

Tricking Out the Garage

BY CHARLES BICKFORD

Since the days of the Model-T Ford, the American garage has become an integral part of the house, sheltering our beloved cars in addition to providing a refuge for those escaping domestic bliss. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, we own about 65 million garages. And given everyone's interest in revitalizing their real-estate investment, those garages represent space waiting to be refined—if we can find the space. Let's face it, most of us are hard-pressed to find anything in the garage because it's stuffed with paper bags, trashcans, paint cans, soccer balls, baseballs, bikes, scooters, lumber, 100-lb. sacks of pet food, fertilizer, rakes, hoes, shovels, gloves, the odd chair awaiting a new finish, and the car, if it still fits. We know who we are.

In the past few years, an entire industry has sprung up to service this neglected part of the house. Homeowners are turning to the garage for their next remodel: It's less expensive than a new kitchen, and it can improve the garage's appearance along with its storage capacity and organization. Contractors who specialize in garages report that remodels average between \$2,000 and \$10,000, depending on the region. It's work that many homeowners can tackle, too, although the fixtures may be a little hard to find. Whether you're a builder or a homeowner, there's a lot going on in the garage: lines of cabinets made just for garages, storage racks, stylish slotted wall panels that replace the old brown pegboard, and more flooring choices than you'd think possible ("Garage goods," pp. 54-55).

Choose durable cabinetry

Because many people use the garage as their regular entrance to the house, most have a



There are plenty of new options for storage and organization; you might even reclaim some parking space.



CABINETS: HIGH AND DRY STORAGE

Because the garage is open to the outside, cabinets should be weather resistant and tough-skinned, and not get in the way when the garage is hosed out or swept.

Plastic

Plano, Stanley, GarageTek

Pros: Waterproof, inexpensive, readily available

Cons: Not as sturdy as wood, potentially susceptible to temperature extremes, limited sizes, appearance

Approximate price
\$10 to \$70 per lin. ft.



GarageTek

Melamine/plywood

GSC, Slide-Lok, Logical Cabinetry, house brands

Pros: Sturdy, easy to assemble and install, many sizes and configurations available, attractive

Cons: Not waterproof

Approximate price \$50 to \$80 per lin. ft.
\$150 to \$180 per lin. ft. (installed)

Midlevel steel

Gladiator, Sears, GarageTek

Pros: Strong, weather-resistant, stylish appearance

Cons: Pricey

Approximate price \$100 to \$140 per lin. ft.



Gladiator

High-end steel

Lista, Baldhead

Pros: Durable finish, heavy-gauge steel, choice of colors, excellent hardware

Cons: Very pricey, not readily available

Approximate price \$200+ per lin. ft.



Baldhead

Photos: Courtesy of the manufacturers

Detailing for style, too. A typical garage remodel like this one might include a colorful floor of interlocking panels by RaceDeck, melamine cabinets by Slide-Lok, wall-storage panels by storeWall, and Lally columns with a protective wrapping of manila rope.

WALLS: USING VERTICAL SPACE

Wall storage has been made more efficient with the advent of panelized systems and adjustable hanging accessories. Hooks, shelves, and baskets can store all shapes and sizes.

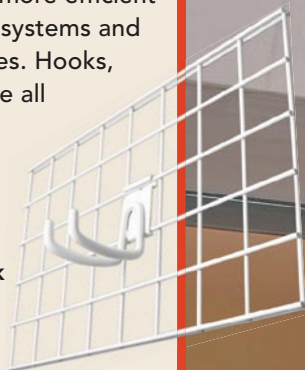
Wire grids

GarageGrids, Gridwall, Schulte Storage, StorageTrak

Pros: Easily installed, readily available

Cons: Fewer wall-attachment points, doesn't hide wall

Approximate price \$3 to \$6 per sq. ft.



GarageGrids

PVC slotted walls

GarageTek, storeWall, Gladiator

Pros: Waterproof, adjustable fixtures, covers wall, DIY installation

Cons: Accepts only slotted-wall hardware

Approximate price \$6 to \$11 per sq. ft.

GarageTek



vested interest in minimizing sprawl. Open shelving will do the job, but cabinets can conceal storage neatly behind closed doors. "Many homeowners consider their remade garages an extension of the kitchen or living room and would no sooner put bare-steel shelving in their garage than they would in their library," says Doug Arendt, president of the Complete Garage, a Midwest remodeling chain.

Available in styles ranging from bare-bones plastic to powder-coated steel, cabinets should resist moisture and the occasional bang or scrape, and still be able to hold all manner of stuff. Look for a UL-rating of their load capacities. They also must be mounted above the floor in anticipation of seasonal flooding or spring cleaning.

If you go to your local home center, you're likely to find plastic cabinets; manufacturers include Stanley and Plano. Completely waterproof, they're usually the least-expensive choice. Most have adjustable metal shelving, and some have locking doors. The



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problem with plastic cabinets is that some evidence suggests they can crack if they get too cold and sag if they get too hot. As mentioned before, many homeowners won't buy them because they don't go with the rest of the house. GarageTek is trying to overcome that perception with a higher-quality (and higher-priced) line of plastic cabinets that hang from the company's slotted wall system.

Many companies also offer generic-looking melamine cabinets—sturdy, easy to clean, and relatively inexpensive. While melamine isn't the best choice for an indoor/outdoor location like a garage, its lower cost may offset the risk of potential failures. Move another rung up the ladder, and you'll find cabinets that are made of melamine with MDF doors and drawers. The cabinets often are equipped with adjustable plastic legs, European-style hardware, and a choice of finishes and configurations. One of the most popular lines is made by Slide-Lok; the cabinet carcasses are made from MDF and plywood joined with sliding dovetails. The face frames are veneered plywood, and the doors are sealed MDF. Slide-Lok offers a wide range of sizes that can be stacked into different configurations, and its Web site has handy design software that lets customers play first and buy later.

Steel cabinets are the top of the line for garage storage. GarageTek makes a steel version of its cabinets, and Gladiator has made a big splash with a line of cabinets that look like they're first cousins to a pickup truck. A little pricier than wood cabinets, Gladiator's line has full-extension drawer slides, adjustable shelves, casters, and a style that's aimed squarely at the mechanic in the family. (Gladiator even offers a garage refrigerator, decked out in diamond plate, for about \$1,000.)

There are a host of imitators out there, too, typically melamine boxes with steel doors and drawers. If you want to spend serious money, go all the way to manufacturers like Baldhead or Lista, who use hammered, heavy-gauge galvanized steel and powder-coated finishes on cabinets and tool chests that cost upward of \$200 a linear foot.

Wall storage: not your father's pegboard

Most of the manufacturers who make garage fixtures came into the business from the retail-display market and know how to make good use of walls. Now, instead of pegboard or nails jutting out of the garage walls, wire grids or slotted panels can hold any number

of hooks, racks, baskets, or shelves that can be moved easily from one place to another. Made of epoxy-coated steel, the wire grids usually hang from clips bolted or screwed to the wall framing and are sold with a variety of hooks, shelves, and baskets.

The original slat-wall-type panels were made of particleboard for retail display. When brought to the garage, particleboard failed, so these days the most popular panels are made of plastic. (A newer entry into the field, Grid Iron, offers a panel made from steel.) GarageTek, storeWall, and Gladiator all make a PVC-based panel that's screwed to the wall, usually on 6-in. to 8-in. centers, which gives the panels a stronger wall connection than the grid system. Each company's product is slightly different. StoreWall's panels are 15 in. wide, and the others are 12 in. wide; storeWall and GarageTek are compatible with other manufacturer's accessories, while Gladiator is not.

The average homeowner or builder can buy the storeWall and Gladiator products,

Doing the work yourself?

Since you're interested in a garage makeover, you've probably done enough research to whet your appetite, only you can't seem to get beyond the appetizers. If you want to install the fixtures yourself, you'll find that some product lines (GarageTek or Garage Storage Cabinets, for instance) are available only through licensed installers. Other installers may claim to have an exclusive on a particular product. However, spend a little time on the Internet, and you'll discover a number of sites that sell products such as RaceDeck, Gladiator, Slide-Lok, and storeWall. Some of them even offer free shipping, but be aware that usually means they've raised the price to cover themselves. Also realize that some warranties evaporate if you don't employ an installer licensed by the manufacturer. Locally, The Home Depot, Lowe's, and other big-box stores carry relatively inexpensive fixtures and cabinets; Sears and Lowe's stock the Gladiator line as well as their own storage products. Many large independent lumberyards carry some of the same products, as well as higher-quality products.



FLOORS: COSMETICS FOR CONCRETE

All garages have a concrete floor, but oil stains, spalling, and cracks can be unsightly and make the floor hard to clean.

Epoxy

Rust-Oleum, Sherwin-Williams, Benjamin Moore

Pros: Extremely durable, easy to clean

Cons: Slab must be in good shape, difficult to install

Approximate price
\$5 to \$6 per sq. ft.

Platform (interlocking tiles)

Gladiator, GarageTek, RaceDeck

Pros: Color choices, easy to install and to clean, not permanent

Cons: Plastic

Approximate price
\$2.50 to \$5 per sq. ft.

RaceDeck

Roll flooring

Gladiator

Gladiator, G-Floors

Pros: Durable, heavy vinyl; up to 12 ft. wide, installs easily, easy to clean

Cons: Limited color choices, doesn't hide slab imperfections

Approximate price \$2.50 per sq. ft.



but GarageTek products are available only through licensed installers. GarageTek also recommends that the entire wall be covered; the other manufacturers (and many installers) recognize that the middle third of the wall is the most valuable space.

There is also a dizzying array of accessories made for every gardening and sporting activity known to man, woman, or beast. Interestingly, Dean Coogan of Garage Finishing Systems in Farmington, Conn., revealed that many of these hooks and brackets, especially those offered by The Accessories Group, are made with a small loop at the top and bottom so that you can dispense with the

panels and simply screw each accessory to the framing.

Flooring you can park on

Of all the fixtures made for the garage, you might think that flooring would be last on the list of needed improvements, but you'd be in the minority. "No one wants to see a cracked and stained concrete floor after they've just remodeled the rest of the garage," Coogan says. There are three types of flooring for the garage. All conceal the concrete slab, some are more permanent than others, and all three can set you back as much as a new wood floor. Platform

GARAGE GOODS

Slide-Lok www.slide-lok.com • GSC www.garagestoragecabinets.com • Logical Cabinetry www.logicalcabinetry.com
StorageTrak <http://storagetrak.com> • RaceDeck www.racedeck.com • GarageGrids www.garagegrids.com
The Accessories Group www.theaccessoriesgroup.com • Better Life Technology (G-Floors) www.bltlc.com
Stanley www.stanleytools.com • storeWall www.storewall.com • OverAll Storage www.overallstorage.com

floors made of interlocking tiles are the most colorful and are easy to install. Typically 12 in. square, the tiles are made of PVC or polypropylene, easily support the weight of a car, can bridge small slab imperfections, and are available in a wide variety of nonskid textures and colors. One of the attractive aspects of these tiles is that you always can rearrange or change them if the checkerboard scheme makes you dizzy.

Another flooring option that's easy to install is a heavy vinyl mat that covers the entire floor. Sold in 8-ft.- to 12-ft.-wide rolls, the mats are textured and immune to a long list of common chemical and petroleum spills. They often are sold with snap-in borders that keep the mats in place. The color choices are Henry Ford-esque—gray or black.

Epoxy floors are the most durable, the most involved, and the most expensive. From a one-coat application that goes on like paint to a seven-layer job that includes a quartz-sand texture, epoxy floors are a labor-intensive process that can yield an industrial-strength, showroom-quality surface that is twice as hard as the concrete below it. The industry-standard process involves a primer, multiple coats of epoxy, a layer of texture (sand or urethane chips), and one or two coats of a UV-blocking clear urethane. (Epoxy floors yellow if exposed to sunlight.) Most installers now use an acrylic-based epoxy that's as strong as the solvent-based variety and less toxic.

The best candidate for an epoxy floor is a new concrete slab that has cured completely. Although the process will fix cracks smaller than 1/8 in., larger cracks, spalling, and slab imperfections have to be fixed first. Oily floors may be exempt; others have to be scarified before they can be coated. Moisture issues are also a big concern. Needless to say, the potential for extra remediation cost is great, and it's the primary reason that drives people to plastic floors. Installing an epoxy floor is the one task that nearly everyone is willing to sub out.

Using space overhead

Now that you've filled the cabinets and festooned the garage walls with hanging stor-

age, what's next? For starters, there's all that dead space above the garage doors when they're open; you could use storage units bolted to the rafters and made by HyLoft, OverAll Storage, or Onrax, among others. They come in sizes that range from 2 ft. by 4 ft. to 4 ft. by 8 ft. A 4-ft. by 4-ft. unit will, when properly installed, hold about 250 lb., depending on the make.

Then there are those pesky bicycles. Makers of wall-storage products all have bike hooks that hang from the wall; others offer an adjustable aluminum pole that spans between floor and ceiling and holds two bikes. The most intriguing option is a man-

ual hoist made by Racor that costs about \$40; make sure that you cleat the line securely before you go inside. Motorcycles and cars also can be stored up out of the way, courtesy of products like Loft-It (made by HyLoft) or Rotary Lift, who also make the Revolution Lift (photo below). Figure on spending around \$2,500. Drive onto the lift, raise it up, then work on the car's undercarriage or park a second car beneath. The price hovers around \$4,000. □

Charles Bickford is a senior editor at *Fine Homebuilding*. Photos by the author, except where noted.

▲ STORAGE IN THE AIR

- Many garages have high ceilings and lots of unused space. **1.** A prime candidate for storage is the space above the garage doors, which you can take advantage of with storage platforms that are bolted to the rafters.
- **2.** Vehicles can go, too. If you've got the space, you can stack your cars with a four-post lift or use the lift to do your own maintenance.
- **3.** Motorcycle lifts put bikes, mowers, or ATVs out of the way when they're not being used.

Onrax
www.onrax.com



Revolution Lifts
www.revolutionlifts.com



Loft-It
www.hyloft.com

Gladiator www.gladiatorgw.com • Plano www.planomolding.com • GarageTek www.garagetek.com • Grid Iron www.gridironusa.com
 Lista International Corp. www.listaintl.com • Baldhead Cabinet www.baldheadcabinets.com • Schulte Storage www.schultestorage.com
 Rust-Oleum Epoxy www.rustoleum.com • Sherwin-Williams www.sherwinwilliams.com • Racor www.racor.com • Sears www.sears.com
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