

## Where to Put the Garage

by Gordon Tully

Houses, at least large ones, have always had driveways, drive-up entrances, and places to store vehicle, but over the last 75 years or so vehicular access and storage have taken over more and more of a typical house and lot. In this article, I want to explore some of the good and bad ways to design and locate an attached garage.

The openings into a house are its eyes and mouth. If you include a huge double garage door on an ordinary house facade, the effect is similar to the huge grinning mouth you might walk through to get into a fun house. It is grossly out of place. But we are now so familiar with the arrangement, we don't say anything. We only notice our discomfort when we ask why our "traditional" house looks so different from a truly old house. The garage door is one reason.

I know of two ways to deal with this problem; either make the door part of a larger, horizontal element set back under an overhang, or use single doors. Figure 1 shows an example of a garage door set under a 3-1/2-foot overhang. This makes the garage door part of a long line of elements: piece of wall, door, piece of wall, void, post.

Breaking the big door into two smaller ones is another way to reduce the scale naturally. Figure 2 shows the garage in a house that we did a few years ago. Here using the separate doors helps to keep the doors from overwhelming the facade.

Unlike other large elements in a house, a garage door cannot effectively be subdivided into windows or other smaller elements. (The little row of windows running across the door is usually worse than nothing at all.) But the door can be divided into panels, and this gives the large expanse some texture. This would be the wrong thing to do in the case pictured in Figure 1, because it would call attention to the door that otherwise effectively disappears under the overhang.

### Where Do You Put the Garage?

The overall floor plan is strongly influenced by the garage placement, and so this question should be one of the first, if not *the* first, issue to be resolved in planning a house. I like to put the garage on the cold and window northwest corner of a house so that it acts as a wind screen. The garage ideally should communicate

with the house through some kind of utility space or mudroom, but it doesn't have to open directly into the kitchen.

When working out the "massing" (looking at the relationships of the house components in terms of volume), it is a very good idea to set the garage forward or back as a separate element, rather than burying it within a larger element. The garage is likely to be the biggest part in the house, as big as a wing. It is unlikely that joining it with another space to make an even bigger wing will improve any design.

Another reason for setting the garage forward or back is that it will be at grade level, while the house floor is likely to be 1 to 3 feet higher. Thus, the garage will have lower eaves than the rest of the house. Is the answer, then, to roof it with a separate shape, or with an extension of a larger roof, as in Figure 2?

If you erect a gable above a two-car garage, it may create a volume that dominates the overall form of the house. This could be a good thing if you handle it right; or it could throw the entire house out of balance. Unfortunately, the pitched-roof alter-

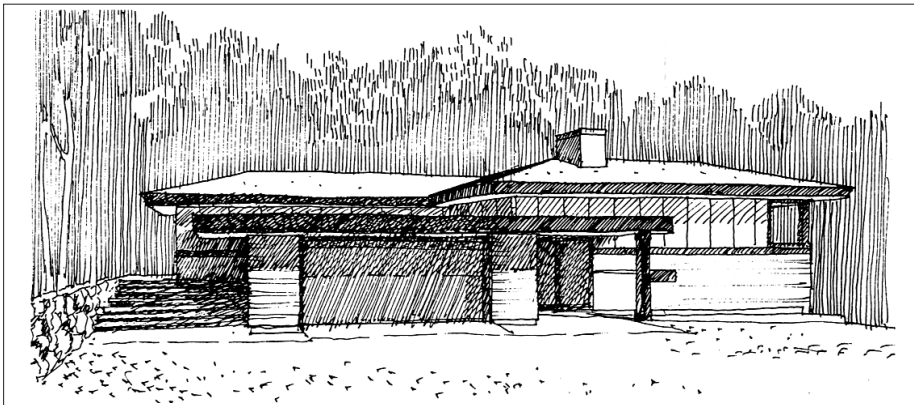
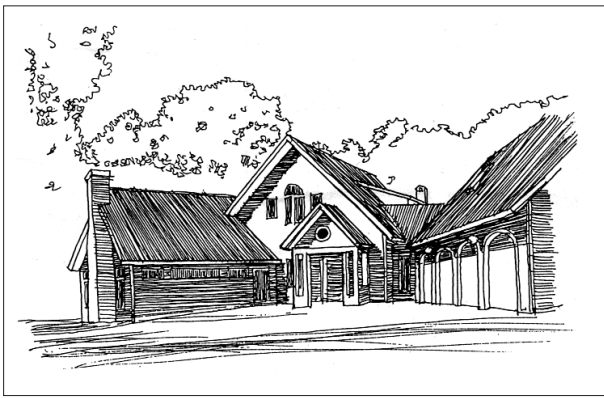


Figure 1. The garage door, set under a 3-1/2-foot overhang, draws little attention to itself, and instead looks like part of a long line of elements. From left to right, you see: a piece of wall, the garage door, a piece of wall, a void, and a post.



Figure 2. Breaking the big door into two smaller ones is a way to reduce the garage doors naturally. Separate doors are less prone to overwhelm the facade.



**Figure 3.** To avoid making the garage seem like the main entrance, place the garage in a wing at an angle. Here the two wings embrace an entrance courtyard which creates a farmyard or country-house effect.

native to a gable is a roof which slopes toward the doors, creating an ice problem on the driveway, where melting snow dripping off the roof freezes on the ground. It is essential to add a gutter to any eaves occurring over a door, and a snow diverter is also a good idea.

In today's world, the approach to the garage is the approach to the house. The typical formal house, with its center entrance and flanking garage gives the world a double message: Enter here at the front door if you are a phantom pedestrian from the past; drive in here to the garage if you are a real person living in the present. More than anything else, this accounts for the well-known fact that few people use the formal front door of a traditionally styled modern house.

The garage should be closely related to the front entrance. Ideally, when you come in from the car, you should arrive at the same place you would if you walked in the front door. All of the houses pictured here show this arrangement. A visitor, arriving by car, will therefore use the main entrance because the back "entrance" is really an internal route into the house from the garage. (There is usually a real "back" entrance on another side of the house.)

When you approach a house from a long driveway, you ideally should come up to the entrance of the house rather than the garage door. One easy way to accomplish this is to place the garage in a wing at an angle to the entrance, as in Figure 3. If you do this, it will be necessary to separate the garage from the house with a covered porch or breezeway/mudroom, in order to avoid having to drive right up to the front door to enter the garage.

Notice that the two wings of the house in Figure 3 embrace an entrance courtyard. Such a courtyard, if made more formal and almost fully enclosed with a pergola or wall, could create a marvelous effect reminiscent of a farmyard or large country house. A caution: Make sure at least one side is open so you can plow the snow to one side in the winter. (This is one reason why you see more enclosed entry courts in California and Florida than in Maine.)

Some building types, such as the raised ranches and split-levels that were so popular in the 60s and 70s have garages that are approached by steep driveways sloping either up or down. Aside from the impracticality of steep driveways in the snow, the visual impact produced by the yawning maw of pavement leading to the

garage doors is devastating to the scale of a house. It is bad enough to have the sea of pavement in front of the house required by our big toys.

If the pavement is on the same level as the yard, it is possible to extend it and create a paved forecourt, perhaps interrupted or bounded by planting areas and low walls. The 24-foot-wide strip of blacktop does not have to become the welcome mat for the house. But if the garage is down or up from the yard, the drive is likely to be of a minimum width, a paved slot chiseled out of the terrain.

The house in Figure 2 is an urban house, and we had no choice but to pave right up to the garage door, warping the pavement to accommodate the steeply sloping street grade. Some of the curse is eased because the driveway is a square of paving that is adjacent to the yard lying atop a retaining wall. Also, the drive interrupts an existing stone wall running along the sidewalk. Without the walls, the driveway would be just another accommodation to Detroit, without architectural character.

I live in a 19th-century suburb where the carriages and later the cars were stored in large barns out back, connected to the street by gravel driveways that were later paved over. In our case, the garage had burned down, so we eliminated the paving and liberated the side and back yard. The street is lined with cars anyway, so the ones parked in the front-yard parking spaces are not much of a visual problem.

There are many advantages to this arrangement. Because we come and go in the front, we see passersby and our neighbors more often. Our cars stay cold, and are less likely to rust. We don't have to worry about running over kids or pets in the driveway. The cars are at the ready, and it is easy to park in an open parking space.

Having never lived in a house with an attached garage, I have a natural-born skepticism toward the idea, except for snowy climates. It is hard for me to fathom why an attached garage is nearly a requirement for modern living.

If you are looking for a way to improve the looks of your next house, consider leaving the cars outside where they belong. If that won't work for your client, try a detached garage. But if you do have to build the garage into the house, try some of these tricks to make it a better roommate. ■

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