



My New (Wo)man Cave



By **Laura Petrecca**

PUBLISHED NOVEMBER 16 | 6 MINUTE READ



Three hours and four cups of tea into my workday, I'm finally into the exquisite, often elusive state of flow. The writing comes with ease. Sentences pour onto the page. Comfy sweatshirt on, hood over my head, I tap away at my laptop keyboard. I am officially in the zone.

But not for long.

My partner is suddenly standing at our kitchen table—my workspace—to ask what I'd like for lunch. He stops cold when he notices that my hood is up, my "do not disturb" signal. It's too late, though. The muse is retreating. I gain a turkey sandwich but lose my focus.

Pre-pandemic, we had our work-life situation figured out. I'd go to our local New York City library each morning while he ran his business from our apartment. But since COVID-19's spread, we've been in a New Jersey Shore condo, working, eating, drinking and breathing in too close proximity of each other.

He's up at dawn and on calls until 5 p.m., with his voice booming through the closed bedroom door 10 feet from my work area (not good for a writer's concentration). Because I schedule most of my video meetings for late in the day, the Bombay Sapphire bottle from his pre-dinner gin and tonic occasionally makes an unwanted appearance on camera (not good for a writer's professional reputation).

I'm confident in the stability of our 11-year relationship, yet there are countless indications that we need some distance from each other—at least during the workday. I want to stab him with a fork when he noisily empties the dishwasher while I'm trying to edit. I tense with annoyance as he and his crunchy lunchtime potato chips invade my kitchen table territory each day at noon.

And while toiling together in a confined space has heightened my desire for solitude, the truth is this: I've long yearned for a workspace of my own, away from other human beings. Before launching my writing and editing business in 2018, I spent almost two decades in crowded newsrooms. And while the city library served its purpose, it, too, was filled with people.

My dream: a place I could ride my bike to and spend the night at if I was on a writing roll. In Manhattan—with its sky-high rent—there was no way I could rationalize paying for such a spot. So, I shoved that ambition aside, where it remained even after I moved to my more affordable New Jersey town.

When I began looking for a new work area in earnest this summer, I considered familiar ground: the local library. But the benefits of a free, convenient location were outweighed by spotty Wi-Fi and my unease with sitting near strangers, even if they were socially distant.

My search for a more professional environment yielded results such as a lone desk in a hallway, a small windowless office in a nondescript business complex and an equally small windowless office in a trendy, up-and-coming area. None were right.

I eventually connected with a newbie real estate agent—a cheerful man with five decades of work experience who said he didn't need extra income; he just wanted to try out a new field. He emailed a steady stream of office and residential listings. Most were outside my price range. And the ones in my budget made the windowless offices seem charming.

And then ...

I opened my Gmail one morning and saw a place with potential. Since my workday was soon starting, I quickly swiped through the first half of photos and dashed off a reply to my new Realtor acquaintance. That evening, we took a look.

The one-bedroom apartment was perfectly petite, fully furnished and a five-minute bike ride from my home. Cable, gas and internet were included. The monthly rent was at the top end of my budget but still in range. And those pictures I didn't initially see? They showed a deck and an ocean view.

The Realtor couldn't contain his excitement over this find. Rightfully so. The place was ideal.

Yet I hesitated on moving forward—no matter that my business is thriving, that I have more than a year’s worth of emergency savings and that my retirement accounts are well funded. Fear and self-doubt crept in.

“We’re still in the midst of a pandemic!” the anxious me shouted inside my head. “Batten down the hatches! Put any extra earnings into savings!”

“Figure out how to make the library work,” insisted the frugal me.

“What will others think about you spending so much time away from your partner? That doesn’t look good for your relationship,” cautioned the insecure me.

And then I took a deep breath.

In the stillness of a beach town empty of tourists, I could hear the whisper of the wise me.

“It is time,” she said.

It is time to meet your needs.

It is time to pursue your goals.

It is time to invest in yourself.

I had to choose which voice to listen to. I picked the one that felt the truest.

My Realtor got his first-ever deal, and I got my first-ever writer’s studio.

Millie content is licensed from Meredith Corporation, publisher of Millie, Real Simple, InStyle and more.

Laura Petrecca is a deputy editor at Millie. Her writing has appeared in publications such as USA Today, Real Simple, Men’s Health and AARP The Magazine.

The Millie 2021 Gift Guide

Hover mouse anywhere. Click to submit.

Did you find this article useful?