

# A “Beautiful” Garage?

## ANYTHING'S POSSIBLE

ONCE UPON A TIME, the garage was where America housed the family Oldsmobile. In the space remain-ing, we parked bicycles, trash cans, a lawn mower – some-times even the drum kit that would surely propel our teen rock band to stardom. We never dreamed that, within one generation, the garage would become the catch-all space for everything *but* the family car.

If you're embarrassed to open your garage door, fearing the neighbors' reaction to your accumulated clutter, don't throw in the towel (there's probably no room for it anyway). Let's take a look at a master organizer's functional garage space. And we've supplied some simple steps as well so you don't feel so bad opening your garage on Saturday morning.

Many homeowners would like their garages to be areas of organized tools, toys, stored





items easily located, with room left over to either create a project or tuck the car in at night. The modern garage is no longer just a room with exposed studs, metal flex tube with wires, and rafters for mice to peer down at you. It has evolved into another room, drywalled, often insulated, and painted. What else can you do?

*HomePRO* was able to convince Alex De Leon, of Costa De Leon Architecture and Construction, to allow us a peek into his garage, and it is an organizer's dream. And who would have thought that the words "beautiful" and "garage" would ever go together?

As unbelievable as it may seem, an aesthetic and functional garage space is not beyond the scope of any homeowner. In fact, Alex's garage was once the drab, cluttered mess that many of us live with. According to Alex, the key to reclaiming the garage is careful planning and prioritization.



"When I designed my garage, I thought about two things: storage and workspace," said Alex. "Grouping similar items together and organizing the areas is the key to making a functional design."

When planning, Alex sectioned the garage into four key areas of his interests: motorcycle, car, jeep, and workbench. He then sought to maximize his space and functionality in each area while also creating a display that was pleasing to the eye. By following his examples, you too can customize your garage to create an attractive, efficient area for your needs and interests.

## LIGHTING

The first order of business is light. Say goodbye to hanging florescent tubes or the solitary 60 watt bulb on the garage door opener (after all, you can't do much work of any kind in the dark!). You can see that De Leon added both recessed can lights as well as functional spots so that all garage areas are visually accessible. The recessed cans give the garage ambient lighting similar to the inside of his home, creating a seamless integration between living space and storage space. Alex then placed spotlights in areas where additional lighting would be needed for detail work, as well as to dramatically highlight key areas of his garage (such as his Ducati display).

Lighting has the potential to be the trickiest aspect of a garage remodel. "A straight swapping of florescent lighting is fairly simple," notes De Leon. "However, if you want track lighting around the perimeter, closer to a work bench, cabinets, or shelving, that involves getting an electrician to run new wires." Alex also mentioned that the recessed cans may be difficult to install for a beginner handyperson due to potential fire code issues, so if in doubt, look to a professional.



## WORKSPACE

What's next? How about the work area. Most standard garages come with a bench, maybe a cabinet or two, and that's about it. And that gets filled up quick as tools and toys begin to grow like weeds in a vacant lot. In addition to the typical freestanding Craftsman organizers, De Leon took a few very inexpensive pre-finished cabinets and shelves available at most hardware, home supply, or discount store and used a painted plywood counter in consideration of the abuse it would be taking.

"A creative composition of cabinet components can transform affordable cabinets into an attractive and functional display," said Alex. "I used pre-finished cabinets complementary to my interior cabinets to create the illusion of a continuous theme, both outside and inside."

Another nifty (and thrifty) trick of Alex's was purchasing a used roll around computer printer desk for his car washing supplies. The stock drawers are a very simple, cheap, and effective way to keep all of his cleaning products together. The drawers pull out for quick access to sponges and towels, and the wheels allow him to move his supplies around



as he cleans. Furthermore, he keeps pieces of carpet samples (available for free at just about any flooring store) as a simple kneepad as he leans into those “hard to reach” areas.

Alex also knew that he would need multiple outlets for his power tools, and built a power strip into the shelving. This eliminates the need for extension cords and allows him to have several tools charging or in play at the same time. The tools rest neatly on the workbench, instead of being scattered throughout the garage. The result of all these improvements is a neat, organized workspace that allows easy access to gadgets and enough actual space to take “things” apart and maybe even put them back together again!

### WALL SPACE AND CLOSETS

De Leon also took advantage of one of the most underutilized spaces in the garage: the walls. Wall space is a great area to get boxes, gear, car parts, and bikes off the floor. These days, hooks and hangers are designed specifically for brooms, rakes, lawn blowers, and just about anything else. For his Jeep doors, Alex bought long Rubbermaid FastTrack hangers and cut them to size. The Rubbermaid system offers a wide variety of hooks to hang just about anything; however, crafty DIYers can create their own quite simply with basic hooks on a small wood backboard. Nail or screw the backboard into the studs for a solid surface to attach the hangers, and apply paint to tie the display together with the rest of the garage.

While Alex worked hard to create visually arresting displays in his four key areas, he also wanted to unify and beautify the garage as a whole. First, he looked for ways to add color and excitement to the rest of his wall space. He accented his walls with paint and a roller to clean up the drab drywall look. He also hung strategically-placed Ferrari and Ducati flags on his wall to cover unsightly panel covers and other problem areas. If you’re not into high-end Italian automobiles, you can cover yours with a favorite poster, pictures of one of your hobbies or even that “special relative.”

Alex also found a way to hide all the excess clutter, such as his motorcycle gear, his lawnmower, surfboards, and the like. He constructed a series of closets and hangers into the walls, perfect for neatly organizing all of his essentials. He also created partition walls for the larger tools and toys, so he can store them out of sight until needed. While you may not be able to create a built-in closet, you can use inexpensive tall closets to hang your accessories, and there are a plethora of shelves to choose from should you not want to make them yourself.

### FLOORS

Like most garage floors, Alex’s consisted of a raw concrete slab. To counteract this, De Leon added a nice mottled brown stain to his floor, completing the polished look of his garage. You can find easily applied finishes in a number of colors to cover your concrete.

These finishes are attractive and practical. They add color and texture and repel spills and stains as well. According to De Leon, you will need an acid etcher/cleaner, at least two colors of stain, and a Hudson sprayer to mimic his floor’s finish.


First, clear the slab of all dirt and oil, using a broom, mop, and degreaser. If there are any additional stains, you may have to spot clean. Once the floor is as clean as possible, use the acid etcher to prep the slab for staining (be extremely careful and follow all directions, as “acid etcher” is more than just a fancy title—this stuff literally is hydrochloric acid!).

Once the surface is prepped, spray the stain onto the floor with the Hudson tool. “It’s important to keep yourself from spraying too much at once,” says Alex. “The stain can not pool on the concrete. [It’s] better to do several light applications to get a deeper color.” Alternate your nozzle settings for a fine or coarser spray to add texture to the floor. Also, be forewarned that you really only get one shot, so don’t attempt it yourself unless you are fully confident in your abilities.

### AFFORDABLE AND FUNCTIONAL

Although De Leon admittedly has a garage much larger than the standard two car garage, he stresses that it’s more about how the space is utilized than anything else. He also points out that an attractive and organized garage doesn’t have to be expensive.

“All things considered, anyone who wants to create a garage like mine could do it on a relatively shoestring budget,” Alex said. “The total for a two car garage should run between \$600 and \$1000, depending on the parts used and the skill level of the homeowner.”

Your garage is an integral and important part of your home. Don’t ignore it – *reclaim* it by investing in these simple steps. You can eventually leave your garage door open with pride—or at least not abject embarrassment. And when it’s all done and the final hockey stick is hung on the wall, you might just be able to fit in a car or two. 

## A WEEKEND PROJECT

Don’t have time to completely redesign your garage? Here are some quick tips to get your garage back in tip-top shape over the weekend.

**1 MAKE A PLAN.** Measure your garage and draw up a rough floor plan to help you visualize the space available. Then sketch how that space should be allocated, penciling-in the approximate size and ideal location of your vehicle, tool storage, workbench – whatever you’d like to see in each part of your garage.

**2 DIVIDE, CONQUER, AND CLEAN.** Empty out your entire garage, separating the contents into piles in your back yard or other secure location. For example, place all yard tools in one pile, sports equipment in another, camping gear in another and so on. Be sure to have piles for items to be thrown away, given away and recycled. Use cat litter to absorb oil spills. Consider making other needed improvements, such as finishing walls, installing lights or painting. And now is the time to finish that concrete slab.

**3 WATCH YOUR OVERHEAD.** Ceilings are a great easy storage space if you run out of room on the walls and floors. You can create an elevated platform from planks laid across two ceiling joists, or use large hooks for suspending bicycles from your ceiling.

**4 CONTAIN YOURSELF.** Some items simply don’t lend themselves to being stuck in cabinets or suspended from walls or ceilings. For these, consider stackable plastic bins that allow your belongings to be easily organized, retrieved and protected. Best of all, bins can be stacked in the corners of your garage, where other items don’t always fit.

**5 KEEP IT CLEAN.** Now that your garage is neat, functional and well-organized, keep it that way by cleaning it regularly and eliminating clutter as soon as you see it. If you find your garage becoming quickly overfilled, you may wish to add an outdoor shed or other storage solution. The key to a functional garage is to keep only the most essential items inside it.