

Why Men Need Man Caves

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A bit of a dive into why men need man caves and some of the essential differences between men and women with respect to projects and tasks.



I once visited a house which had the ultimate man cave. It occupies a very large well-insulated shed fitted out with air conditioning and plumbing. Inside, there is a workshop, an alcove with an L-shaped sofa with a big TV and sound system, a games area including an air hockey table and a stand-up arcade machine, a multigym, kitchen facilities and a toilet. The concrete floor is shiny and sealed with cool and trendy mats and rugs laid out in the chill-out areas. Posters and pictures not permitted to be hung in the house are proudly displayed here. Most men would love to have such a space, but it is a luxury many would not be able to have.

So, what is this so-called ‘man cave’? It’s usually basically a room or section in the house set aside for the man to be left alone to do as he pleases. It’s quite common and I’ve come across many of them whilst visiting some of our nearby friends, particularly those with children. Not far from us, are some friends who, not only have their own children, but also host students from foreign countries studying here in Australia. One can imagine it’s quite a hectic household, husband and wife trying to keep things afloat with day-to-day tasks. In this case, the man cave is a room that sports a prominent sign on its door saying so. Perhaps, the adult version of the kind of badly-spelt sign boys used on treehouses to deter girls from entering. Within this room, is an Aladdin’s cave of sorts, a veritable mix of odds and ends, many of which lie dormant on dusty shelves or strewn across a desk, the surface of which had probably never seen any light for the best part of a decade. Old screwdrivers, soldering kits, one of those clinking ball office toys,

a computer with a keyboard splattered with bits of paint and coated with grease, a few old books, and lots and lots of wires. It's a very untidy place, and it's the one place in the house that never gets cleaned, and it's also the one place in the house that nobody is allowed to clean. But when it does, it is done by the sole denizen of the man cave and is undertaken as one massive *project* rather than a daily *task*, like cleaning the dishes or making up the bed.

In contrast, my late German grandfather had his own version of a man cave, but in this case, it was simply a locked room upstairs with no prominent sign to deter unwanted intruders. As a young child, I often wondered what was behind and asked my grandmother what was in there. I was told that it was strictly off-limits. Naturally, I was curious, but when, on one occasion the door was ajar, I peeped in and then walked inside. It was, essentially, an office. Everything had its place and order. Perpendiculars and squares, there was not one thing askew or looked like it didn't belong there. A smooth and clean desk void of dust, with a few adornments such as a paperweight made up of a perfect cube of heavy glass, one of those little metal contraptions which you flip around a pivot each day to bring the next calendar date, a leather writing mat on the desk, and a couple of ballpoint pens in a holster. There were no papers lying around in view. I assume they were in the filing cabinet, which, of course, was securely locked. The room was airy, uncluttered, and had a subtle pleasant smell of the aftershave or hair lotion he used. He was a meticulously clean person, wore a casual suit and tie in the house, and didn't like being touched, especially his hair, or what was left of it. He was quintessentially, very German, in the old-school style.

Later in life, my father had occupied a lounge in a small country house to build his railway models and, thankfully, there were two lounges much to his wife's relief. This lounge was once a very nice room which he used for his patients when he was practicing psychotherapy, but giving up the practice and with nothing better for him to do, it was transformed into a workshop littered with Dremel tools, plastic bags of modelling material, bits of scratch-built model locomotives and rolling stock, and, like all man caves, crawling with wires and more wires. Sadly, he passed away last year, but the silver lining, of course, was that the room, and other once hobby-infested occupied spaces in the house, had been restored to its splendid glory.

Some men use the *entire* house as a man cave, one of which I encountered not far from where I live. Undoubtedly, his wife must be very understanding. In every corner of the house are reminders that he is a keen electronics hobbyist, but more

specifically, an enthusiast for oscilloscopes, of all things. Men are often quite specific on their choice of hobbies, but for the life of me, I cannot understand the appeal of collecting old oscilloscopes. They were scattered out all over the house, most of them quite vintage looking and probably not operational. And this brings me on to my next point.

Let's look behind the scenes why men like or need a man cave starting off with the difference between men and women in general when it comes to tasks and projects. Men tend to embark on projects, most of which involve creating something new and women are more consistent with undertaking somewhat more mundane, but arguably, more important tasks such as cleaning, cooking, organising school-related stuff for the kids, being in constant touch with other mothers willing to share the load of looking after the kids, and not losing patience with making calls to utility companies in search for a better deal. Exceptions apply, of course. For example, in most circumstances, I tend to be the cook in the house.

Is this a fair statement to make? I believe it is. Men are far more solitary creatures and sometimes need to be left alone. Not all the time, of course! We know of a childless couple who live in an acreage out in the bush not far from where we live. She runs a series of health-related wellness programs including yoga and he does lots of seemingly interesting things like editing movie scripts, writing articles, and conducting research into some obscure genre of music. Being in the company of others seems especially awkward for him except with his close group of friends and, like many men, shudder the prospect of engaging in small talk. Consuming a bit of alcohol can dull the effects of pretending to be interested in trifling conversation often leading to discussions of paramount importance, like how to save the world from idiotic politicians or contemplating the boundaries of the universe.

Back to men and projects, this is also interesting. Men are apt to be engaged in a project or hobby regardless of any practical outcome or not. Whereas women seldom engage in a project or practice a hobby with no practical or discernible outcome. There are very few women who hold hobbies with no practical or measurable value. Haberdashery, cooking, pottery, painting, making food preserves, and other pursuits which are generally viewed as those adopted by women, all exist to create something that can be used. Naturally, there are overlaps and exceptions. For example, gardening is a practical pursuit enjoyed equally by men and women. Also, it seems entirely reasonable to state that both

men and women occupy such pursuits equally when at the level of the master. For instance, world-class chefs and famous clothing designers.

When men embark on projects which are of practical use, they tend to be less frequent but more grandiose in nature. For example, renovating a house, building a new shed, or restoring an old car. These pursuits usually involve the need, or perhaps excuse, to use lots of interesting tools. Power tools are men's toys, and make it what you will, I've seen many an advert suggesting that you should get your hubby this amazing cordless power circular saw for Christmas, or some other amazing new tool. After all, not many women will salivate over a new top-of-the-range masonry hammer drill at the local tool shop. In essence, men tend to like creating things but when completed, they get bored and it is time to move on to the next big project.

However, there are many hobbies and pursuits by men which hold no practical use whatsoever except to distract, entertain, or to challenge. The man cave is an ideal place to carry out most of these activities, many of which are geared towards either collecting, being totally immersed in audio/visual entertainment, or the pursuit of achieving some personal conquest. For example, in the world of collecting, this could be stamps, vinyl records, model cars, video game consoles, or whatever takes one fancy. Some women collect things, but, in general, they do not. Being totally immersed in the audio visual world is most assuredly and predominantly a man's thing. Very few women partake in video games or watch feature-length movies with full-blown THX-like sound for example. Some claim that playing video games is generally time wasted but, the same can be said for binge-watching new series on streaming services like Prime, HBO and Netflix. The soundproofed man cave is the ideal place for men to blast music to astronomically loud sound levels.

Watching the dynamics of how men and women behave during a movie is interesting and illustrates why women tend to be perfectly at home watching a movie on a small screen with less than impressive sound, often from small tinny speakers on the tablet. Women tend to be somewhat more restless and don't feel that they need to be following *every* bit of the movie. They are often quite happy to chat about something completely unrelated while the movie carries on. Men, on the hand, are often completely absorbed into the movie and relish not only listening to what is being said in the movie, but also to physical *feel* it. Women often find the need for large speakers or subwoofers an unnecessary addition to

the living room taking up additional much wanted space for other things like house plants or some other decoration.

As for personal conquests, men take things to extremes more often than women. One might wonder what this has to do with man caves, but in a sense, the act of carrying out a personal conquest, often alone, is another form of being within a form of man cave, freed from the interruption by others. Such conquests may include undertaking an especially long hike in unsuitable weather, photographing *every* old industrial building in the city, or going to places which few others venture to, on the grounds of just doing so for the sake of it. This is more of a male thing, whereas women tend to be content with somewhat less demanding pursuits such as a picnic in a nearby park, a moderate bike ride, or gathering with a bunch of likeminded friends down at the local coffee shop. Women are too sensible to embark on such silly pursuits. Perhaps they are right.

In a nutshell, men tend to take things to the extreme or to the point of exhaustion. Climbing *every* mountain over a certain height or visiting *every* country or mapping out *every* piece of land, even parts no one will go to, is a very male thing. Many women question men why they want to do these things, many of which, are pointless affairs serving only to add an extra trophy mark or point of interesting discussion when next conversing with other likeminded males. This is generalising and I make no apology knowing that there are many women out there who undertake male-like pursuits and men out there who enjoy those activities which have been traditionally seen as being more attractive to the ladies.

So, why do men seek solace being in a man cave? In short, to be alone and pursue and do things without being overlooked and pried on. Single men, of course, do not need man caves. As stated earlier, men are more prone to be engaged in projects or activities which have no real *tangible* value except to serve as either a form of entertainment or an activity like writing for fun giving an example. I stress the word, *tangible*, because these activities do provide value in other ways. For example, reducing stress levels, improving one's knowledge, or simply to do something to while away the time.

Some men engaged in a hobby are intrinsically aware that many of their wives or girlfriends, at first, may view their activities as something new and interesting. But after some time, men start feeling edgy when they start to sense from the other half, that they are taking the hobby to far greater extents than what was intended. This is especially awkward when no man cave is to hand. The very act

of writing an article, organising one's photos or fumbling through boxes of postage stamps while a full-blown assault takes place in the house with a vacuum cleaner, duster and sponge is exceptionally unnerving and sometimes taken as a signal that there are more useful things to be doing. I call this 'angry cleaning', a phenomenon many men may experience. The slight feeling of guilt that one needs to get up to do something else. This is regardless of any prior useful task just completed. It's a signal that there are *other* things one can do.

One of the positive and negative features with men is their resolute doggedness to solve a problem or complete a task immediately. I've experienced this on many occasions, particularly when it comes to computer-related technical issues. I stubbornly refuse to go to bed until I fix the problem or until near exhaustion kicks in. On the most recent occasion, a problem with mapping email servers to iPhones, it turned out that my wife was right. Forget or postpone the problem until the morning. The problem was the failed installation of a server certificate which I put right. The man cave serves as a refuge for the stubborn male safe in knowing that the rest of the household won't be disturbed nor he disturbed by other wandering insomniacs or a reprimand from the wife that he needs to get to bed.

There are women out there, of course, who need their own space or retreat, to cite a better alternative to the word, cave. A common example might be an airy sunlit studio in which to unwind, meditate, or do some artwork. A quiet place away from the kids or from other distracting sounds like the TV or the stereo. Also, there are women out there who display very male characteristics with respect to risk and adventure. But no doubt, men, particularly young single men, will do the most stupid and dangerous of things to exhibit their prowess and bravado. Take the three men who climbed Meru Mountain in India via the Shark's Fin, an exceptionally dangerous and unclimbed route. They failed on the first attempt, and on returning to the US, one of the climbers became a near cripple after a skiing accident. Despite pleas by their partners on not returning to the fateful mountain, they stubbornly resisted. The guy who had the skiing accident did everything he could possibly can to be fit again to climb, and the three ventured off a few years later to attempt it again. They succeeded, but at quite a cost, physically and emotionally. All three were in their own virtual man cave.

Perhaps, an appropriate definition of a man cave is a place for the man to carry out adventures and desires by creating a space for them free from the mundane distraction of life.