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THE North Shore WEEKEND



No place like home

Special dens for men are better than ever on North Shore. P8

The Perper home in Highland Park

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Neanderthals no more

Man caves are high-tech havens on North Shore



Pool tables, bars and more are part of man caves on the North Shore.

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF COLDWELL BANKER

■ BY BILL MCLEAN

Man caves — also known as man-tuaries, hubby hideaways and the forerunners to media rooms — have come a long way since taking up space in oil-stained garages and dank basements.

In many cases they're now immaculate, high-tech havens for homeowners who want to close a door on the stresses of life and then lose themselves in the joy of watching their favorite football team win a televised game on one of several flat screens.

A billiards table nearby comes in handy during halftime, as does a wet bar. Sometimes the crackling from a man cave's fireplace drowns out the sound of liquid hitting ice cubes in a glass.

"You could define a man cave as a deluxe, comfortable setting that allows people to separate themselves from everyday worries," says Roberta Miller, an associate broker at Koenig & Strey in Lake Forest. "It gives a person a feeling of escape."

But Miller and others in real estate along the North Shore believe men's "Do Not Disturb" signs on the entrance of their caves have largely fallen and now serve as welcome mats — for women and children.

"It shouldn't be a room just for men," says Susan Silverberg, marketing coordinator at Coldwell Banker in Deerfield. "I like the idea of sitting around in a big room in your PJs. The husband and wife should take turns using it; the whole family should be able to enjoy it."

Dan Perper and his wife, Danielle, live in Highland Park with their three children, ages 6 to 11. Dan's cave features eight TVs, cozy furniture and a unique door separating it from the home library. Close the door, push a button and, gradually, the door's glass frosts over. Cool — in more ways than one.

"I'm a big NFL fan," says Dan Perper, an investment firm partner and an even bigger Chicago Bears fan. "I'm in there every Sunday during the football season. When I'm in there I don't hear a thing going on in the rest of the house. For about every 20 times I'm in there, my wife is in there with me once, and our 6-year-old knows how to work the whole room. You should see him, the way he plays video games while watching TV."

According to mancavesite.org, "man cave" was first used as a description for a room in 1992. In 2012, in a piece written by Adam Tschorn of the Los Angeles Times, interior designer Courtney Cachet notes a man cave would have been "called a media room" in 2005.

"I promise you," she adds, "as soon as the economy takes even a little bit of an uptick, there will be a resurgence that will put to shame what we've seen so far. People will be pulling out all the stops. We'll see man caves with bowling alleys."

Barbara Shields, a broker at @ properties in Winnetka, would like to strike "man cave" from the domestic lexicon altogether.

"A so-called man cave ... that's so pedestrian," she says. "A man who wants a place to be alone at home only has to go to his beautiful library, or his office, or a wine room. An office is classic and timeless, a perfect place for a man to close a door to the world and be with his golf trophies, books and other things."

Orren Pickell has seen all kinds of man caves, from a low-budget shelter with a kegerator (a refrigerator modified to contain and dispense beer) to a high-end room with a poker table as its centerpiece and an air handler to disperse cigarette and cigar smoke.

"The best man caves are the ones that take care of all of a man's video and audio needs, the ones with multiple TVs, games — they're essentially large entertainment centers," says Pickell, president and CEO of Orren Pickell Building Group in Northfield. "It's a space for a man to do anything he wants."

"But I'm sure there are wives who also like man caves," he adds, "because wives get to escape their husbands when the husbands are in those caves for all those hours."

Hours before men's hockey games at the University of Notre Dame, Irish players get to hang out in a room in the Compton Family Ice Arena, relaxing while watching TV on a leather couch or playing Foosball. The convenient refuge is dubbed, "The Chill Room," aka man cave's little brother.

For Highland Park resident Ian Robinson, a man cave wouldn't be a man cave without sports jerseys in glass cases on walls, posters of sports heroes, baseball bats and football helmets here, baseballs and golf balls there, and other varieties of sports memorabilia doing double duty as room ornaments.

"When I think of the early man caves I also think of the ones with a wood-paneled bar in a wood-paneled basement," says Robinson, branch manager and broker at Coldwell Banker in Northbrook. "Many of the them now are home theaters with huge screens. The definition of a man cave depends on the man. I have an office at home; it's like a library. It used to be a spacious place for me to sit on a couch, read books and relax. Now our son's toys are in there and we've converted it into a family room where we spend a lot of time together."

Tom Girot, president of Thomas Sarti Girot Interiors in Park Ridge, has been in the design trade for 35 years and worked on many North Shore homes. Nearly every house he enhances boasts a media room, aka a man cave's classy cousin.

"I don't need a man cave or any room similar to it," says Girot, a Morris resident. "I don't want one."

"I live vicariously through my clients." ■

ME WANT NEW NAME

The term "man cave" may seem slightly anachronistic in the 21st century — especially on the North Shore, where some of these havens feature eight big-screen televisions and other technological wonders.

The North Shore Weekend's Facebook page at [Facebook.com/TheNorthShoreWeekend](https://www.facebook.com/TheNorthShoreWeekend) invites you to participate in our Man Cave Reader Poll. Our editor will be choosing the most creative response to our Man Cave question among those entries that like the NSW Facebook page.



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