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Garage can be well organized, attractive space

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No room in the garage for a car? It's stuffed with stuff? Ashamed to open the door because the neighbors might see the mess?

It doesn't have to be that way. It is possible to transform a garage into something to be proud of. "The garage is the entryway to your home," said Linda Fiore Ceolin, creative director at Garage Living, a Toronto-based company with a franchise in Dania Beach. "Why have it be a jungle?"

The problem may be partly because South Floridians don't have basements. "In South Florida, garages are mostly used for storage — mostly junk people haven't gotten around to sorting and getting rid of," said Steve Weinberg of Garage Transformation and Organization in Hialeah Gardens.

SET A GOAL

"First decide what you're trying to accomplish," said Ryan McCue of Alpha Garage Solutions in Weston. "Will it be just for storage, will it be an extension of your home, or will it be a showplace?"

The first part is the toughest. "Take everything out of the garage and purge," said Mitch Hollifield of GarageTek in Davie.

"Engage in D&D," Weinberg said. (Translation: dump and donate.) "If you're not using something, now is the time to discard it."

"Just because you may need it 'someday' is no reason to keep it," said professional organizer Beth Levin, owner of The Closet Queen in Miami.

Sort items into categories like sporting goods, tools, toys and gardening equipment. "Then when you put things back into the garage, you can put them into different zones so you'll know exactly where everything is," Levin said.



An attractive, well-kept yard will give a potential buyer a good first impression. (Courtesy of Christopher Zoller)

TAKE INVENTORY

Take an inventory of all the items that will be kept and think about the best ways to store them, said Jonathan Seltzer, general manager of the California Closets store in Miami Gardens. "Get everything off the floor," he said. "What can you hang on the walls and what can go into a cabinet? Put the things you use the most in the most accessible places."

Pull the car into the garage and measure the area that's left. "Plan to have space all the way around the car," Fiore Ceolin said.

Storage methods vary and depend on budget, the size of items and how neat the homeowner is likely to be when putting things away long after the transformation is complete. Options include hooks attached to slatted walls, shelving, closed cabinets and overhead racks.

How heavy are the items? "Be sure your system can handle the weight," McCue said.

HANGING SPACE

Tools, bicycles and gardening equipment can often be hung on hooks so they are easily accessible. Fiore Ceolin suggested hanging recreational items like tennis racquets and surfboards that conjure the idea of fun rather than work. "Some people hang racing photos or photos of their own cars," she said.

SHELVES

Weinberg recommends storing infrequently used items in plastic boxes, sliding them onto shelving horizontally and then stacking one on top of the other. "Sturdy shelving is the most economical way to store rarely-used items," he said.

Items used more often can, or course, be put on shelves arranged closer together without stacking. Create layers. "Mount a bar under the shelves with hooks," McCue said.

CABINETS

Closed cabinets can have a variety of shelving and drawer configurations inside them. "A drawer

gives you an open palette so you can see what's there," Fiore Ceolin said.

"Look at the thickness of the cabinet walls and shelves, and how it will be anchored to the wall," McCue said. Wood studs and metal studs require different kinds of fastening, he added.

Cabinets with a stainless steel or black finish can create a sleek, modern look. Bright hues can be playful and eye-catching. "You can get colors like blue, green, yellow and red," Hollifield said.

Some homeowners choose cabinets to match their vehicles. Seltzer recalled a homeowner who loved his red and white Mini Cooper so much that he installed cabinets in the same colors.

Another possibility: "You can coordinate your cabinet colors with the home's interior and make the garage echo those design decisions," Fiore Ceolin said.

Cabinets can be a good choice for homeowners who tend to be cavalier about putting things away

neatly. "You can hide a lot behind closed doors," Seltzer said. "It can be a complete mess inside and it will look nice when the doors are closed."

One caveat: "If you have a one-car garage and you put in a cabinet, you may not be able to open the cabinet door without pulling your car out," Weinberg said.

OVERHEAD STORAGE

Overhead storage, especially for items used once or twice a year like holiday decorations, is another option. Pull-down racks and lofts work best in garages with ceilings that are at least 10 feet high, Hollifield said. But, he added, it is possible to put a loft in a corner even with a ceiling as low as eight feet if the location won't interfere with the car. "It can be a very flexible space," he said.

Weinberg will install drop-down racks only in garages where he can see the roof beams, because the rack must be screwed into them to avoid the possibility of the unit

falling down. Drilling must be done carefully. "If you start drilling and don't know where to drill, you can drill into electrical wires or plumbing," he said.

Have a fear of heights? An overhead rack or loft will probably require climbing a ladder. "Some people are confident getting onto a ladder, and some aren't," Hollifield said.

FLOORING

Coating the floor with epoxy gives the garage a finished look. "It's a rapidly growing trend," Weinberg said. "It makes the garage look like part of the house."

While it is possible for a do-it-yourselfer to apply epoxy to the garage floor, a professional will first grind down the cement so the epoxy is absorbed into it, Weinberg said. A DIYer may not have the tools for that.

A properly installed epoxy floor should last many years. But if the material is not applied properly, hot automobile tires can cause it to lift, McCue cautioned.

Epoxy floors are available in a variety of colors and patterns. "It can look like terrazzo or granite," Weinberg added. "There are no seams or grout lines, so everything stays clean."

"Try to create symmetry," McCue said. "If the cabinets are blue, you can get a floor with a blue flake in it."

"Some people choose a color to match a vehicle they're passionate about," Fiore Ceolin said.

Avid sports fans sometimes install the logos of their favorite teams on their garage floors, Hollifield said. Others go even further: He once finished a garage floor in a blue that mimicked the ocean, with a sandy beach illustration at the edge and a foaming wave between. "Most garages are utilitarian," he said. "But some people want it to be a showplace."



Cabinets can keep clutter out of sight. (Courtesy California Closets)



Bright yellow cabinets set against gray slatted walls lend pizzazz to this garage. (Courtesy GarageTek)



Black cabinets and a charcoal floor provide an impressive backdrop for any car. (Courtesy Garage Living)



New flooring can dress up a garage. (Courtesy Alpha Garage Solutions)