

An aerial, top-down view of a car's metal chassis. The trunk lid is prominent in the center, reflecting a vibrant, colorful cityscape with orange, yellow, and blue tones. The surrounding body panels are dark, with various mechanical components and bolts visible. The overall lighting is dramatic, highlighting the metallic textures and the reflection on the trunk.

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Custom Garages

From practical space to showplace

BY FRED SANDSMARK

PARK PLACE
When determining a game plan for your redefined garage, be sure to consider whether or not you want items to be accessible on hooks and shelves or hidden from view in a cabinet.

WHEN SHE BROUGHT HER new Acura MDX home, Joanne Jones knew she had a problem. "We have a small garage, and the MDX is a fairly good-sized car," says the Huntington, New York, mother of two. "We could barely get the car in, because there was so much stuff in the way. We needed to do something—it was ridiculous."

So Jones called in professionals to remake her garage. For around \$7,000, they laid down a tile floor and hung racks on the walls to accommodate the family's golf clubs, garden tools, and fleet of bicycles. Jones also unloaded some unwanted stuff. "Now you can actually walk into the garage and get into the car," Jones says with a grin.

Jones isn't alone in wanting her garage to work better. Americans spent \$500 million on garage cleanup and storage products in 2004, according to the Atlanta-based Peachtree Consulting Group, and a growing number of companies provide garage products and installation, design assistance, and organizing advice.

Several forces drive this market. Sometimes, the garage doubles as workshop, playroom, or den. "Some guys just want a place to hide and smoke a cigar," says Marc Shuman, president of GarageTek, a nationwide chain of garage organizers. "But the majority are fastidious about their homes, and want their garage not to look like a giant junk drawer."

From the Ground Up

Garage makeovers often start with the floor. Two treatments are popular for covering bare concrete: epoxy paint and modular floor tiles. Epoxy paint is attractive, hard, thick, and durable. Modular floor tiles, such as RaceDeck, can be installed in a variety of patterns, including checkerboards and borders. Both treatments hide concrete cracks and stains and make a garage floor easy to clean.

Next up are the walls. Many garage-product companies sell slotted storage panels with a variety of hooks, baskets, shelves, and cabinets that lock into them. "There are hooks for everything you can imagine," says Shuman. "Golf clubs, bicycles,



tennis rackets, rollerblades, skateboards, surfboards, fishing rods, you name it." The downside of wall systems is that they put stuff on display. "People want to conceal the junk," Shuman says. That's why cabinets are among his best-selling products.

Garage cabinets are often sturdier, taller, and deeper than kitchen cabinets. Some are made of industrial-style materials—Whirlpool's Gladiator Garageworks products sport diamond plate surfaces—but others have a warmer finish. "People can extend their decorating theme from the kitchen into the garage," says Doug Arndt, president of The Complete Garage, a garage-products retailer. "Half of what we do is wood-type cabinets or storage walls," he notes. Impervious work surfaces and specialized tool storage are popular.

Once the floors and walls are done, the ceiling beckons. Hoist and hook systems allow empty airspace to serve as storage for bikes, boats, and car-top carriers.

Ceiling-mounted platforms that hang over a car's hood are another option.

Beyond Storage

Garage upgrades also can include built-in vacuum cleaners, heating and cooling systems, and custom lighting. And since garages have long been home to an extra refrigerator or freezer, appliances are now designed to withstand an uninsulated garage's temperature extremes.

Often the biggest rooms in the house, garages also double as party rooms, Arndt says. "Every spring we get half a dozen calls saying, 'My kid's graduating in three weeks. Can you come do my garage?'" But Shuman says most customers want to spiff up the garage for everyday use.

That was Jones's motivation. "I've always wanted to be an organized person," she says. "I just never had the right tools in my garage." ☺

Fred Sandmark cowrote the "Heart and Home" chapter of How to Organize Just About Everything (Free Press, 2004).

Spiff Up Your Space

Home shows, car shows, and home-improvement centers are good places to check out garage-organizing products. Other resources:

- **THE COMPLETE GARAGE** (866/892-0200; www.completegarage.com) has 14 showrooms in the United States and sells many products online. In its franchise areas, local dealers give free estimates and advice.
- **GARAGETEK** (866/664-2724; www.garagetek.com) has more than 70 locations nationwide. Its representatives provide free estimates and 3-D renderings of a garage remodel. Price averages \$7,500 for a two-car garage, including floors; accessories range from basic hooks for less than \$10 to floor-to-ceiling locking cabinets running upwards of \$250.



GET IT DONE
Customize your space with relative ease—renovations can be completed in a matter of hours or a couple of days.



- **RACEDECK FLOORING** (800/457-0174; www.racedeck.com) is sold through regional dealers and online. Cost begins at about \$4 per square foot, uninstalled.
- **WHIRLPOOL GLADIATOR GARAGEWORKS** (866/342-4089; www.gladiatorgw.com) sells a variety of garage accessories, cabinets, and appliances, ranging from a \$10 ladder hook to the \$1,100 Gladiator Freezerator.