

THE SAFE ROOM

With home invasions on the rise and a new breed of more destructive and potentially more dangerous invaders at work, the wealthy are increasingly making safe rooms, also known as panic rooms, an integral part of their homes, businesses and leisure spaces.

BY ASA BRET PRINCE

The reason for having a safe room is straightforward: To provide short-term security and protection for the occupants of a home, yacht, office, or hotel while they wait for help to arrive. A person who seeks shelter in a safe room should immediately communicate with the police or a security professional.

EXPERT ADVICE

"A safe room should be designed to resist ballistic, forced entry and chemical attack," says Thomas Gaffney, CEO of **Gaffco** in New York, one of the country's leading builders of safe rooms. "Each of our safe rooms is custom built to suit the particular customer's needs. Our rooms are also designed to blend with the existing surroundings, making them architecturally pleasing yet secure enough to protect to the required threat level," Gaffney adds.

"A high-quality safe room should include cameras and monitors to look at the entrance to the room," says Paul Viollis, president of **Risk Control Strategies** in New York. "And it's a good idea to have a clearly identifiable camera outside the doorway of the safe room as well as a hidden camera. That way, the intruder can be lured into destroying the visible camera and be unaware of the hidden camera, thereby giving some advantage to the safe room occupants."

STOCKING YOUR SAFE ROOM

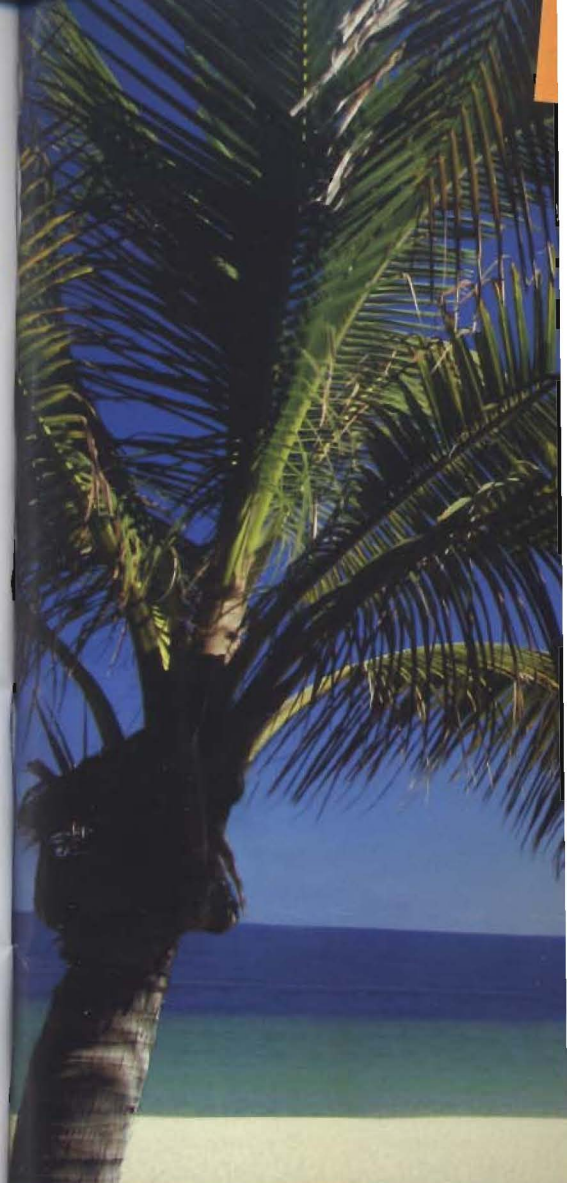
As for the contents of the safe room, gas masks, bottled water and food are essential. Furthermore, the ventilation should be protected from chemical and biological agents. And, of course, it is vital that there are more ways to communicate with the outside world that can't easily be disconnected or compromised.

Increasingly, houses with safe rooms are being constructed so that the safe room acts as a command center, controlling the "weapons" built into the house. The ability to remotely aim and fire non-lethal shotguns, for example, can give the occupants in a safe room a strategic advantage. Flooding the house with tear gas is another way for the safe room occupants to fight back.

The threat level notwithstanding, cost is the biggest issue when deciding how extensive a safe room to build – and, when it comes to safe rooms, the sky is the limit. But while the details and budget can vary from one safe room to the next, there's no denying the fact that the use of safe rooms is very much on the rise, both for the affluent and those who work with, and for, the affluent.

"To put it simply," concludes Viollis, "properly constructed and positioned safe rooms save lives and provide unparalleled peace of mind to the affluent."

Asa Bret Prince is a private client security specialist and the co-author of Safe and Sound.



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