

HIS WORKSHOP IS HIS CASTLE

How to create perfect places to pursue hobbies

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Rick Rickman's personal workshop isn't just his home away from home. At more than 1,400 square feet it's practically the same size.

Inside the free-standing structure is a dizzying array of saws and planers and sanders, all hooked up to dust-intake tubes that sprawl from the ceiling like homemade tentacles. There's even a jury-rigged bench that uses a forklift to go up and down.

And that's not all: Check out the two televisions, mini-fridge, and stereo pumping out something by Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers.

"I've got all the comforts of home," says the West Toledo man who over the years has enjoyed making all sorts of furniture and decorative wooden items.



Rick Rickman relaxes in his workshop. (THE BLADE/ANDY MORRISON)

If you're into woodworking, the overall impression leaves no room for doubt: You want this. You need it.

But how can you duplicate it?

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First things first. For anyone eager to create a great home workshop, be it for woodworking, mechanical work, or other endeavors, there's a basic but important place to start.

"The first thing you have to decide on is the location," says Steve Shanesy, editorial director and publisher of *Popular Woodworking* magazine in Cincinnati.

While some areas don't permit them, a separate building like Mr. Rickman's is ideal, according to Mr. Shanesy, who has a clear vision of the perfect workshop: "It would probably have maybe 1,500 to 2,000 square feet. It would have excellent lighting, natural lighting from the windows."

Then fill it with high-quality tools, 220-volt power to run some machines, and a good dust collection system. Oh, and don't forget to heat it.

Bill Cox, 60, a building and construction maintenance instructor at Owens Community College, says he had enough of working in his frigid garage and decided to build a heated structure, which is in the works.

"I'm getting to the age now where I'm getting tired of playing in the cold," says the Maumee man.

For many people, perfection and reality rarely coincide. That doesn't have to stop you from having a mind-blowing place to pursue your hobby.

Retired University of Toledo professor Les Elsie couldn't build a separate structure, but in his basement workshop filling 2,400 square feet he seems to have thought of everything.

The space under his Sylvania Township home has high ceilings and a separate entrance to the garage — with an extra-wide door — to make it easier to get things in and out. In addition to the multitude of machines, a number of which are on wheels, there are lockers, cabinets, even an old library card catalog, with meticulously organized tools, finishes, and accessories.

The furnace is partitioned off from the rest of the room too, something experts suggest to prevent forced-air furnaces from circulating dust from cut wood throughout the house.

Perhaps the crowning touch, though, is the toilet in one corner, exposed for all to see, with a piece of paper taped to the wall behind it that says, "Project Planning." It epitomizes the fact that this workshop is where Mr. Elsie, 68, comes not only to create beautiful period furniture but also to get away from things.

"Iraq never crosses your mind when you're down here...", he says.

Something that should cross one's mind prior to designing such a workshop, however, is how work will flow through the room as it moves from one piece of equipment to the next. Mr. Rickman, 59, mapped out every detail to make sure that his setup would work before it was set up.

"I took all the machinery stuff that I was going to have and took actual measurements and made actual cardboard cutouts of them," he says.

This kind of organizing should apply to the little things too, which is why people like Ken Swint, of Temperance, are such devotees of tool boxes and storage cabinets and why they can never have enough pegboard.

"The most important thing is to keep things organized and in their appropriate place so when you need a tool you know where to find it all the time," says the 62-year-old who keeps his garage neat and tidy for working on his 1966 Pontiac GTO convertible.

As many have found, that's easier said than done.

"It's a constant job," says Larry LaBeau, 69, of Temperance, who has about 1,200 square feet of work space at home and who, like Mr. Elsie, is employed part-time at Woodcraft, a retail store on Airport Highway that focuses on woodworking. "It's easy to work in your shop and just lay things down without taking the time to put them back or put them away. I spend a lot of time doing just that."

For those hobbyists out there who don't have the means to follow all of this advice and can only dream of their own gigantic workshops, Mr. Shanesy, the magazine publisher, does offer some consolation.

"There are people who have extremely modest setups who do remarkable work, I mean museum-quality work," he says. "It's really not about the shop in many ways. It's about the guy ..."

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