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MALE ROOMS

After a long period of **playing second fiddle** in matters of home aesthetics and use, men are **beginning to assert themselves** in domestic design and décor. From special “man caves” to the kitchen and beyond, discover how homes near and far have started **manning up**.

By Jeff Cockrell

YOU HAVE TO WONDER how we let it get this way. Men, I mean. How we allowed ourselves to be put in this position. Because you can bet Washington would never have stood for this. Or Peter the Great. Or Napoleon. I'll guarantee you *le petit caporal* didn't spend all that time toddling around Europe, adding palace after palace to his letterhead, only to watch Josephine fill them all with scented candles and decorative towels. Or submit to regular scoldings about his saber being left on the floor. Or have to worry about leaving plans for the invasion of Russia scattered across the dining room table for fear of returning to find them “straightened up.” (Fat lot of good it did him.)

Nor did the empress, I assure you, subject her husband to tiny dioramas of collectible porcelain statuettes depicting utopian village scenes. Or walk about tacking up kitschy bric-a-brac, here and there a wooden placard with some winking aphorism engraved beneath a fleur-de-lis. One can only imagine what would have become, in the Bonaparte household, of a bowl of plastic fruit.

And yet, men, here we are. Incidental to our surroundings. Disenfranchised in our own homes. Having at some point ceded almost all control to our living environments, we are left to hope the master plans concocted by our significant others include some sliver of room for our own wants and needs.

No, you can't set your model train up in the family room.

No, you can't line the walls with your vintage movie posters.

Yes, you can watch the game — but keep it on mute. I'm reading in the next room.

We have, in other words, become second-class citizens in our own homes, and so we are forced to do what all oppressed and aggrieved groups have had to do throughout history, the only solution an abused people can turn to for satisfaction, which is to demand it. To wrap our arms around some portion of our living space and declare, to wife and kids and dog and anyone else who might encroach upon it, that **THIS**

IS MINE. MY SPACE. AESTHETICALLY AND FUNCTIONALLY, ITS FUTURE AND FATE ARE IN MY HANDS. And then we have to hope the wife and kids and dog don't double over with laughter, because let's face it, we don't have a ton of leverage here.

Of course, you may remember your dad making a similar declaration. About the, um, garage. “Garages have always been the places guys have hung out, so have basements and attics, and they've really been any place that's been unused, or really uninhabitable,” says Sam Martin, author of *Manspace: A Primal Guide to Marking Your Territory*. “Places that you've got to share with the car, they're un-insulated, they're kind of outdoor/indoor places.” But our long banishment to the less-civilized corners of the home, Martin says, may be coming to an end.

“What's changed I think is that guys ... (are) really starting to make some pretty unique spaces that anybody would want to hang out in, men (and) women alike, and they're spending some money on this. So it doesn't have to be unused spaces anymore.”

In fact, Martin's book is in some sense based on that very premise, the notion that we as men are putting more thought, energy and resources into our personal spaces — even showing them off. It's an idea given credence by media attention, and by programming like the DIY Network's *Man Caves* show, and by the marketing and decision making of developers and builders themselves. And, local experts say, even when we're not fashioning special rooms to which we can lay sovereign claim, men are at least becoming equal partners in the vision of the home at large rather than sitting passively by as our better halves tell us how it's going to be.

Which is good, because nobody gets to tell us how it's going to be. We're men. And we're, you know, sensitive about that kind of thing.

A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN

You can call it a “man cave” or a “man space” or whatever you

want, the fact is that some men simply have to have a little area that's all theirs. Maybe it's for displaying a collection of antique jukeboxes, or for setting up a six-figure home theater, or for building a shrine to the '85 Bears' backfield. It could be literally anything, designed in any style for any purpose, because your space is a reflection of you.

"I think it partly has to do with identity," Martin says. "I think that guys create their own spaces to sort of express themselves. To have a space of your own is sort of a way to say this is who I am, and when you invite somebody in your space, you're sort of inviting them to get to know you a little bit better. You know, because there's a story behind the stuff you put in there. Like, 'Here's this old concert poster.' You know, and for guys, sometimes that's easier than having a heart-to-heart conversation, especially when you're hanging out with other guys."

Hanging out with other guys, according to Martin, tends to be the single most common application for man spaces. And really, if you have any interest in doing that at all, you have got to get yourself a club room.

To see why, just check out the version the folks at Orren Pickell have installed at their IMAGINE Your Home showroom on Willow

Road in Northfield. Stained concrete floor. Cherry paneling. Plus an attached wine room, and a humidor, and a bar whose surface is made from the slats of reclaimed wine casks.

Or take a gander at the club room pictured on page 66, a masculine mélange of animal horns and intricate pecan woodworking and embossed alligator wallpaper nestled into a home in Highland Park. In that case, the man of the house "wanted a space for himself, but he didn't want the traditional, typical office or ... a library, you know, the typical room that you see in most homes," says Juli Jacobs, director of marketing for Jacobs Homes, which built the house. So he fashioned himself a multipurpose room that positively smacks of manhood, complete with what Jacobs calls "big, hunky furniture," a private porch on which to take the air and smoke cigars, and a "big, huge, grand, way-oversized fireplace."

Of course, even if your club room is overwhelmingly male in look and feel, that doesn't necessarily mean it will be exclusively so in use. Jacobs says that even the Highland Park fortress of machismo described above is used frequently by both husband and wife for entertaining or just as a place to escape for some quiet conversation. (The room is superinsulated and has been kept free of televi-

sions, making it a good place to escape from noise, distraction and children.) And IMAGINE Your Home manager Tom Hackett says women are usually at least a little bit involved with the club rooms that Orren Pickell builds.

"It's basically a place where everyone can come in and do something," Hackett says. "But it's definitely a space where I would think the majority of our clients, you know, the husband is using them if they're going to play cards, if they're going to have friends over, watch the game. The whole club room is basically created around that concept where you can sit down, have a cigar, play poker, and right behind you is the big-screen TV where the game is on."

Club rooms, Hackett says, have become an increasingly popular option among Orren Pickell clients, and features like wine rooms (a typically male indulgence) are getting to be almost ubiquitous. One can only hope that means a corresponding increase in straight flushes and indecent conversation and empty bottles of Scotch filling North Shore recycling bins.

But man spaces don't have to be wood-and-leather-coated retreats for puffing Cohibas and sipping Talisker — not that there's anything, let's be clear about this,



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wrong with Cohibas and Talisker. It's just that we don't need all that polish and shine. There is ample evidence that we men can take otherwise pedestrian spaces and turn them into something worth cherishing. Even — sigh — the garage, which seems to have some sort of magnetic effect on the Y chromosome.

"There is kind of a trend to do really fabulous things with the garages," says Susanne Tauke, Barrington resident and president of New American Homes. She says things like special flooring (such as interlocking tiles), workbenches and special tools and facilities for auto repair are becoming more and more common. And it ain't just work we're doing in there; Hackett says that along with a work area, one Orren Pickell client outfitted his garage with creature comforts like a kegerator, TV and seating. "It's not a huge home," he says, "but that garage

With its man-friendly features and masculine styling, the club room at IMAGINE Your Home by Orren Pickell is the kind of space a guy could get used to.



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space is all decked out for him.”

And lest men be accused of being a bunch of whiskey-swilling, crescent-wrench-toting Neanderthals, let it also be known that our varied and divergent interests are separated by more than the individual preference for Pabst over Old Style or vice-versa. Tauke says one client of hers in the Newport Cove development in Antioch Township decided to “completely redo the second story of his home to accommodate his extensive train collection.” The folks at Poggenpohl, meanwhile, have teamed up with the design luminaries at Porsche to suggest that a man’s place in the home might actually be squarely in front of a hot oven, unveiling a new-look kitchen with an aesthetic as masculine as Gary Cooper.

Of course, it’d be impossible to make any room as central as the kitchen a “man-only” man space. Eric Small, national product and design trainer for Poggenpohl, says the intent of the Porsche Design Kitchen wasn’t to make a space just for men — only to use men as the “target audience.” Hence the boxy aluminum frame, heavy on right angles; the integrated LCD display and speaker; the handle-less doors and drawers that open at the touch of a finger; and the high-performance appliances, the speed ovens and steam ovens

and induction cooktops, from Miele. Playing to the male preference for a strictly organized and uniform look, the kitchen is a unified whole comprised of similar elements, with every detail — down to the placement of electrical outlets, which are built into the frame — accounted for. “The best way I can explain it is it’s almost like a suit,” Small says. “Everything is all thought out; the pants and the jacket, everything goes together.”

Naturally, in the battle for domestic space it’d be easy to think of men taking control of

“They don’t understand why it costs so much money. Women tend to understand a little bit more considering what it costs to buy a handbag and a dress.”

—DOUGLAS LEVINE

the kitchen to be roughly the tactical equivalent of Sherman marching into Atlanta. But let’s not forget where we started here. We don’t all need our own testosterone-soaked kitchen or fantasy garage or cherry-paneled poker room. Most of us would settle for just a little more influence when it comes to design and decoration in the house at large, particularly in those rooms and spaces that matter to us most. And for one reason or another, that seems to be exactly what we’re getting.

AROUND THE HOUSE

The women, I think we can all agree, can keep the drapes. Give us remote controls and blinking LED lights and polished stainless steel; we can live without the window treatments, without all that pricey fabric that just kind of, well, hangs there.

“That’s always the hardest sell for a man is to get them to buy drapery,” says Douglas Levine, founder of L Corp. and the designer behind the home office featured in the Mer-

chandise Mart’s 2007 DreamHome. “They don’t understand why it costs so much money. Women tend to understand a little bit more considering what it costs to buy a handbag and a dress.”

But if men have been slow to pick up on the value of drapery, it’s part of a shrinking list of household design concerns with which we’re not taking an active interest.

“I’ve been in this business 20-some years, and I would have to say that today men are

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much more interested than they were when I first started in the business," Tauke says. "And they're much more particular than they used to be. It used to be that women were the detail-oriented ones; now it's the men as well."

So when we're not carving out our own spaces, we're putting our stamp on the rooms we share with the rest of the household. In particular we seem to be interested in home offices. And dressing rooms. And what Hackett calls "English-looking libraries." Porsche and Poggenpohl have made an obvious statement about men's growing culinary interests, but even when the whole kitchen isn't tuned specifically to our tastes, Tauke says we are helping to push a "commercial look" that includes a lot of stainless steel and bulky, heavy-duty appliances.

We also tend to be in the driver's seat when it comes to outdoor kitchens, where we can satisfy our desire for specialized equipment thanks to an array of wine coolers and brick pizza ovens and fire pits, among many other possibilities. The same goes for sports facilities, which can range from lap pools to weight rooms to indoor basketball courts. Not that you have to choose just one: Hackett recalls one client who had squash and basketball and outdoor tennis courts installed at his home. Tauke, on the other hand, says in one neighborhood she's worked in, the owners of indoor basketball courts have even formed a league in which they travel from house to house for games.

But if it's possible to identify the spaces in the home where men tend to have the most interest and influence, it's a little tougher to nail down our aesthetic style — mostly because we don't have just one. That is, just about everyone seems to agree that we're technophiles, suckers for anything that plugs in or lights up, for mirrors that turn into TVs and for built-in coffeemakers and for programmable smart-home systems. In addition, we may be more likely to dig dark colors, to appreciate clean and well-organized design, and to show an interest in wood and wood-working. But as Levine points out, style is subject to all sorts of demographic influences and personal preferences. The way we design and decorate our homes is as individual as the way we dress.

We're a complex bunch, after all. Just as complex as the fairer sex, even if we don't like to admit it. But what we want is very simple — a little place that feels like ours. And brother, believe this: We're getting there. ■

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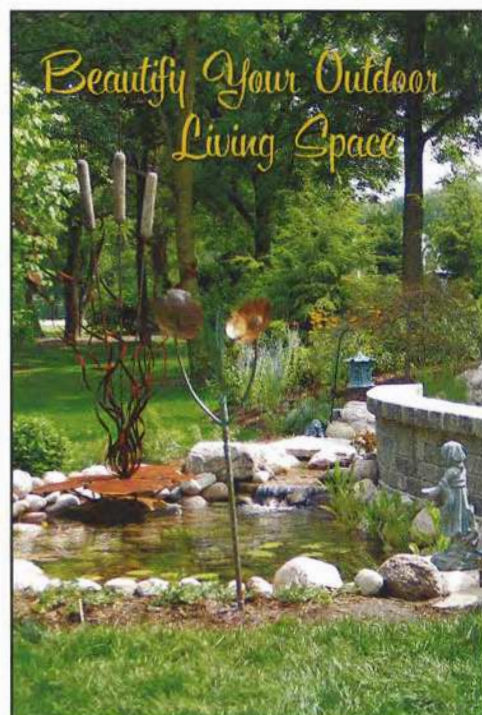
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