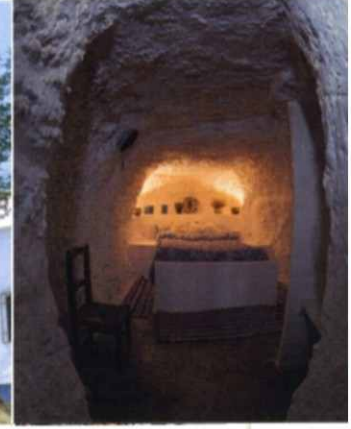
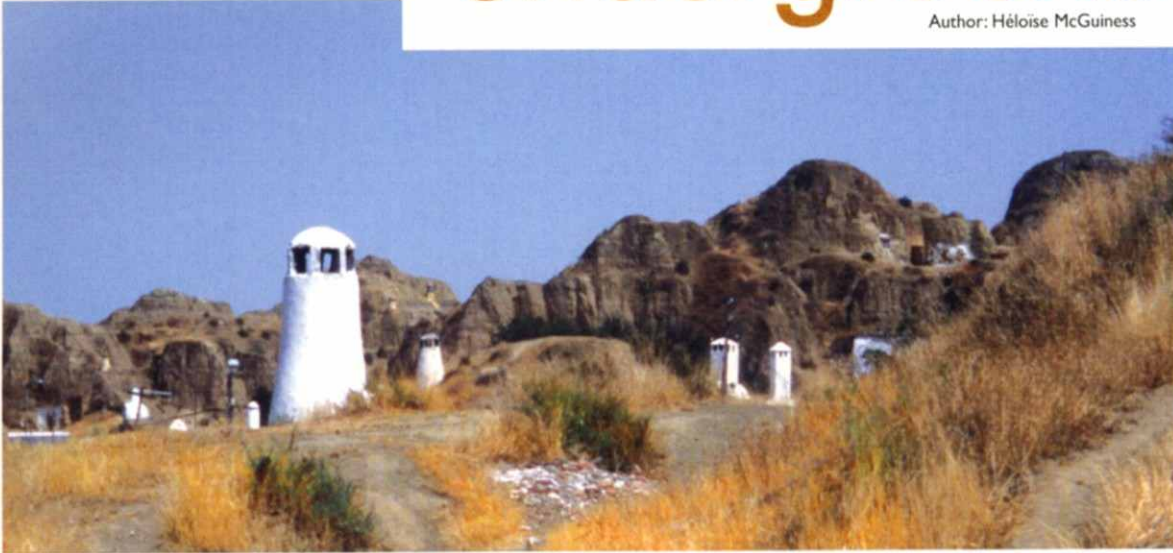


Going underground

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Yabba Dabba Do...

If you thought that cave-dwelling went out with Fred Flintstone you may be in for a surprise. Troglodyte homes have been making a big comeback in southern Spain - and whereas at one time you had to put a lot of effort into digging your own cave house, these days you simply pay a visit to an estate agent.

Originally the cave was a popular form of housing in many parts of Spain - in the Guadix area of Granada alone it is estimated that there as many as 14,000 caves that are, or were once, inhabited. Then, along with other types of traditional dwelling, the cave went into decline as many Spanish people opted for newly built and modern style flats and houses in urban settings. Now caves are becoming increasingly popular with both Andalusians and other Europeans looking for a dream home and they have even been featured in Spanish interior design magazines.

Cave Comforts

According to one estate agent, many people don't know what to expect from a cave house - mostly they imagine a damp and uncomfortable hole in the ground with a boulder for a door. Then they take a first look and get a big surprise. Cave homes look more like pretty little white cottages than dark, dank caverns and have electricity, running water and drainage. Typical caves have a house type frontage with windows and a front door, and they frequently have one storey and nearly always very thick, curved walls and ceilings, which are usually whitewashed and look as if they have been coated with roughly applied cake icing. Rustic, homely touches like open fireplaces are common. In addition many have all the mod cons and home comforts that a 21st century Betty and Wilma would expect, like heating and stylish fully fitted kitchens and bathrooms.

Caves have a number of advantages over more conventional types of housing. For example, two-metre thick walls mean that your cave is always quiet inside no matter where it is located. Extreme summer and winter temperatures are more bearable as caves have natural insulation and maintain a steady year-round temperature of around 18c.

My Cave in the Sun

Although many people who opt for cave living are looking to get away from it all, not all caves are found in rural areas. Cities like Granada, Almeria and Guadix all have cave districts. The Barrio de Santiago district of Guadix is an area larger than the whole of the rest of the city and has around 2,000 cave homes where around 10,000 people live. The famous Sacromonte district of Granada has been inhabited for centuries, originally by Gypsies who are said to have come to Granada with the conquering Catholic Kings in the 15th century. The caves there have some of the best views of the Alhambra of anywhere in the city. In Almeria there is a traditional cave district known as la Chanca. More rural places with fairly large cave districts are Galera and Orce in the province of Granada.

Try Before You Buy

One way to try out the troglodyte lifestyle without committing yourself is to take a cave holiday. Along with increasing interest in cave homes, cave hotels and holiday apartments are also discovering the troglodyte accommodation can be found in places that are well away from the tourist trail, yet are handy for exploring Andalusian cities or the region's beautiful and varied countryside.

Who knows - you may find cave living is just what you always wanted. As one new resident of a cave put it: "Caves are so different and beautiful... we literally fell in love with our cave house."