
PRESS

THE S-T-R-E-T-C-H GARAGE

By Michelle Hofmann, Special to The Los Angeles Times

*Our insatiable appetite for more space has transformed
a grease-stained American institution.*



The Los Angeles Times

ATTACHED or detached, cluttered or clean, the garage is an indelible part of American history.

Henry Ford's first automobile, Hewlett-Packard, Walt Disney's early cartoons, the Apple computer and Mattel Toys all got their start in a garage.

By the 1950s, 41% of homes had one. The two-car version became the standard in the 1980s. Now, each year, homeowners spend about \$3 billion making over the nation's 65 million garages.

But home buyers don't just want any garage. They want the super-sized version — a three-car garage or larger.

With more three-car households and rising demand for space to house recreational equipment, builders say a bigger garage is also a popular amenity for extra storage or living space, one that when finished can help a home stand out from the competition at resale time and increase home value.

"There's definitely a trend toward three-car garages," said Gopal Ahluwalia, staff vice president for research for the National Assn. of Home Builders. "It's one of those must-have features."

In 2005, 33% of new homes built in the Western states had three-car garages, up from 20% in 1992. And, Ahluwalia added, 35% of home buyers polled in 2004 said they prefer three bays or more.

Buyers in upscale developments — where homes start at \$850,000 — don't just want a larger garage, said Sybil Miller, an agent with First Team Real Estate Inc. in Irvine, they expect it. "The three-car garage could definitely give sellers a competitive edge."



Adding a garage to an existing home might cost \$10,000 for one bay to \$25,000 for three, Ahluwalia said. But, he added, in most cases, the homeowner would more than recoup the initial cost and probably more.

Marc Shuman, president of GarageTek (www.garagetek.com), a national provider of garage organization systems, said he doesn't see consumer demand for more space letting up.

"I wouldn't be surprised to see four-car garages becoming the standard," Shuman said.

Jim Boyd, regional president for Toll Brothers in Southern California, said the nationwide builder has designed luxury homes with six-car garages in some Southland communities and four-car garages for some town homes.

Toll Brothers also is considering adding an option that would include garages big enough to house larger recreational vehicles, he said.

One strategy being used to accommodate larger cars and SUVs is to replace standard 7-by-9-foot garage doors by 8-by-10-foot doors, the National Assn. of Home Builders reports.

Although three-car garages are now standard in most Pardee Homes communities, Bob Clauser, senior vice president of marketing, said the home builder also offers a \$5,000 extra single-garage space option to give home buyers more flexibility. "They can use the finished space as a garage or allow it to be converted to a workshop or a downstairs bedroom."

With garage organizers creating sleek spaces featuring lighting, heating and cooling systems, elaborate wall-storage units and cabinetry, work areas, utility sinks, plasma televisions and music systems — Shuman said the tinkerer's retreat is becoming a civilized extension of the home.

Forget housing bulk packs of toilet paper, lawn mowers, shovels, ladders, bicycles and the crib where little Timmy, now 45, once slept. Shuman said today's homeowners want a workshop, a bedroom, a home office, a gym or a playroom.

Enthusiasts and hobbyists are trading a space with a concrete floor and oil spots for an art studio, a wine cellar, a home theater, a recording studio or other specialized areas.

Whirlpool Corp., for example, has designed cabinets, workbenches, floor covering, wall panels and appliances in its Gladiator GarageWorks (www.gladiatorgw.com) series specifically for garages.

"We have found that the garage space is a great opportunity for people to customize their house," Pardee Homes' Clauser said. "We try to design the third garage so the house can grow into it." To that end, some new homes have a single-car garage separate from the double garage.

Calabasas homeowner Mark Sikand, 51, has been expanding into his 800-square-foot garage since buying his 30-year-old Spanish-style home in 2005.

Sikand's yearlong garage-space odyssey cost \$5,000 in paint, electrical work and lighting, plus a \$12,000 makeover from Pasadena-based garage storage and organization firm Garage Envy (www.garageenvy.com).

Garage Envy systems range from \$1,800 to \$30,000, with the average makeover costing \$7,800.

With its texture-coated floor, which resembles polished granite, and elaborate cabinets and wall systems, Sikand said his four-car garage is the envy of the neighborhood.

"We are the only house on the block with an organized garage," he said.

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For Sikand and his wife, Lynette, 45, a finished garage and the utility of an extra 800 square feet of living space is important.

"We are in it so often," he said.

Although the Sikands use their garage space primarily to house their fleet of autos, only 12% of the nation's homeowners actually park a car in one. And many people can barely get through the door.

This is not news to Los Angeles-based John Trosko, self-styled organizing expert and founder of OrganizingLA (www.organizingla.blogspot.com).

Although garages might be evolving, Trosko said, homeowners are not.

"God forbid Southern Californians use the garage for its intended use: parking a car," he said. "They use them as a sort of waystation for life. They aggressively throw stuff in them in order to avoid decisions."

Trosko recently helped Los Feliz homeowner Steve Andrews reclaim his two-car garage.

Andrews, 33, had given up parking his Range Rover there. Though far more valuable than the tools, paint and college memorabilia collecting dust in the space, the Rover sat outside.

"It drove me nuts," Andrews said. "But it seemed hopeless."

In July, he hired Trosko, and after about half a day's work, the Rover was put where it belonged.

"It's wonderful," Andrews said. Still, if he buys again, Andrews would look for a home with a three-car garage.

"With a trend toward more leisure toys, you have to put them somewhere," he said. "And there's something to be said for the freedom of having more storage space."

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