

LUXURY GARAGES

MANSION

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Garage Wars
Here's how to decide who gets those precious indoor spots. **M14**



Charge It
These owners have amped-up parking spaces for EVs. **M5**

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Friday, August 27, 2021 **M1**

The Great Garage Takeover



Homeowners are going beyond the extra room or home office to transform their under-utilized garages into welcoming spaces, such as an art studio, a bar for friends and neighbors, a classroom, a sports lounge

Dennis and Kathleen Klaeser turned one of the two garages at the Glenview, Ill., home they bought three years ago into a bike lounge.

By CANDACE TAYLOR

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.

"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."

Cooled 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 Justine Lundquist.

Until the pandemic, Ms. Lundquist said she had never worked on repurposing a garage, but

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Tom West and his wife, Ann, converted their garage into a studio where Mr. West can paint and display his artwork.



Car barn cost: around \$600,000

The Ultimate 'Carchitect'

Patrick Ahearn is known for his distinctive architectural style and his devotion to designing garages worthy of luxury car collectors

By NANCY KEATES

WHEN PATRICK AHEARN was growing up in Long Island in the 1950s and 1960s, he became obsessed with cars. He knew every model down to its hub caps, which he would render in intricate drawings.

But a high-school guidance counselor discouraged his dream of being a car designer, telling him he'd need to get an engineering degree, and suggested architecture instead.

Now, Mr. Ahearn, 71, is a nationally known architect, famous for



his many hundreds of often large, New England-style, classic houses that stylistically blend into the background on Martha's Vineyard,

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The carriage house Patrick Ahearn designed for Chris and Christina Ruggles in Wellesley, Mass., holds three of Mr. Ruggles's cars, including a Signal Orange 1984 Porsche 911 RSR Tribute.

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The Garage Takeover

Continued from page M1 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.

Many Americans have garage space they don’t use for cars, said UCLA urban-planning professor Donald Shoup. The excess stems from off-street parking requirements first instituted in the 1930s, he said, with cities requiring two, three or even four parking spaces for each home. Present-day cars, Mr. Shoup added, are far more durable than they were in the past and don’t need to be stored indoors, especially in warm climates.

In California, “no one parks their car in the garage,” said Caitlin Bigelow, co-founder of Maxable, a company that specializes in accessory dwelling units, or ADUs. “Everyone is using their garage for storage. People park in the driveway or on the street.”

Many cities are now eliminating off-street parking requirements out of concern for affordable housing and the environment, Mr. Shoup said. In 2017, California dropped its requirement that homeowners converting their garages into ADUs have two covered parking spaces.

The number of garage conversions accelerated during lockdown, when strait-crazed homeowners started to make changes. “It was something that kind of exploded,” Ms. Bigelow said, “with people saying, ‘I want more space on my property.’”

Josh and Juliet Friedman had never used their three-car garage for cars in the two years since they moved into their house in Orange County, Calif., parking in the driveway instead. So when preschool closed down during the pandemic, they decided to convert the garage into a classroom for their 3- and 5-year-old sons. They hired California Closets, working with Ms. Lundquist, to outfit the space with white and gray cabinets, shelving and other storage spaces, including locker-style cubbies. Then they added kid-size tables and chairs, bookshelves, and bins for toys and Legos. “We tried to emulate the preschool,” said Mr. Friedman, 41.

Another section of the garage was turned into a gym, with a Peloton bike and treadmill, a yoga area, a pull-up bar and a television.

“I love it,” said Ms. Friedman, who calls herself a Peloton addict. “I’m never going back to a gym.”

Finally, Mr. Friedman, a videographer, has a workbench with charging stations for his drones and cameras. The total cost of the project was roughly \$25,000, Mr.



Josh and Juliet Friedman converted their California garage into a classroom for their 3- and 5-year-old sons, adding child-size tables and chairs, and plenty of storage bins, shelves and cubbies. For the adults, the rest of the space became a yoga and exercise area, with gym equipment and a television.

Friedman 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 & Re-



The Wests took the opportunity when repurposing their garage to give it a more contemporary look. They removed metal siding, added large windows and installed sliding glass doors.

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 fiber-board 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.

Bored during Covid, Rich Joyce decided to put a television in his Natick, Mass., garage for a no-frills hang-out spot. Before he knew it, he had spent about \$5,000 to convert the garage into a pub, with a 4-foot wooden bar, a pinball machine and a sign dubbing it “Joyce’s Bar & Grill.” Now every Friday night his friends gather in the space, where custom-made Joyce’s coasters read: “Home Is Where The Bar Is.”

“Once we got going and there was nothing else to do, it took on a life of its own,” Mr. Joyce, 47, said of the project. “When you get time on your hands, it makes you a little more creative.”

Before Covid, he and his wife, Jennifer, had never used their garage for parking, because their driveway can easily fit four cars. “It was a place to throw stuff,” he said of the space.

Mr. Joyce did nearly all the work himself. He built a subfloor and put in laminate flooring. The garage had “one lightbulb with a pull string,” he said, so an electrician friend rewired the space to accommodate two refrigerators, a television and ceiling fan, plus baseboard heating.

He added a panel of windows to the garage door for more ventilation and light, and set a new door in the side of the building. The walls are clad in cedar paneling. Mr. Joyce had left over from another project, interspersed with barn board for a decorative look. As the work progressed, friends contributed signs and other eccentricities for decoration; a neighbor gave him the pinball machine. “Around town, everybody knows about Joyce’s,” he said.

Once completed, the space lent itself to Covid socializing because the garage door can be opened for plenty of air circulation, Mr. Joyce said.

“It gave us an area where we could all hang out, and still see people,” he said.

No money is exchanged at Joy-



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cee's, and visitors are encouraged to bring along a beverage to share. Mr. Joyce hosts events there, such as a friend's 50th birthday, and made Joyce's T-shirts to sell. He may even expand Joyce's in the future.

The Glenview, Ill., home that Dennis and Kathleen Klaeser bought three years ago had two garages, one of which they never used for cars.

"It was just sitting there as an extra storage space, completely underutilized," Mr. Klaeser said. An avid cyclist, Mr. Klaeser wanted to turn it into a bike lounge, where he could store his bikes and hang out with friends after rides.

The couple hired Morgante Wilson Architects to help them revamp the space. First, they removed the traditional garage door and replaced it with custom doors that swing open. Then they added a gas fireplace. "The fireplace completely transforms the space, so it no longer looks like a garage," said Mr. Klaeser, 63, a retired banker.

Aiming for an industrial look, Morgante Wilson installed ceiling beams made from wood reclaimed from an old barn in Wisconsin. They covered two of the interior walls with a brick veneer and the concrete floors with luxury vinyl tile, which gives the appearance of wood but could support a car if necessary. Mismatched furniture and rugs were selected to evoke a clubhouse feel, said Morgante Wilson co-founder Elissa Morgante.

"It looks like he collected this stuff over time," she said. A bright red Smeg refrigerator stores water, beer and wine.

The Klaesers' canoe hangs from the ceiling. Because bike storage was an important function of the space, the walls were specially reinforced to hold bike racks. Mr. Klaeser, who bikes about 100 miles a week, stores his five bicycles, as well as the tandem bike the couple bought "so my wife could keep up with me while we're biking," he quipped.

The lounge also has some bikes displayed on the wall as decorative pieces. A dandelion-yellow bike was handmade by the famed framebuilder Dario Pegoretti. A blue one is a refurbished road bike that belonged to Mr. Klaeser's late father.

The total cost of the project was roughly \$40,000, Mr. Klaeser said.

The pair had come up with the idea before the pandemic, but the work didn't start until the summer of 2020. Once it was completed in December, "that's when we realized it had a lot more function than we had thought."

On cold winter days, they can entertain in the bike lounge with the doors and windows open,



Dennis and Kathleen Klaeser converted the second garage at their Illinois home into a bike lounge, where Mr. Klaeser could hang out with friends after rides. They replaced the traditional garage door, put vinyl tile on the floor and added beams of reclaimed wood and a fireplace.



Rich and Jennifer Joyce planned to put just a television in their Massachusetts garage, but expanded the project to create a home pub, with a 4-foot wooden bar, a pinball machine and a name: Joyce's.



HOME PUB
\$5,000



warmed by the fireplace and hot drinks. "It worked very well during Covid," Mr. Klaeser said. "We could host friends and feel as

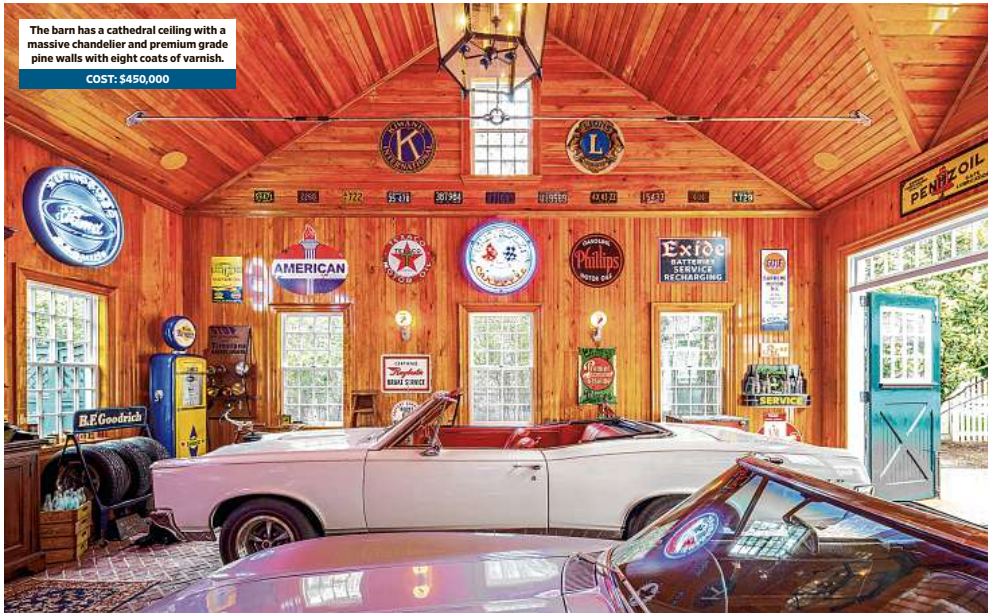
though we had the openness of an outdoor space but a little protection from the weather."

Ms. Morgante said her firm has

been busy adding amenities to houses as people make space for new hobbies or look to make their homes more comfortable. With no

end to the pandemic in sight, she said, "I think we're all just adjusting to the new normal of what this might look like."

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This Ahearn-designed car barn is attached to a house owned by real-estate broker Gerret Conover, below, in Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard.

Car obsessed to 'carchitect'

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Wellesley and up and down Cape Cod. His goal is to make the homes appear timeless and authentic, as if they have been there forever—to give them what he refers to as "implied history."

His projects tend to look alike, and they are easily identifiable as his work. They often include large, luxurious car barns and carriage houses filled with vintage cars. Many of his clients are baby boomer men who share his automotive enthusiasm and become his friends.

"The garage has to be as nice as the rest of the house," says David Malm, 57, managing partner of a private-equity firm, who has owned several homes and car barns designed by Mr. Ahearn. "You don't want to go from a house with millwork and brick into a garage with slab concrete and plaster on the walls. It's jarring," Mr. Malm says.

Mr. Malm's Ahearn-designed, stand-alone car barn on Martha's Vineyard is on a property he bought for around \$4 million in 2019. It has brick floors in a herringbone pattern, wood beams and a club-like area with leather chairs, a bar and a television and living spaces upstairs. He is currently renting it out, but usually he keeps his red 1971 MG there. He also has a carriage house in Dover, Mass., part of a \$2 million home renovation and new garage project, where he keeps his three Aston Martins. "They're such beautiful cars. You have to put them somewhere nice," he says.

Mr. Ahearn says the lines of his garages, like many of the homes he designs, are inspired by classic cars, with roof overhangs that nod to streamlined headlights and windows with frames like the teeth of a 1960 Corvette's grille. He is inspired by the simple, timeless designs and the time period they represent. "The world was a better



place in the 1950s," he says. He matches the car a person drives to the project he designs for them, using it as part of the narrative, or script, he creates for

how the person lives, which he says helps them pick appropriate fixtures and materials. "I can tell a lot about a person by their car. Sometimes it deter-

mines whether I do their house or not," says Mr. Ahearn, who has blue eyes, a thick mustache and wears button down shirts and blue blazers.

He tells of one client, the CEO of a major office supply company, who drove a beat-up Toyota Corolla. "That told me a lot about how cheap he was," says Mr. Ahearn. Throughout the design process, the client was always questioning the cost of the materials and fixtures. "I had to educate him on why it's not just a vanilla box," he says.

He recently asked the client if he still owned the Corolla. He did. "He says he's just not a car guy," says Mr. Ahearn, throwing up his hands.

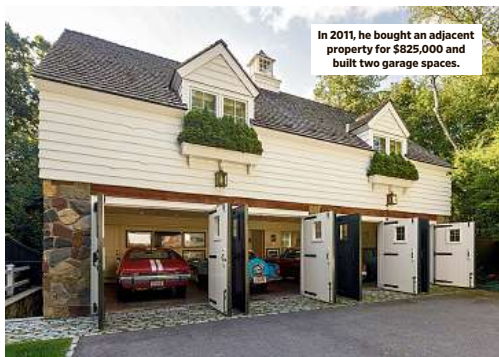
Chris Ruggles, 52, a retired software engineer who is a car guy, hired Mr. Ahearn to design a 1,200-square-foot carriage house in Wellesley. He knew about Mr. Ahearn's affinity for cars because every carriage house he liked was designed by him. "He has an easily recognizable style," says Mr. Ruggles.

The one Mr. Ahearn designed for Mr. Ruggles, for about \$600,000, has brick floors, white beadboard walls, a high ceiling and leather chairs for hanging out. The exterior, with its dormers, shutters and shingled roof, makes it look like another house.



Mr. Ahearn designed this carriage house in a Dover, Mass. for David Malm, managing partner of a private equity firm. It holds his three Aston Martins and is attached to a house Mr. Ahearn renovated.

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Mr. Ahearn's 2-acre compound in Wellesley, Mass., has three separate garage spaces. The carriage house, above, parks four of his most-prized of cars: a 1968 American Motors AMX in Matador Red (above far left), a 1956 Ford Thunderbird in Peacock Turquoise (above right), a 1953 Studebaker Commander in Regal Red and a 1964 Studebaker Avanti in turquoise.



The lower level of Mr. Ahearn's car barn is what he calls his sanctuary—where he works and hangs out, amid his 1964 356 C Porsche coupe and his 1958 365A Porsche Speedster.



The doors look like old-fashioned carriage-house doors but swing open automatically.

Mr. Ruggles likes to spend time sitting quietly in the carriage house, sometimes listening to music, just being around his Albert Blue 1970 Porsche 911E, his Signal Orange 1984 Porsche 911 RSR Tribute and his Old English White 1960 MGA Roadster.

"It's a Zen thing. It's relaxing," he says. His wife, Christina Ruggles, has recently started having dinner parties in the garage among the cars with her friends. "It's turned out to be a nice little event space," he says.

The parties that Martha's Vineyard real-estate broker and contractor Gerret Conover, 58, holds in his Ahearn-designed car barn in Edgartown on Martha's Vineyard are wilder: he dresses up mannequins and seats them in his silver 1967 Chevrolet Corvette convertible and his Pearl White 1967 Pontiac GTO.

In Mr. Conover's garage, which cost about \$450,000 to build, the signature Ahearn brick floors accommodate a car lift, the cathedral ceiling houses a massive chandelier, and the walls—premium grade pine with eight coats of varnish—are crowded with what he calls "automobilia": early to mid-20th century enamel and neon service station signs and vintage calendars. An old Mobil gas station pump and a soda machine complete the look.

Mr. Ahearn's own 2-acre compound in Wellesley has three separate garage spaces and revolves around a 1936 farmhouse he bought for \$525,000 in 1991 and renovated, adding two wings, all painted it in his signature Ahearn White (half Benjamin Moore Linen White, half Benjamin Moore China White).

In 2011, he bought an adjacent property for \$825,000 and built two new garage spaces, a carriage house and a car barn, for a total of around \$2 million. The carriage house's old-fashioned looking Es-

sex Green stable doors automatically swing open to reveal the four most-prized of his 18 cars (a number that's always changing, as he buys and sells them): a 1968 American Motors AMX in Matador Red, a 1956 Ford Thunderbird in Peacock Turquoise, a 1953 Studebaker Commander in Regal Red and a 1964 Studebaker Avanti in turquoise.

Mr. Ahearn's car barn is 4,000 square feet and has two stories and a loft. The lower level is what he calls his sanctuary—where he works and hangs out, amid his 1958 365A Porsche Speedster in Fjord Green, his 1964 356 C Porsche coupe in Dolphin Gray and his 1970 280 SL Mercedes-Benz in Beige Gray. Three leather chairs, a big flat-screen TV, an electric train set with a model Porsche dealership and dozens of little Porsche model cars, among a

sea of other car memorabilia, set the mood.

The intersection of car design and architecture, sometimes dubbed "architecture," goes back to when the first automobiles hit

'I can tell a lot about a person by their car. Sometimes it determines whether I do their house or not,' says Mr. Ahearn.

the road over a century ago, leaving a "lasting imprint on the design of our built environment," according to the introduction to the Museum of Modern Art in New York's current Automotia ex-

hibit. Le Corbusier compared car design to that of ancient Greek temples, while Frank Lloyd Wright, who was obsessed with cars and designing spaces for them, incorporated garages into signature homes like the Robie House in Chicago and Fallingwater outside Pittsburgh.

Nowadays, architects design condo buildings around cars, such as the Porsche Design Tower in Sunny Isles Beach, Fla., where each of the 60 units has built-in parking in the apartment, separated from the living area by a glass wall to allow views of the vehicles.

Born in 1950, Mr. Ahearn grew up in Levittown, the planned production home community on Long Island developed by William Levitt that was composed of nearly identical Cape Cod and ranch-style houses created for GIs re-

turning from war. It was to be the suburb what the Model T is to the car, says Mr. Ahearn: a pioneer of mass-produced good design that changed society. He credits the community for influencing his designs by making him appreciate the balance between density and scale and that warmth can accompany sparseness.

After graduating in 1973 from Syracuse University with undergraduate and graduate degrees in architecture, the first in his family to attend college, Mr. Ahearn packed up his lime green VW Bus and headed to Boston, where a girlfriend was attending law school. He was hired at Architects Collaborative in Cambridge and Benjamin Thompson & Associates, where he worked on the adaptive reuse of Faneuil Hall Marketplace.

In 1978, he started his own practice, converting buildings to condos in Boston's Back Bay and working on national and international hotel projects. He pivoted to renovating and building single family homes, expanding his now 21-person office to include Martha's Vineyard in the 1990s, where he has designed hundreds of homes. His projects, ranging between \$500,000 and \$5 million, now span the country and Canada.

His second and current wife, Marsha Ahearn, had three young children when they met in 1987 and drove what Mr. Ahearn describes as an unremarkable blue Volvo station wagon. He married her anyway in 1989. "I thought I could correct that," he says.

Mrs. Ahearn doesn't go into the garage spaces at her home in Wellesley very often. The series of 15 Chevrolet Suburbans she's owned stay in the driveway. That is partly for convenience: Since the carriage house and the car barn aren't connected to the house, they wouldn't help protect her in rain and snow.

But it's also that her cars just don't fit. "I don't get garage space," she says.



Chris Ruggles, below with his wife Christina, likes to sit in his carriage house surrounded by his Albert Blue 1970 Porsche 911E, his Signal Orange 1984 Porsche 911 RSR Tribute and his Old English White 1960 MGA Roadster.

