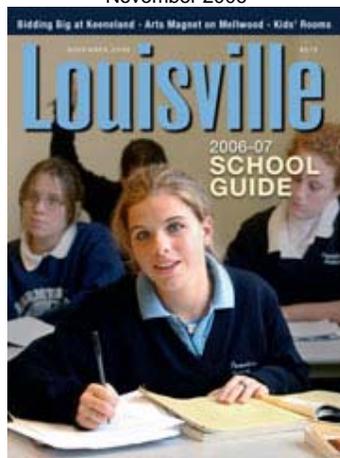




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HOME & DESIGN — GARAGE GRANDEUR

By Donna Andrews Russell



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This new Anchorage garage, designed by Don Underwood Designs, houses four cars, two full baths and a large recreation area with a built-in bar.

Garages have been gracing American homes since the turn of the 20th century. First known as "auto houses," they were originally designed purely to protect automobiles, which were easily damaged by extreme temperatures, from the elements. The word garage derives from the French "garer," meaning "to shelter."

Over the past 90 years, garages have become ubiquitous features of American homes, first as outbuildings and then attached. In 1950, less than half of new homes had a garage, while today 90 percent do, according to the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB). And not just single-car boxes. In 2004, 64 percent of new homes boasted a two-car and 19 percent a three-car garage.

As garages have grown, they've taken on roles far beyond sheltering the family fleet. Their use by home businesses and fledgling musicians, for example, has birthed such epithets as "garage inventor," "garage entrepreneur" and "garage band." They're also the favored retreat of many home hobbyists, from woodworkers to hot rod enthusiasts. In many homes, the attached garage has replaced the back door as the primary familial entrance. But for most Americans, the garage serves as a gigantic drive-in closet — the repository

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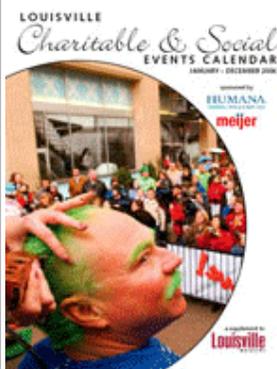
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for the flotsam and jetsam of our acquisitive lifestyles.

Many garages are so jammed with junk, they can't be used for their intended purpose, says Jim Grider, founder of Great Garage, a garage organization dealer network based in Middletown. "The number-one reason people call for our services is that they just want to be able to park their cars in their garage."

The NAHB estimates that Americans will spend \$3 billion in 2006 on garage remodeling and organizing, up a half-billion from last year. Here's a look at some of the improvements those billions are buying.

New Freestanding Garages

With 28 years in the industry, Bluegrass Garage Builders' Gary Willis has witnessed many changes in the marketplace. "People today want garages as big as they can get them," he asserts, noting that 2½-car, rather than two-car, garages are now the mainstay of his business. "A 2½-car garage measures 24 by 24 feet, instead of 20 by 20, and people want those extra four feet for workbenches, tools and storage."

Most of the 200 or so garages Willis builds each year are freestanding, frequently replacing an attached garage that was converted to a family room. More and more, however, his clients want a second garage — for their boats or for their children's cars. "You see kids 25 and 30 years old still living at home," he observes.

Another trend: two-story or 1½-story garages with top-floor recreation areas, home offices, studios or workshops. "We're also getting more requests for plumbing, particularly from people with pools, who want a bathroom in the garage to keep wet people from traipsing in and out of the house," Willis says.

Historic-renovation specialist and remodeler Todd Stengel of Todd Stengel Construction calls his two-story garages "carriage houses" — a tribute to their high style and multiple functions. He tore down a dilapidated garage in the Highlands, for instance, to make way for a carriage house with a two-car garage/pool house on the first floor and workshop, full bath and future kitchen on the second. Another Stengel project, Randy and Carol Smith's new Anchorage carriage house, has parking for four cars (including Randy's restored 1968 Camaro), wall-mounted TVs and a full bath downstairs. Upstairs is a spacious recreation area with built-in bar, big-screen TV and surround-sound system, as well as a deck and second full bath. The Smiths use it as a party house and Randy views it as his backyard home away from home. "It's like you're somewhere else, like being at a cottage," he says.

New Attached Garages

Declining lot sizes coupled with larger homes have created a new phenomenon in the high-income reaches of suburbia — the rise of the front-loading garage. In times past, big-home garages were either hidden in the back or on the side. Front-loaders not only save space, but they also shorten the driveway and reduce paving costs. The biggest downside: The doors are constantly on display to passers-by.

Overhead door manufacturers are meeting this challenge by offering a plethora of options, such as windowed doors, says LaDona Hall of Raynor Door Co. of Louisville. "Windows are a way to make your house look different than the one down the street. They also let light into the garage and enable you to see if somebody is in your driveway," she says.



The patio side of this two-story Highlands garage serves as a poolhouse, while the second floor is a woodworking studio.

Some of the latest window styles at Raynor's showroom off Preston Highway include silk-screened designs and snap-in inserts that quickly transform square or rectangular windows into arched windows with or without fans. Cunningham Overhead Door on Frankfort displays leaded "glass" windows (all garage window glass is actually acrylic, explains owner Chris Cunningham) and "wrought-iron" windows made of seeded acrylic with black-iron-look designs embedded in the glass.

Also making a comeback are old-fashioned carriage-house doors, now available not only in wood but in lower-maintenance steel and composite. While the doors look as if they open out, they actually roll overhead like modern garage doors. In addition to style and material, other carriage-house door options include authentic-looking hardware such as simulated strap hinges, knockers and handles. "The style choices available are unbelievable," Cunningham says. "People come in and think they are going to pick between garage door A, B or C and then find out they have so many, many choices to make."



Everything's neatly in its place with this organization system from Garage 360.

A couple of tips from Hall on maintenance: "Twice a year, in the spring and fall, squirt some WD40 on the rollers and hinges," she recommends. "Also, car wax, applied annually, will do wonders with helping your door retain its original color."

Garage Organization

For many homeowners, the garage's exterior appearance isn't the problem. It's the chaos inside, which, with front-loading garages, is in plain sight whenever the doors open. "Most garages look as if Hurricane Katrina just blew through," says

Tim Furlong of Garage Solutions.

Over the past five years, the shocking state of the American garage has spawned an entirely new industry — garage organization. Key to the concept: creating zones on the walls for storing specific items, from fishing poles and golf clubs to tools and wheelbarrows. Some systems, such as those sold by Garage 360 and Great Garage, rely on PVC slat walls for hanging tool hooks, shelves, cabinets and baskets. Others, such as the Tap Mount system sold by Garage Solutions, use wall-mounted steel tracks. Cabinets, worktops, dog food — even Shop-Vacs — can easily be hung on the walls. Also available are gadgets such as the electric Bike Slinger to suspend bikes, canoes and kayaks from the ceiling. "An automatic switch lowers and raises it," Furlong explains. "We put one in with a basket for a customer with a ski boat so he has a place to store life jackets when he pulls his boat into the garage."

A garage reorganization can cost several thousand dollars, but can be accomplished in stages over a period of years. And while the garage is normally considered male territory, women are usually the drivers when it comes to cleaning it up, says Grider. "Ninety percent of our signed contracts are from women, and many times it's a birthday, Christmas or Father's Day present for their spouse."

RESOURCE LIST

Bluegrass Garage Builders
15823 Brush Run Road, 266-5871

Todd Stengel Construction
161 McCready Ave., 895-8181

Cunningham Overhead Door & Window
2133 Frankfort Ave., 897-5700

Raynor Door Company of Louisville
3807 Oaklawn Drive, 969-1379

Garage Source
6518 Park Place, Crestwood, 930-2114

Garage 360
554-7836

Great Garage of Louisville
914B N. English Station Road, 259-9119

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