

**LOCAL ADDRESS**

Elizabeth Razzi

*Garage Space, the New Frontier*

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**H**ave you spent any quality time in your garage lately? Or is yours just a cluttered, sort-of-smelly place that you shove through on your way to the driveway—where your cars are always parked for want of room inside?

All that clutter is the sign of a problem waiting to be fixed.

Home builders, remodelers and specialized garage-organization companies see that problem as an opportunity to sell you a solution. They have plenty, including more square footage and garage-themed cabinetry. You can even find a fridge specially built for the garage, so you can always have a cold drink at hand when you're working on your wheels.

Around some homes these days, the amount of space devoted to the garage is big, indeed. Three-car garages were included in 20 percent of new homes built in 2005, according to the National Association of Home Builders. Another 64 percent of new homes had two-car garages.

The space is used to house vehicles, of course. But that's only part of the burden borne by today's garages. Especially since basement space is often consumed by family rooms, home theaters or other finished spaces, the garage is expected to accommodate much of the stuff we used to put downstairs. The garage is now the place for lawn mowers, tools, off-season garden furniture, bicycles, boats, too-good-to-throw-out stuff that is waiting to be fixed, plus the booty from our latest Costco run. It's no wonder cars get squeezed out.

When badly designed, a large garage can overwhelm a house. Is there any aspect of cul-de-sac suburbia more disheartening than a street lined with bland garage doors, each with an afterthought of a house attached to the rear? Planners and architects sensitive to that blight usually try to play down the garage, especially if it's a large one, to its proper role as an accessory to the home.

"The focus on the garage and the time spent designing it and considering it has increased a lot since we started our company," said



BY ELIZABETH RAZZI — THE WASHINGTON POST

**A model garage at Coles Run Manor in Manassas has floor-to-ceiling upgrades including one you don't see here: a flat-screen TV. The options add up to \$19,500.**

Josh Baker, president of BOWA Builders, a McLean remodeler and custom-home builder that has been in business 19 years. "We virtually never have a garage that faces the front of the house," he said. He prefers to put it to the side or rear of the house, where it won't compete for attention. And he noted that construction of a large garage is typically as involved and as expensive as construction of a small house. Indeed, his company often includes finished living space above the garage.

Baker said clients often outfit the living space with a grade of cabinetry and finishes similar to that in the main house. "A lot of these garages almost look more like guest cottages. And the space above the garage is used as a guest house, home office or in-law suite."

The garage BOWA recently built for Renée and Ted Austell, who live in the River Bend area of Great Falls, is big enough to accommodate their three cars, each with the doors fully opened, plus a gaggle of motorcycles, bicycles and baby strollers. It has its own heating system, and there's attractive

wainscoting on the walls. The upstairs attic has dormer windows, skylights and electrical wiring, but for now is unfinished. The couple may eventually finish it for use as an office or nanny suite.

The garage is connected to their house by a 90-foot-long covered breezeway. "We certainly didn't want the garage — it's large — to be a focal point when you drive up to the house," Renée said. Instead, the three structures — house, breezeway and garage — frame an elegant courtyard made of tumbled-concrete pavers.

Production home builders, as well, are starting to pay more attention to the garage as a selling point.

The garage on display in a Stanley Martin model home at Coles Run Manor in Manassas is packed with nearly as many fancy upgrades as the kitchen. Their "tricked out garage" option (available at the company's developments in Northern Virginia and Southern Maryland) includes raised-diamond pattern rubber-like floor protectors; a work bench; storage cabinets; tool racks; slatted wall coverings that accommodate a

variety of hooks and baskets for storage; ceiling-mounted bicycle hoists; and even a 20-inch, wall-mounted flat-screen TV. Buyers can choose elements a la carte or sign up for the full slate of options for \$19,500.

Houses at the Coles Run Manor development start at \$445,990, and they're offering a \$55,000 credit toward options and \$15,000 toward closing costs.

You can "trick out" your existing garage, of course, assuming you have the energy to haul all that old junk out. Potomac Garage Solutions, which has sales offices in Rockville and Fredericksburg, is among the companies that can outfit your garage with accessories sporting a NASCAR-like flair. (A checkerboard of raised-diamond flooring goes a long way toward that effect while protecting the concrete from leaked oil and road salt. Flooring for a two-car garage typically costs \$2,000 to \$3,000, according to Zev Pomerance, the company's director of sales.) Potomac Garage Solutions is a distributor for the Gladiator GarageWorks line of metal cabinets and appliances sold by Whirlpool.

Who knew there even was such a thing as a refrigerator specially designed for the garage? Gladiator makes the Chillerator Garage Refrigerator, which is Energy Star rated for efficiency and is designed to handle the wide variations in temperature and humidity usually found in a garage. Potomac Garage Solutions sells it for \$999. For \$1,100 they sell the Freezerator, specially designed for garage use. It allows you to turn the temperature in the freezer compartment down to ordinary refrigerator temperatures, to better accommodate your stockpile of beverages. Both come in an oh-so-manly diamond-plate metal finish.

Instead of wondering where you can put your car, maybe by February you'll be able to watch the Daytona 500 on the flat screen in your garage.

E-mail Elizabeth Razzi at [razzie@washpost.com](mailto:razzie@washpost.com).