



Photo by Jerry Portelli

# Divide and By Sarah Wolf CONCUR

WHEN A COUPLE HAVE TWO WILDLY DIVERGENT DECORATING STYLES, SETTING ASIDE “THE MAN ROOM”—A SPACE DEDICATED SOLELY TO A FELLA’S INTERESTS AND PURSUITS—MAY BE THE BEST WAY TO ENSURE DOMESTIC BLISS. HERE, A QUARTET OF EXPERTS SHARES SIX SUREFIRE TIPS FOR CREATING THE ULTIMATE SPACE FOR HIM.

FURNITURE STORES COULD make a killing if they offered marriage counseling with each sofa purchase. That’s because even the most compatible couples are likely to butt heads when shopping for furniture or embarking on an interior design scheme. She may swoon over ruffles and frills, while he’d rather swear off football than fill his house with flowery fabrics.

Instead of trying to meld two different styles into one for the whole house, design professionals recommend divvying up the rooms and decorating spaces differently. One trend that has emerged from that philosophy is the designated man room (also called the gentleman’s or dude room), where an entire area is dedicated to his tastes and hobbies and decked out with him in mind. Such a divide-and-concur approach is one way to meet in the middle—without compromising aesthetics or heading into therapy.

“If a couple have very opposing aesthetics, that’s probably easier,” says Andrea Banda, director of design for Rowe Furniture. “Trying to come up with a room that’s a hybrid of two styles is hard to successfully achieve. You could end

up with rooms that have an identity crisis. At least this way, both people feel like the home is their home.”

Intrigued by the concept? Read on for professional designers’ advice for planning a man room that both he and she can live with.

## I. Determine the room’s function.

The man room can take on many forms, from a hobby workshop, to a garage filled with collectibles, to a sports-bar-style hangout—and everything in between. How the room will be used is the overriding concern, and all other decisions, from layout to furniture to decorating, emerge from there.

Say a guy wants a snazzy space for chillin’ with friends in front of the TV. In that case, seating and an entertainment center that accommodates the television, DVD player, stereo components and speakers are the must-have items. All other decisions, such as upholstery fabrics, rugs and wall paint, should come only after you’ve determined a list of essentials.

## 2. Bring in an expert.

Whether it is an interior designer, architect and/or another specialist, those who know what they are doing in their field are invaluable resources when planning a man room. Keron Weathered, an associate designer near Houston, worked very closely with electronics experts when planning a home theater for a male client. “I really leaned on the home entertainment folks to tell me how big the speaker openings had to be, whether I could make them symmetrical, how I could enclose the cabinets, and all that,” she says. “I drew the specs to scale for the carpenter, but I needed all that information from the electronics people.” Specialists in electronics, lighting, space planning, kitchens or baths are worth their fees for the experience and expertise they bring to a man room project.

## 3. Determine a layout.

Does the room need to serve multiple functions? Is it, say, both a carpentry workshop as well as a TV-watching area? If so, set aside space for both activities and figure out a way to separate the two. You can do that by putting down a rug, arranging furniture a certain way or even incorporating room-dividing screens or shelves.

Here’s where designers can come in handy; their spatial planning abilities and creativity let you visualize possibilities you wouldn’t have thought possible. For example, in the aforementioned home theater, Weathered needed to incorporate comfortable seating for six, no small feat in a space that also included a sprawling media cabinet and display shelving for sports memorabilia. She cleverly included three cushy theater-style recliners near the screen and elevated the sofa behind them on a six-inch platform. “That way, people sitting on the sofa can see over people sitting in the theater chairs,” she says. “It’s almost like a theater setup.”

## 4. Decide on a theme.

Once you’ve decided what furnishings you need, it’s time to determine the room’s aesthetic. Many men, if cornered,

couldn’t articulate what type of fabrics and paint they like, let alone the architectural style they prefer, so it’s tempting to let the man room be all about comfort. But resist taking the easy way out: “The goal is for the room not to look like an eyesore,” Banda says. “You still want it to be aesthetically pleasing.”

Determining a theme for the space is a great starting point. With some rooms, the theme practically presents itself. For example, Valerie Marcus, an interior designer based in Arizona, created a sports-bar-inspired man room for professional baseball player Kerry Wood. She started with his desire for a place where he could hang with the guys, then took note of his collection of signed jerseys and ball caps and built the room around them. “Kerry is a collector,” Marcus notes. “Every object in the room has a special meaning for him; that’s why he wanted a spot in the house just for him and for all of his friends. It’s not just for show.”

For Keith Bolock, a builder and one of the owners of Shiloh Custom Homes in Scottsdale, it was a snap to choose a theme for a recent client, Keith Kolerus. Bolock took cues from Keith’s collection of classic cars, a vintage pool table, a jukebox loaded with oldies-but-goodies and other treasures, and he knew that a 1950’s diner theme would be perfect for a garage and adjacent hang-out room. Adding to the drive-in diner atmosphere are the windows wrapping around the two walls that are shared with the garage: “Keith can be playing pool in the diner and admiring his Corvettes at the same time,” Bolock says.

For other men, finding a suitable style might take a little digging. Start with a favorite piece of artwork or furniture and let it dictate the room’s scheme. “Remember the wagon-wheel coffee table from ‘When Harry Met Sally?’” Banda asks. (In the movie, a couple moving in together are sorting through their furniture, and the woman declares that the coffee table has no place in their new house.) “Maybe in that room with that coffee table, western could be the theme. Or if he loves billiards, maybe the theme could be ‘man’s club.’ There are creative ways



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to work around a man's favorite things. Anytime you can have a cohesive presentation of whatever it is he likes, it's a good thing."

If you're still having trouble, hand him a stack of home magazines and ask him to point out things he likes, even if he can't put his finger on exactly why. Usually, this practice will at least narrow the field of choices. Or take a gander through his closet to see what colors he gravitates toward and how formal his clothes are. That will provide another valuable clue to his tastes.

## 5. Shop for furnishings.

But before you do, remember that men and women shop differently. Men have a plan, don't dawdle in the store and usually buy the first thing that fulfills their wish list. For women, it's more about the shopping experience, not just the purchases. Don't force a feminine approach on a man shopping for his room.

Weathered, the Houston designer, says that it's often helpful to limit a man's choices so as not to overwhelm him. Instead of asking him his opinion on a stack of paint chips, give him three or four to consider. "A lot of times, women really love the process, but with men, you need to help them with all the fine details as much as you can," she says. "They're more big-picture-type clients."

Also keep in mind that men and women have opposing priorities in furnishings and fabric. Women will sacrifice comfort if something looks great, but ease is essential for men. (You wouldn't catch a man in high heels, would you?) Encourage him to settle into chairs, sprawl out on sofas and put up his feet on ottomans—he'll want to be sure that these pieces suit his height, weight and kick-back mentality.

## 6. Choose finishes and fabrics men can relate to.

Again, comfort and practicality are musts. Make sure

fabrics are stain-resistant, and consider those that fellas can easily relate to: Denim, twill, corduroy, flannel, pinstriped wool, velvet, leather and others derived from menswear are excellent options because they're familiar.

In lieu of wild patterns, opt for delicious textures on walls, floors and fabrics; they will hide wear and tear and lend visual interest without exhausting the eye. Weathered notes that manly spaces can be enriched with moldings, columns, patterned carpet, dramatically colored walls and gorgeous lighting—all of which are (if not overtly masculine) at least gender neutral enough for a man room.

In Kerry Wood's space, Valerie Marcus put burlap on the walls and bamboo sheaths on one side of the bar. The bar stools are covered in various animal-print fabrics for a small shot of pattern. "I wanted to make it very comfy and inviting with a lot of texture," the designer notes. "I did everything for the guys!"

Of chief importance when planning such a space—or any decorating scheme, for that matter—is that all members of a household feel at home in their house. "That's what a home should be," Banda says. "It nurtures your relationship and your life. Home is a haven." And by designing your interiors with both partners in mind, you both are sure to live happily ever after. ✨

### TO LEARN MORE

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