



©Volvo Cars

The Modern Garage Makes Space for More

The quest for organized storage and space for pandemic reprieve spurred interest in transforming garages, but nowadays the sky's the limit on how the space is used and looks.



August 23, 2022

Key Takeaways:

- **Two key factors—the pandemic and the search for more storage—have influenced current garage trends.**
- **Garage space isn't just for cars anymore. It's now a space for recreation, solitude, working out and a home office in many cases.**
- **Trends for the garage also include sustainability, which means EV stations for either the current owner or to improve resale value.**

When it comes to a garage, most clients won't require the space to house 12 cars like a recent client of Los Angeles architecture firm KAA Design Group. In fact, the client himself didn't need that much space. He owned only two cars but was thinking about resale value on his home—knowing car collectors are in abundance in L.A.—when he opted for the extra-large garage.

He's currently using the extra space as an art studio, says Grant C. Kirkpatrick, KAA architect and founding partner.

The need for flexible garage space, however, is on the rise. Before the pandemic, most homeowners wanted and needed less. They required space to park two cars and room for some seasonal items or tools. However, lifestyle changes and pandemic-fueled hobbies mean a garage needs a little more flexibility to meet demand.

Changes Influencing Garage Space

During the pandemic, many people took up outdoor hobbies, says Laurel Vernazza, home design expert at The Plan Collection. As a result, space to store outdoor gear such as kayaks, paddleboards, golf clubs and bicycles tops the list of garage needs.

The pandemic also fueled requests for more quiet spaces away from the main part of the home, and garages sometimes served as a retreat, a home office or a gym.

Though it may not [rank as high](#) as the desire for an updated kitchen or owner's bathroom, having a finished garage with flexible space has moved up on many buyers' wish lists.

Converting Garage Space

One advantage of converting a garage, especially when it's attached to the home, is that it is typically an easy and affordable transformation. The space is often already outfitted with electrical outlets and weatherproofing, says New York City-based architect Victor Body-Lawson of Body Lawson Associates. "An attached garage is also easy to heat or cool," he says.

A detached garage, however, is a bit of a challenge to convert, Body-Lawson says. "Expenses increase with big-ticket items of new windows, insulation, new floors, interior finishes and plumbing," he says.

How often buyers undertake these types of changes often depends on a variety of factors: climate, property size, budget, age of the house and what neighboring homes offer.

An Overview of Demand for Garage Space

In historic mining town-turned-ski village Telluride, Colo., adding a garage can raise the home's sale price by 20% or more, says salesperson Anne Brit Ostlund, with Mountain Rose Realty.

In contrast, the new nearby town of Mountain Village features many homes with a minimum of a three-car garage to make space for off-road vehicles, golf carts and town or sports cars, Ostlund says. Larger garages might add a 10% payback for resale, she says.

In still other communities such as Maplewood, N.J., having a garage is so important that removing one for whatever reason isn't allowed unless it's replaced. In the town, which has 25,000 residents, only 18 houses lack a garage, says Stephanie Mallios, a salesperson with Compass.

Besides functionality, Kirkpatrick says aesthetics are important for a garage. "Since our clients are most often coming home via their garage, it should be beautiful," he says.

One trend is certain for new-home construction as well: Fewer new houses come without a garage of some kind. Developer Jeff Benach of Chicago-based Lexington Homes says he no longer brings to market a single-family house or townhouse without a garage that offers more than a single bay. He also won't design one with a tandem layout, where cars line up behind one another.

Vernazza concurs that it's rare for a new home to have room for just one car.

What Matters Most

Nowadays, want outweighs need when it comes to features that pique buyer interest. A finished, clean garage is likely to offer an uptick in value by presenting buyers with the plus of one less project to tackle, says Aaron Cash, founder of Toronto-based Garage Living, a franchise that transforms garages.

Clean and Uncluttered

The first step is to declutter the garage as you would any other part of the house rather than make it a dumping ground, says Cash. Though the garage was once a space to house dirtier objects like lawn maintenance equipment, homeowners would rather see a clean space as well. Montgomeryville, Pa.-based The Closet Works recommends using an antimicrobial or antibacterial finish on surfaces for cleanliness.

Door Styles

Nicer, more durable, and lower maintenance doors, sometimes constructed from galvanized metal that doesn't rust or less costly vinyl, are preferred these days. Styles range from matching the rest of the house to setting a different vibe. For Mallios' new two-car detached garage, she veered from her home's Tudor style for mahogany carriage house doors and stucco facade, making it "more charming than my house," she says.

The good news is that the garage door shortage, which hampered upgrades and new-home construction during pandemic supply chain delays, is lessening, according to Scott Balogh, owner of Aero Garage Door in Libertyville, Ill. "Backlogs have gone from one year to 14 weeks, though delays remain for certain popular colors, styles and materials. Among the more popular looks are wood tones that match a front door," he says.

Garage door extras are also popular, including exterior lights, smart features used from a smartphone, and automatic controls since it's more common for people to use their garage as an entry and exit from the house, Cash says. Cameras are also becoming more common, which helps with package delivery verification, Balogh says.

Windows

Windows have become popular, particularly in the upper third of the price range of garages, says Dan Timm, a salesperson with Baird & Warner in Libertyville, Ill. A cost-effective way to include them is to have them on the garage's top panel or one just below, he says. "It breaks up what is otherwise a monolithic slab," Timm says. But, in some houses and front-loading garages, they may be placed on a side.

Interior Floor and Walls

Those who want to spiff up their garages may start with a floor coating that's similar to epoxy and makes the garage easier to clean, says Cash. A variety of colors and textures are available, he says. Designer Claire Ownby of Scottsdale, Ariz.-based Ownby Design often chooses from porcelain wood tiles, industrial carpet tiles or polished concrete. "It really depends on the aesthetics of the environment, but we are typically treating the floors with a more affordable and durable version of the interior of the house," she says. Gray still ranks high in popularity since it's neutral and hides dirt, according to Closet Works.

Organized Storage

Storage and organization are top of mind for all spaces in the home, including the garage. Adding slats and other systems along walls or installing cabinets, drawers and bins, some with locks to keep out children, are popular options to add intentional storage space. Some also like to add overhead racks that they can reach with a pulley system or ladder. Having good visibility by adding more lighting than the typical single bulb makes finding stuff easier, Cash says.

Sal Graci of River Avenue Digital, which handles Closet Works' marketing, makes other recommendations: leave empty space for future expansion, install only adjustable systems so changes can be made and store stuff off the ground to leave room for cars and avoid damage if flooding occurs.

EV Charging Stations

As [interest in EV expands](#), garages need to accommodate home charging. More of Case's clients ask to install one station or at least provide the rough-in for work to be finished later, and the vast majority of newly constructed houses are including one, he says. When Mallios built her new garage, she installed two.

Car Lifts

Commonplace in commercial garages, these have become more popular in residential and allow an owner or potential future owner to have a large car collection without adding square footage, Ownby says.

BONUS: Garage or an Extension of the Indoor Space?

The garage is frequently becoming an entertainment destination with the clever moniker of the "gar-bar" or "new speakeasy," Mallios says. One house Mallios recently sold at 18% above the asking price had a four-car garage with such a space. It helped its owners survive the pandemic, she says.

For some KAA Design clients, the garage becomes a man cave or equivalent. "The pride in their vehicle or vehicles and the car culture results in a desire for a garage that brings it all together—car display, workshop, lounge and bar, entertainment, etc. for solo reflection or friends and parties," Kirkpatrick says.

A client of Timm's installed a TV, sound system, color-changing LED lights, epoxy floor and collection of vintage car grills with lights inside the headlight spaces.

Also becoming more common is to convert part of the garage into an accessory dwelling unit so it can be occupied by family, grown children, college students or renters as home prices and rents rise, says architect Body-Lawson. Some ADUs also become offices for new businesses, he says.