Super Garages: What would yours look like?

By Ellen Hoffman

The garage may be the last frontier of home renovation, but you don't have to be a car collector to see the potential in this once-cluttered space

You've already overhauled the kitchen and bathrooms, added a pool house with outdoor kitchen and bar, and organized the closets with modular storage systems. What's left to improve? *Hint:* Have you looked in your garage lately?

The organized garage as 'designer' garage

Once a cluttered repository for garden tools, miscellaneous junk, and maybe even your car, the humble garage is going designer. For many, it's the last frontier of the complete home makeover, a big open room that can be converted to a spacious showplace for a car collector or an activity center for the hobbyist.

You can go as far as your imagination and budget allow. Baton Rouge architect Kevin Harris is designing a $1 million, 4,000-square-foot, four-car garage for a client who wants walk-in storage closets, elevator access to the house, and pet condos for 10 dogs and cats (with videoconference facilities so the owners can keep in touch with their animals when they travel).

In part, garages have gotten bigger to accommodate such multiple roles. Today, 15% of new homes have a garage large enough for three cars or more, according to the National Association of Home Builders. In 1992, it was just 6%. Archway Press, a New York company that sells detailed blueprints for houses and garages, has been ramping up the size and complexity of its garage designs to meet demand. For example, one Archway blueprint gives plans for a freestanding, 10-car structure with a 2,700-square-foot apartment above it.

Garage cabinets, floors and shelving all go 'up market'

A garage's main purpose continues to be storing cars, but that doesn't mean it has to look like a garage. Driving into David Rodrigues' four-car garage is like entering your family room. The Pewaukee, Wisconsin builder spent $20,000 just

on **wood-paneled walls**, red alder pantry-style **cabinets**, and a bronze stained **floor**. There are also **wall-mounted racks** for golf and ski gear, and a lift system to keep his Heritage Harley-Davidson motorcycle off the floor.

Lawyer Bob Wade spent about $275,000 to build an unassuming 2,400-square-foot cedar garage at the foot of his driveway in Northampton County in eastern Pennsylvania. But inside, it's more like a museum to house his collection of six classic cars, including a 1965 Porsche Cabriolet. The space features a 130-square-foot work area and a hydraulic car lift. It even has a shower so Wade can clean up when he's finished working on the cars.

Increasingly, though, owners are revamping their garages, or at least part of them, into livable spaces where they can spend time on everything from hobbies to hosting wine tastings. Zev Pomerance, who owns garage outfitter Potomac Garage in Gaithersburg, MD, says his clients want to spiff up the garage because it's the real gateway to the home. "Neighbors, friends, family - they all enter the house from the garage," he says.

The rise of the garage kitchen

A lot of people keep an extra refrigerator in the garage. Now, entire kitchens are sharing space with the Volvo and Harley. Dan Lajoie, who runs Gourmet Garages in Wallingford, Connecticut, says he's currently designing a garage for a doctor who loves to cook. It includes a butcher-block food prep area and storage for pots and pans.

In a few weeks, Michael Cardenas, who owns eight restaurants in Los Angeles and Las Vegas, will be moving his 2,000-bottle wine collection from a spare bedroom in his Malibu, California home to a new temperature-controlled wine cellar in the garage he's having renovated. The project, which cost around $35,000, also includes cabinets for storing pans, plates, linens, and other catering supplies.

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