# Man Caves That Aren't for Cave Men

The humble sanctuary of the man of the house gets a luxury makeover



The man cave has come to represent the quintessential guy sanctuary. But a growing number of men are opting for anti-caves of a sort — male retreats with a sophisticated twist. Photo: Claudio Papapietro for The Wall Street Journal

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**If men**, as comedian Rita Rudner once quipped, are just “bears with furniture,” then it’s only fitting that the man cave came to represent the quintessential guy sanctuary.

The formula traditionally has been a simple one: take an empty garage or basement, add a leather sofa, a big-screen TV, perhaps a humidifier, maybe a vintage beer sign or two, and—voilà!

But that image of the hangout for the man of the house is changing, particularly in the luxury housing market, where once-humble spaces like the closet, the pantry and the bathroom have already gotten a high-end upgrade.

Now, more men are investing in the spaces that used to be rarely seen by guests: the hobby room, the potting shed, the reading nook, the TV room.

Erinn Valencich, a Beverly Hills-based interior designer, says she has worked on many ultraluxury manly spaces, one of the most memorable being a recent tasting-room project that featured a glass wall looking onto the client’s wine cellar. “You could push a button and the glass went opaque and became a screen where you could watch a movie,” she says, adding that high-tech elements are popular.

Here is a look at some of the man cave’s latest forms:

## The Bookish Hideout

Designer Gideon Mendelson’s man haven is an octagonal library in the five-bedroom Sagaponack, N.Y., beach house he shares as a second home with his husband, Tom, and their three children. It allows him to steal away for some free time, but not miss out on the family’s activities.

Mr. Mendelson, 40, says he often ducks into the library for some privacy when planning the day’s dinner menu. “I love to cook, and we entertain quite a bit out there,” he adds.

Roughly 10 feet in diameter, the room came with a pair of built-in bookcases, “but that was it,” he says. He has since added a traditional library table and a shell-lined overhead light that he characterizes as a “very serious English lantern” with a whimsical element.

Mr. Mendelson personalized the room with touches such as a snakeskin ceiling cover, and ash and linen-blend-covered benches that he designed. With a color palette of orange, white and warm olive-brown, the space has a “modern country” feel, he says. He estimates he spent about \$35,000 decorating the room.

“If you’re sitting on the far side of the room near the bookcases, you can’t [be seen] from any other room in the house,” he says. “So it’s my little hiding place if I need to do a little bit of work, but I want to be involved with the family and not go to my office upstairs.”