



CAVING IN

Many people seek out renovation project bargains in Spain, but why not ditch the bricks and excavate your own cave home instead? **Antonio Valdivieso Suárez** looks at life as a Spanish caveman

THROUGHTOUT history in the Baza area in the requirements to build your own home were a pick, a shovel and enough strength to excavate the rooms needed that would form your new home. Up until about a decade ago, cave homes were considered a sort of 'lower class' form of home ownership and in most cases transfers of ownership were conducted via a shake of hands or in exchange for your best burro (donkey).

Fortunately, for the sake of local history, economy and the aesthetics of the region, cave homes now form a key role as an emblem and a sign of identity that enriches the area. A new form of economy has been formed solely from caves. The market for troglotourism and cave renovation is booming.



Examples of the kinds of homes you find carved into the rocky hillsides overlooking the country-side near Granada.



Photos provided by : Cuevas Al Joffo

WHERE TO LOOK

Guadix, Galera and Baza in the region of Granada, in Spain are key places to find this troglodyte phenomenon. Thousands of visitors from all over the world come to this region for the unique experience of lodging or living in a cave while enjoying the surrounding mountainous parks, lakes and landscapes.

IT'S NOT ALL DAMP AND STALACTITES

Since cave homes are unheard of in most parts of the world and most people have never actually been in a cave home, there are many common misconceptions or myths that it's worth dispelling.

- **LIGHT** Cave homes do not have to be dark or enclosed. Given the flexibility of the structure, nearly the entire

front of the property can be opened up with doors and windows and most constructions allow for sunlight to enter all rooms. Skylights with glass domes also let light into all the rooms.

- **DAMP** Contrary to natural caves that are typically damp and dark, most modern cave homes are constructed in a type of soil and rock that actually serve as a barrier to external dampness. In fact, some of these local caves have such a dry atmosphere that they are used for the hanging and natural drying of those wonderful Serrano *jamon*s and chorizo *sausages*.

- **STRUCTURE & SUPPORT** Many first-time cave visitors ask 'Where are the supports or columns?', wondering if the ceiling might cave in (pardon the pun!). However, most cave homes are constructed so that the thick partitions



support the weight of the ceiling, and as may be built in solid rock anyway, even the largest of rooms needs no support. And for evidence of their strength, consider that most caves resist collapse for centuries. Locals who own both newly built and traditional cave homes will tell you to come back and visit 500 years from now: the cave will still be standing, exactly the same.

So what are the advantages of living in a cave? First of all, the absolute quiet afforded by the thick walls, often embedded into solid rock can lead to a completely relaxed life. Also, caves tend to year round, so you need little extra heating in winter and no cooling bills on the edge of towns in quiet neighbourhoods away from traffic and noise, while the positioning usually affords unobstructed open views to the surrounding landscape.

CHOOSING CAVES OFF-PLAN

Ok, so we're not talking prehistoric caves, we're talking about homes created in the last decade or so that have been designed specifically for modern living, with electricity, running water and all mod cons. And of course they come in different sizes. There are large ones, small ones,

dark ones and light ones, and homes on one or several storeys. Some are fully renovated while other older cave homes are fit for renovation. They can be finished off in a multitude of styles: rustic, classical, modern... in fact, cave homes and their interiors can take any shape or form, only limited by the owner's imaginations. The magic of cave homes is in their flexibility and the amount of imagination that can go into their building or renovation. You can show the original pick marks and irregularities. Similarly, floors can be given a modern finish with concrete or tiles, or left rough and undulating. And if you're worried that your three-seater Chesterfield sofa won't fit in your new cave lounge, then opt for a stone sofa (or even beds, cupboards, shelving or seats) carved into the walls and floors... at least this way you need never worry about woodworm! Forget the Flintstones, a Spanish cave home can be the epitome of modern living, combining the rustic nature of the house with modern extras... plus the fact you'll never be short of conversation subjects at the next tapas crawl you go on. And don't forget that communities of cave dwellers are some of the friendliest neighbourhoods you'll find in Andalucía. Bedrock here we come!

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THINGS TO REMEMBER

If you have decided a cave home may be the right type home for you, you should consider the following factors in the purchase and renovation of your cave home:

- **Orientation:** South- or southcast-facing is ideal for taking full advantage of natural light within the cave.
- **Ventilation:** Most caves have been built with air vents and conducts to help circulate the air. Modern caves will typically have fan-driven ventilation.
- **Drainage:** Correct drainage is essential for the well-being of the cave. Exterior rooms should be above street level to avoid incoming water. Interior rooms where water will be used, such as bathrooms or kitchens are best located on the outer edges of the cave. The golden rule is to work with professionals at the time of installation of water lines.
- **Legal:** To avoid frauds and to purchase with confidence; if a home currently does not have a public deed it is possible to have a deed currently does not have a public deed it is possible to have a deed written if the correct documents are requested at the time of purchase. It is recommended to speak with a solicitor or real estate agency familiar with the process.

The walls in this cave home have a mixture of natural rough finish and smooth plaster