



The Last “Hot” Room

*GarageTek transforms
garages into attractive,
functional spaces*

W By Dennis Quick

hat to do with your garage? You’ve remodeled the rest of the house; but, for who knows how long, the garage has been there collecting—let’s call it what it is—junk. The walls are either hopelessly cluttered or wastefully bare. The space is so tight, you’re lucky if you can squeeze your car into it. When your garage door is open, you offer your neighbors a sight that can be positively frightening.

True, you never meant for your garage to become what it became. It just sort of happened. We have a habit of accumulating things we don’t always know what to do with. And not all of us are geniuses when it comes to organizing space.

A messy, chaotic garage can be intimidating. But don’t despair. GarageTek happily will come to your rescue, reorganize your garage and make it spacious and functional.

Garage Gurus

GarageTek, a franchise operating from Columbia, S.C., specializes in transforming garages from disaster areas into neat, well-organized storage areas. Founded in 2000 and billed as offering “The World’s Cleanest Garage,” the company is based in Syossett, New York. It has 60 franchises in the United States, plus more in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. As the company’s website proudly touts, GarageTek’s makeover miracles have been featured on television programs such as NBC’s *Today*, CBS’s *The Early Show* and the Style Network’s *Clean House* series. GarageTek makeovers have graced the pages of *Good Housekeeping*, *Better Homes and Gardens*, *House Beautiful* and numerous other national and regional publications.

Keith Wilson and Bill Frew bought the Columbia franchise last year. Theirs is the only GarageTek franchise in South Carolina. About 70 percent of their market is along the coast, from Mount Pleasant to Savannah, Georgia.

“We raise the storage capacity of a garage from about 45 percent to 90 percent” Wilson says of GarageTek.

Improving the storage capacity of the customer’s garage adds value to the customer’s home, Frew adds. He notes that it costs about \$28 to \$30 per square foot to upgrade a garage, whereas it costs roughly \$350 to \$400 per square foot to re-do a kitchen.

“When you put it in that perspective, customers see the savings,” Frew says.

A redesigned garage by GarageTek offers a tranquil entry point for the home.



GarageTek increases the storage capacity and improves the look of your garage by designing a garage space more suited to your needs. The company throws out unwanted items taking up space in your garage and installs products that provide places in which to put things: cabinets, shelves, floors, ceilings, wall panels and lights.

GarageTek markets to an upscale clientele. Wilson and Frew's most extravagant project was a 10-car garage on Daniel Island. The garage stored antique as well as contemporary automobiles. GarageTek created more storage space and made the garage snazzier by installing a new floor, paneling the walls and installing a wall-storage system. Cost of the makeover: \$65,000, according to Wilson.

Customized care

To launch a garage makeover, GarageTek representatives first meet with the customer at the customer's house to discuss what the customer wants. The representatives ask customers to make three piles of items: one pile consisting of items they want to keep, another of stuff they want to throw out and the third of items they want delivered to Goodwill—a delivery GarageTek makes on the customer's behalf.

After the approximately 45-minute meeting with the customer, GarageTek representatives go back to the office and, with the aid of a Computer Automated Design program, create a design of the soon-to-be-improved garage. Depending on the size of the garage, the makeover involves two or three GarageTek specialists and takes no more than two days. The makeovers have a lifetime warranty.

The backbone of GarageTek's storage system is its wall paneling, which

GarageTek's floor tiles are available in seven colors and multiple patterns.

supports storage bins, racks and shelves and can be re-arranged to suit the customer's changing needs. Other GarageTek products include full-size cabinets with adjustable shelves; racks for golf clubs, tennis racquets, bicycles and other sports equipment; shelving units (including special heavy-duty shelves); various storage baskets, bins and brackets; long-lasting floor coatings and materials; ceilings that support storage racks; lighting systems; and safety products such as portable first-aid kits, fire extinguishers and carbon monoxide alarms.

Because most of Wilson and Frew's clients live in the coastal region, many of the garages they re-make are atypical of most American homes—that is, many coastal garages tend to be located under houses built on huge stilts

THE GOODS ON GARAGES

- According to a study by the Peachtree Consulting Group, the garage is the fastest-growing segment in the \$7 billion home-organization sector.
- Census data released in June 2006 shows that 20 percent of new homes have garages built for three or more cars. That's almost double the figure from 1992, when just 11 percent of garages were built to house three or more cars.
- Homebuilder estimates show that Americans spent \$2.5 billion enhancing and improving their garages in 2005.

and therefore don't have studded walls. Wilson recalls such a house on the Isle of Palms, a home built atop pylons and whose garage had slatted rather than studded walls. But GarageTek met the challenge by installing studded walls so that the various storage products could be supported.

The Last Room To Transform

Because of weaknesses in the housing market and in the overall economy, sales in the home improvement industry fell by 2 percent last year to \$306.7 billion and are expected to drop another 1.5 percent in 2008, according to available research. However, the home improvement market's long-term outlook remains strong for the next four years, with sales expected to reach \$381 billion by 2012.

GarageTek offers more than 100 different accessories ranging from cabinets and shelves to racks designed to hold hobby or sports gear.



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Although Wilson and Frew admit that business is slower in this economy, they note that homeowners continue to turn a face-lifting eye to their cluttered garages.

"The garage is the last 'hot' room," Frew explains. "Homeowners have done the kitchen, they've done the bathroom, they've maybe added a sunroom. The last room is the garage." ↪

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