

TORRANCE, CA
 DAILY 73,927
 MAY 29 2008



Burteles Luce

702 1518

oil 2 oz

For men, prefab sheds becoming 'a little place to get away'



By Finn-Olaf Jones

THE NEW YORK TIMES

"All those flowers and designs," said Christina Hoff Sommers, a resident scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute in Washington. It's no wonder men aren't comfortable at home, with the overdesigned, "feminized spaces that are being imposed on them" by the women in their lives, she said. "They're going to want to push back."

It may be an unpopular opinion, but Sommers, who is known for her critiques of feminism, may have a point.

According to James B. Twitchell, professor of English and advertising at the University of Florida in Gainesville, men are increasingly creating small private domains in and around their houses — in sheds, basements, attics and closets — as a way of retreating from everyday life.

Twitchell, author of *Where Men Hide*, published this month by Columbia University Press, does not agree that women are to blame for this phenomenon, or that it's a matter of blame at all.

He sees it as a positive development, and

perch at the top of a der leading up from 30m.

designing the rest of Connee intentionally orate the cupola. "I er's space," she said. 't be cute."

ractor, taken with e for the little room, ses for meditation, re weather and tak-the sun, surprised n expansion that -third more space. It st by 8 feet and has a row seat.

s totally a guy-to-Connee Cowles said. rolling my eyes and s and their toys."

SHED/83

SHED

FROM PAGE B1

has built a shed of his own. He uses it as an office and calls it his hidey-hole. It sits on a site near his summer house in Vermont once dedicated to an above-ground septic tank.

He has plenty of company. Although The Home Depot would not release sales figures, Kathryn Gallagher, a company spokeswoman, said there was a growing trend of men putting prefab sheds to various recreational uses in a quest for "a little place to get away."

Haroula Battista, marketing manager for Summerwood Products, a shed manufacturer in Toronto that mainly sells to American customers, described "a tremendous upsurge in demand," in particular for the company's larger sheds.

"They're turning them into everything from workout rooms to their personal bars," she said.

Tuff Shed, a company in Denver, now makes 50,000 sheds a year, up from 20,000 in 2003, and sells them through its own stores in 21 states and through stores such as The Home Depot. Phil Worth, the company's director of marketing, estimates that as much as 15 percent of Tuff Shed's sales are now for "male-driven spaces like workshops, poker rooms and the like."

"Guys are looking for their special spaces, and I'm telling my salesmen to find opportunities there," said Randy Morrow, Tuff Shed's Southwest region sales manager.

Gail Andrews, one of his sales associates, has taken his advice.

"Used to be when a guy ordered a garage, it was for a car," Andrews said. "Now they're

positioning them to be used as workshops and pool rooms. I've had musicians who use them as low-rent recording studios."

Even before Richard Warner, a retired history professor, and his wife, Judy, a retired teacher, moved into their Spanish-style stucco-sided house in Asheville, N.C., two years ago, he had his own special space in mind: a 10-by-16-foot prefab barnyard utility building that would serve as his second home.

He bought a kit for \$2,600 from Blue Ridge Builders, set it up in the long, narrow backyard, and fitted it with heating, air-conditioning, drywall and a stucco facade for an additional \$3,400.

He was soon happily ensconced, surrounded by a desk, a sofa and an extensive collection of military memorabilia, and working on what he calls an "action-adventure historical novel about a shipwreck off the coast of Maine, and cannibalism."

"Every man ought to have one of these," said Warner, 70, describing the building as "a place where I can do what I want to do." His wife knows to stay away, he said, adding, "She won't even bring a meal in there for me."

"I just stay out of there," Judy Warner, 69, confirmed, adding that when her husband proposed the building, she wholeheartedly agreed with the idea. "Our house is very small," she said. "I'm just doing my own thing here. It's his space out there."

A century ago, instead of retreating into his shed alone, Warner might have belonged to some kind of fraternal order, as one in three American men did, according to Twitchell; 50 years ago he might have spent time socializing with other men at a barbershop, of which there were six times as many as there

“
Used to be when a guy ordered a garage, it was for a car. Now they're positioning them to be used as workshops and pool rooms. I've had musicians who use them as low-rent recording studios.
”

— GAIL ANDREWS,
Tuff Shed's sales associate

are today.

It is the loss of these kinds of communal retreats — which the Robert Bly-inspired vogue for men's encounter groups and drumming circles in the early '90s did little to stem — that has left many men to their own devices when it comes to decompressing.

But decompressing at home is not always easy, said David Halle, professor of sociology at UCLA and author of *America's Working Man*. (University of

Chicago Press, 1987).

Classically, "men hide from the 'honey-do' list" of demands made by their wives, he said, but now that men are spending more time at home, they may also have to contend with a sense of being unwelcome.

"Women like alone time even more than men do," and they "don't necessarily want to share their space," Halle said. Men are faced with "the problem of carving out a space in what has, for many of them, become foreign territory."

Vince Jones, a 33-year-old real estate salesman in Rocklin, in Northern California, took on the challenge with gusto, turning a \$10,000 prefab shed into his personal fight studio.

"I practice Shoshu kung fu and Brazilian jujitsu," said Jones, who stages regular bouts with other men in his backyard retreat. "I originally wanted a Shaolin Temple with a curved roof, but that proved to be too difficult."

Once the drywall goes up, he said, he plans to decorate with martial arts swords.

"It's definitely a masculine space I've made," he said, acknowledging that there was no way his wife would let the main house be used for a restaging of "Fight Club."

"This has worked out well for both of us," Teri Jones said of her husband's backyard project. "I was not at all weirded out by it."

Other men may be less adamant about asserting their masculinity, but at a time when many

homes reflect an almost obsessive concern with design, they are grateful to find spaces that are not as self-consciously decorated as the rest of the house.

When sculptor Fuller Cowles, 44, built his 4,000-square-foot post-and-beam house on an old farmstead an hour north of Minneapolis in 1985, "it was a kind of bachelor pad with studios," said his wife, Connee, 57, a ceramist. It was only after they married that the house began to feel finished, as she put it.

And it was just last year, in the final stage of the 15-year renovation, that Connee Cowles' home improvement efforts reached the cupola — her husband's own version of a hidey-

hole, a tiny perch at the top of a 24-foot ladder leading up from the living room.

But after designing the rest of the house, Connee intentionally did not decorate the cupola. "I feel it's Fuller's space," she said. "It shouldn't be cute."

The contractor, taken with Fuller's love for the little room, which he uses for meditation, watching the weather and taking naps in the sun, surprised him with an expansion that added one-third more space. It is now 8 feet by 8 feet and has a built-in window seat.

"That was totally a guy-to-guy thing," Connee Cowles said. "I was just rolling my eyes and going, 'Boys and their toys.'"