

# In California, 'G



Photos by Stepha

## A ROOM FOR A CAR, A BOAT . . .

Brad Barnes's custom garage, above, is more than a third the size of his neighbor, Dennis Bernard, added amenities like carpeting and cable

By NICHOLAS GRUDIN

BAKERSFIELD, Calif.

**A**T 6 feet 10 inches tall, the financial consultant Brad Barnes needs a lot of things custom built. His home's doors are more than a foot higher than standard, and a go-cart he made for himself for fun looks about the size of a Mini Cooper. But what's most indicative of this man's need for space is his garage, which with six car bays is at the cutting edge of a trend in high-end real estate: the "garage mahal."

Mr. Barnes's 1,700-square-foot garage is an airy contiguous room more than a third the size of his 4,800-square-foot custom home, leaving plenty of space for five cars, five motorcycles and his colossal go-cart.

"If I had it to do again, I'd do 12 — I'd go double-deep," he said, standing on the gleaming light green epoxy finish that covers the garage's cement floor.

Just down the street in Mr. Barnes's gated community of Brimhall Classics, Dennis Bernard also has shelter for six vehicles. Mr. Bernard, owner of a meat distribution company, has three separate two-car garages attached to his \$750,000 brick abode: one for his son Brandon, one for his wife, Janice, and one for him. His garages' many

amenities include carpeting, cable speakers wired to the home stereo and a bathroom.

"I've always liked garages and think you can have enough of them," Bernard said.

Home builders and real estate agents say consumer demand for bigger garages is more than the passing fancy of a few Bakersfield bigwigs. Throughout the country, from 1992 to 2003, the percentage of homes built with three or more stalls rose from 11 percent to 18 percent, according to the Commerce Department. And in the West, where basements are rare and thus storage space is scarce, the trend is even more pronounced: 33 percent of garages built in 2003 had at least three cars.

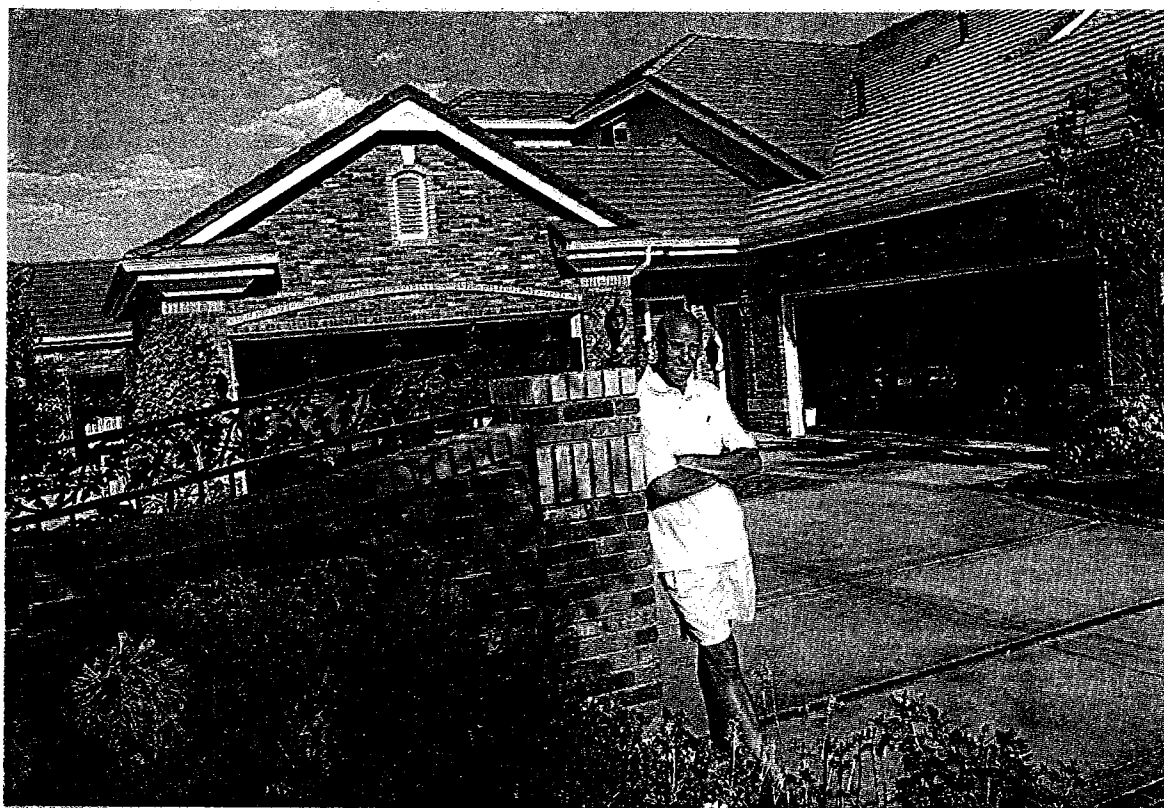
Although the number of garages with four or more bays is not high, anecdotal evidence suggests a spike in demand, as well, said Gopal Ahluwalia, an economist at the National Association of Home Builders.

"Upscale housing is tending toward more car garages," Mr. Ahluwalia said. "In the West, I would venture to guess that 15 percent are four or more. Everybody wants more garage — the basis of it is that more is better."

Each stall added to a garage cost

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

# Large Mahals' Are Not Just for Cars



New York Times

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\$7,000, depending on the regional market. For remodels, garage additions cost about 15 percent more, Mr. Ahluwalia said. In general, extra garage space will recover more than 80 percent of its cost when a home is sold.

Large, obtrusive garages can detract from the value of a home if they dominate its front elevation, but there are a number of ways to camouflage them, according to Arthur C. Danielian, president of Danielian Associates Architecture & Planning in Irvine, Calif.

"Architects and builders have gotten a lot more creative and have done a really good job on the street scene by playing down garages," he said.

For example, Mr. Barnes's garage is attached to the rear of his home and Mr. Bernard's three are staggered alongside his house, blending inconspicuously with the rest of the brick structure. Other methods of concealing large garages include building them detached, or making them tandem so two cars fit one after another.

Residential developers — from boutique custom builders to major national companies — are catching on to the demand for bigger garages and adjusting their offerings accordingly.

KB Home of Los Angeles, the fifth-largest

builder in the nation, recently introduced four-stall garages in Southern California, something the company has never done before, according to Jeffrey Mezger, the chief operating officer.

"The garage is now part of the lifestyle of the home people live in," he said. "It's a flex space that they now incorporate into the way they live."

The steady growth of GarageTek, a franchiser of garage organization systems that is based in Syosset, N.Y., reflects this trend. The company, founded in 2000, had \$13 million in sales through its 67 franchises last year, up from \$1.1 million in 2001. Marc Shuman, GarageTek's founder and president, said the company is on pace for \$22 million in sales this year.

GarageTek installs flooring, cabinets and shelves, touting "a revolutionary concept in home improvement" by transforming cluttered garages into "flex space." The company says it has come across an increasing number of four-, five- and six-car garages.

"Larger garages will ultimately become the recreation focal point of the home — people will be working out and potting plants in there and kids will be playing in there," Mr. Shuman said. "The garage is evolving into a different room than it has traditionally been known. The garage that

we've seen up until the 90's will not be the garage we see in 2010. It's an inexpensive, very functional space."

The most obvious explanation for growing garages is that people simply have more cars and other "toys," such as boats, jet skis, motorcycles and recreational vehicles, said Phil Gaskill, owner of Gaskill Custom Homes in Bakersfield, which built Mr. Barnes's and Mr. Bernard's garages. More people are also buying sports utility vehicles, he noted.

"Now Junior has a car and dad has a second car that he uses on weekends, and add in a boat and, gosh, you don't want that to sit out in the sun, and then mom and dad bought a Harley for Wednesday night rides, so you have to have a place for that," said Mr. Gaskill, who has built several homes with five or six bays. "It's like bathrooms — everybody feels like they ought to have their own personal vehicle and their own garage stall," he added.

Standing outside his palatial brick trio of garages admiring an immaculate 1938 Ford pickup, one of six family vehicles, Mr. Bernard could not agree more. "You have to build your garage first and your home second," he said. "It's like the old saying: the guy who dies with the most toys wins."