

Outside the Home

Keeping chaos at bay with easy-to-maintain gardening, and saying hello to the new breed of home-decorating entrepreneur: the “garage stylist.”

WHEN DAYLAN Jellinick and her husband, Robert, remodeled their home in East Amherst, N.Y., they paid special attention to the front of the house. Daylan loves to sit in her Adirondack chair on the brand-new front porch. Now she has a new project in mind: a garden. Granted, it can't take up too much time. “Being a mom of four kids”—all under the age of seven—“gardening isn't at the front of my mind,” she says. But she'll have a handsome spread all the same, sprinkled with some easy-to-maintain perennials and low-growth shrubs that'll require a bare minimum of her time.

Recent fashions in gardening involved enough exotic plants and potted geraniums to rival your local botanic garden. These days, however, “low maintenance is in,” says Janna Paulson, president of PPDS, a design studio based in Austin, Tex. Homeowners' lack of time isn't the only factor at work here, Paulson notes; a growing number of municipalities are trying harder to conserve water, and to hit their marks they're charging penalizing rates to high users. It's all an incentive for homeowners to plant more indigenous shrubs and wildflowers that require little use of hose or hoe. Gardeners are also mixing in stones to help redirect water flow and, at the same time, make their gardens more visually appealing by creating inter-



esting contours. In southern states, this might mean a mix of rosemary shrubs and bluebonnet flowers, with pieces of limestone or other locally available stone as accents. Among homeowners who have a lot of trees in their yard, many are breaking up the greens of the lawn and leaves by sprinkling black mulch around the trunks.

Chances are, that garden will abut a building that's increas-



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8

Garage Cabinetry

COST: \$350 to \$450 each

WHAT IT IS: Intended to replace the typical family's jumble of boxes and shelves, most of these products are designed with flexibility in mind. Many have wheels; the more expensive systems can be built on sliding racks along the walls. Since they're easier to move, they're easier to reconfigure and clean around. What's missing is a broader palette of materials and colors beyond drab steel or plastic.

9

Garage Flooring

COST: \$700 to \$3,500

WHAT IT IS: Designed to fight stains and make cleaning easier, it usually comes in tiles or sheets made from synthetics like polypropylene. One flaw: Changes in the weather can make the material expand or shrink, which can create gaps or air pockets. For a better fit, make sure the flooring sits in the sun for a while before you install it.

Photographs (from left) by Karen Bussolini; courtesy of Gladiator GarageWorks

ingly precious to the homeowner: the garage. Surprisingly, garage renovations have become one of the fastest-growing areas of the remodeling business. In a recent survey, architects, designers and builders said they expected the average garage to grow 44 percent, to over 570 square feet, by 2015, even as the size of the rest of the home remains constant. Blame Costco: As homeowners have continued to buy in bulk, they've run out of storage room in other parts of the house. And since only about 35 percent of homes include a basement, the garage is picking up the slack. Last year homeowners spent roughly \$2.5 billion on remodeling existing garages, up from less than \$1 billion a decade ago.

There's even what amounts to a garage-consulting industry: Over the past few years, outfits like GarageTek and Gladiator GarageWorks have begun rolling out new products like flooring materials to cover up stained, cracked concrete; some even sell premium porcelain tiles once seen only on the showroom floors of luxury-car dealerships. Customized shelves and "storage systems" are also big sellers for these dealers. For years the garage has been "the most embarrassing, disorganized part of the home," asserts Chad Haas, president of Vault Brands, a luxury garage remodeling company based in Beaverton, Ore. "It also happens to be one of the most visible." Projects will usually start at around \$2,500, and if you opt for a full range of offerings—premium flooring, welded steel cabinets, a hard-

maple workbench and custom lighting on the walls—the price can quickly pass the \$10,000 mark.

James Richards, a semi-retired investment banker in Bonita Springs, Fla., decided it was a price worth paying. Richards hired a garage stylist who used 3D software to map out exactly what new organizational products should go where in his two-car spread. The result? Order where there once was mayhem. Richards's Christmas decorations, pool supplies and boxes full of (mostly unread) books, which used to sit exposed on old plastic shelves, are now neatly stored within no fewer than eight new cabinets. Richards also has his own "golf activity center," which includes a special rack for his clubs, a shelf for his shoes and hooks for his hats and towels. Everything has been mounted to the wall on special tracks so that it's easier to slide his cabinets around and clean underneath them. And scrubbing away the stains from oil drippings is no longer as much of an issue: Today a stain-resistant layer of interlocking polypropylene tiles covers the concrete floor. "It looks wonderful," says the 63-year-old Richards. "I like a clean garage, not just a clean car." All told, the work set him back \$9,000. But if he puts his place on the market, Richards figures, the garage will be a selling point instead of an eyesore to be avoided. And in the meantime, when passersby watch him pull up in his shiny BMW, there's a possibility that they'll be as impressed by the garage as they are by the car. **S**