



Garage Conversions

From Ordinary to Spectacular

By Mica Barton

Stefani McMurrey, western hat designer and owner of SMarHats.com, needed more space. Starting a home-based business and building it for three years left McMurrey with one huge problem - the need to expand.

Situation

McMurrey's business began as a typical kitchen project, but soon grew into a full-time business. With hats numbering in the hundreds and creative supplies such as tiaras, feathers and paint filling multiple boxes, the custom hat business began taking over. First, every inch of the dining room was filled, and then the living room, the extra bedroom and finally the kitchen stove became a file cabinet.

Rather than moving her business, she wanted to keep working out of her home. As she says, "Sometimes you're just more efficient working in sweatpants, or in the middle of the night."

Realizing that her business should stay at her home, McMurrey took inventory of her home. Her





three-bedroom home with two-car garage seemed to be shrinking. She needed to separate her living area from her work area. She needed a creative place for designing and a storage area for her hats, tools and accessories.

In January 2004, McMurrey attended a women's networking meeting and listened to a presentation by a garage organization company about converting a garage into a usable workspace. The idea sounded intriguing.

"People think of a home addition before they think of a garage conversion," says McMurrey. "I thought conversions were only for tools and car enthusiasts."

Project - Converting a garage into a showroom

McMurrey set up a consultation with the a garage organization company. The company visited her home, discussed her goals and put together drawings for the garage.

Pleasantly surprised by the drawings, she moved ahead. The drawings indicated that, in the converted garage, she could display all of her hats, not just keep them in storage boxes. Racks, shelves and wall hooks were included in the plan for her hat display.

The plan doubled her work and storage capacity. "Like most people, I think of storage horizontally. Many garage conversion companies also think of storage vertically, using lots of wall space," says McMurrey.

The two-car garage soon became a one-car garage with a showroom. The drywall in the garage was a mess. With a few repairs, the flat wall went up and the look of the garage began to change. Next, the ceiling was painted white to match the flat wall paneling. And, finally the storage shelves were placed at eye-level, drawers and hooks were installed, and racks and storage containers were organized.

As additional services, McMurrey opted to have the garage cleaned out and organized for her. Plus, she



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had the extra items she no longer needed hauled away.

Results

Slowly, McMurrey stopped thinking of her garage as a storage area, and started thinking of it as a design area and showroom. She slowly started moving in other items. First a table and chairs, then she added better lighting. In the late spring, she installed a window-unit air conditioner. She now works out of the showroom full time. From designing to shipping, every step is completed in her showroom.

"Everything is accessible and business has exploded. I couldn't keep up if I didn't have this work space," says McMurrey. "This conversion totally exceeded my expectations. They taught me how to organize things and I am much more efficient. My business would be chaos without this system."

Hiring a garage storage and organizing company worked well. "As a homeowner, you don't really have to think about it. It's all done for you," says McMurrey.

Now, the business of creating a line of fashionable western hats and custom designs is all she has to think about. ▶



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Garage Organization

Converting a garage to a showroom may sound like an extreme makeover to many homeowners. But, if your garage is stacked with garden tools and flimsy boxes full of hand-me-down clothes and items that should have been donated to a charity, installing a storage system may be just what you need.

Garage systems are not created equally. Systems are completely unique to each homeowner, based on their needs. On the high end, custom designs can include granite countertops, wet bars and wall-mounted TVs, according to Adrienne White at Closet Factory.

Not all homeowners want granite countertops in their garages, that's why garage organization companies offer a wide variety of cabinetry sizes and shapes, storage containers and accessories.

Garage organization companies such as Closet Factory, Garage Appeal, Storage Overhead Systems, and Closets by Design will make a home visit for a consultation. Their goal is to determine what you want to accomplish, and then make that happen. They take physical measurements of your garage, including:

- Number and size of tools
- Mowers and shop vacs
- Storage items and boxes
- Bicycles and sports gear
- Potting benches
- Fans
- Baskets

The storage components they recommend are custom built to fit your garage and your needs. Cabinetry can be elaborate hardwoods or melamine that is easy to wash and is heat resistant. Storage bins, chrome baskets and other storage containers are available in many colors.

Time

After the initial consultation and the homeowner places an order, the average time to custom manufacture

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and deliver the storage system is two weeks.

Installation time is quick. If homeowners need a helping hand to organize their belonging, most garage companies will recommend a professional organizer.

Accessories

Garage storage systems can accommodate most household and outdoor items. Specially designed storage is available for:

Brooms	Rakes
Bikes	Hoses
Boots and shoes	Ladders

Rolling bins and pull-out trays help homeowners keep items such as toys and sports gear organized for smaller members of the family. To help children find their toys and other items easily, clear storage containers are generally recommended.

Storage cabinets are normally six- to seven- feet high. However, some storage systems can reach up to ten feet high. This extra storage space is great, if your garage is tall enough.

Creature comforts

As garage conversions grow in popularity, the creature comforts of home are working their way into the garage. Gladiator Garageworks has introduced a



line of appliances for the garage, designed to look like construction steel. The Freezerator™ is a convertible refrigerator/freezer. Depending on your needs, the upper compartment can be either a refrigerator or freezer. They also offer a trash compactor and a compact garage refrigerator.

When converting a garage, don't forget the floor. Gladiator also makes a non-porous, roll-on floor covering. For use underneath a vehicle or to hide stains and cracks, this floor covering can be cleaned by spraying it with a garden hose.

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