



Financial adviser Tom West converted his Maryland garage into an art studio during the pandemic. OLIVIA ALONSO GOUGH FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

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These Home Garages Sat Idle Before Covid. Now They're Gyms, Art Studios and Even Pubs.

The pandemic inspired homeowners to repurpose their seldom-used garages

By [Candace Taylor](#)

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For two decades, financial adviser Tom West spent his free time painting in the basement of his Maryland home, next to the furnace and the washer and dryer. For almost as long, he dreamed of turning his property's detached two-car garage, seldom used for parking, into an art studio.

Then Covid hit, and Mr. West had far more time to paint and to finally start the project. He and his wife, Ann, spent about \$150,000 to transform the dilapidated garage into a light-filled art studio with a 14-foot cathedral ceiling to allow room for Mr. West's large-scale, abstract oil paintings. The project was completed in June.



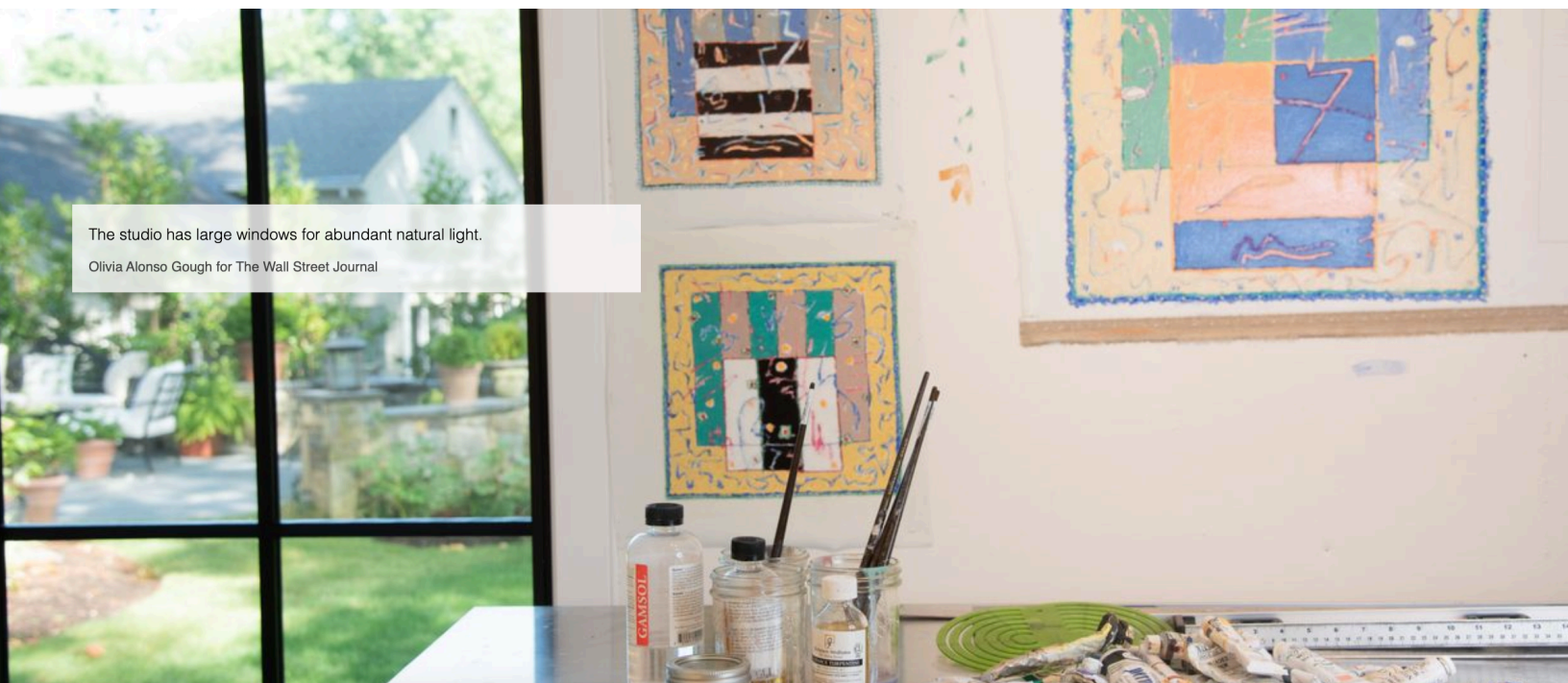
After years of painting in the basement of his Maryland home, Tom West converted his garage into an art studio.

Olivia Alonso Gough for The Wall Street Journal



Tom and his wife, Ann, had owned the property for about 25 years, and rarely used the garage for parking.

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The studio has large windows for abundant natural light.

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“Since I started painting in natural light, I realized how deprived I was in my old space,” said Mr. West, 64. “I was starting to see colors I had not realized were as brilliant as they were.”

Cooped up during the pandemic, many homeowners transformed their garages into spaces that have nothing to do with cars—from home offices and gyms to ceramics workshops. Some of these conversions grew out of a necessity to add living quarters or to safely entertain friends and family, but others emerged from flights of fancy.

“People are getting creative with their space,” said California Closets designer Justee Lundquist.

Until the pandemic, Ms. Lundquist said she had never worked on repurposing a garage, but since Covid she has had about 10 requests to turn garages into home offices, man caves and more. “The garage is an open area where they can let their imaginations go wild,” she said.

In addition to rarely using their Bethesda garage for parking, the Wests had never liked the look of the circa-1960s structure. “The building had this horrible metal siding on it,” said Mr. West. “I’ve wanted to get rid of that for 20-some years.”

They hired a friend, Stephen Gordon of InSite Builders & Remodeling, to tackle the conversion. InSite removed the siding and added large windows and sliding glass doors for abundant natural light, Mr. Gordon said. A low-heat LED lighting system has small but powerful light fixtures strung on a metal cable.

Two walls are covered with a fiberboard called homasote, so Mr. West can tack his canvases directly onto the wall while he is painting.

“The whole look of the building is much more contemporary,” said Mr. West, who plans to host art shows and cocktail parties in the space.