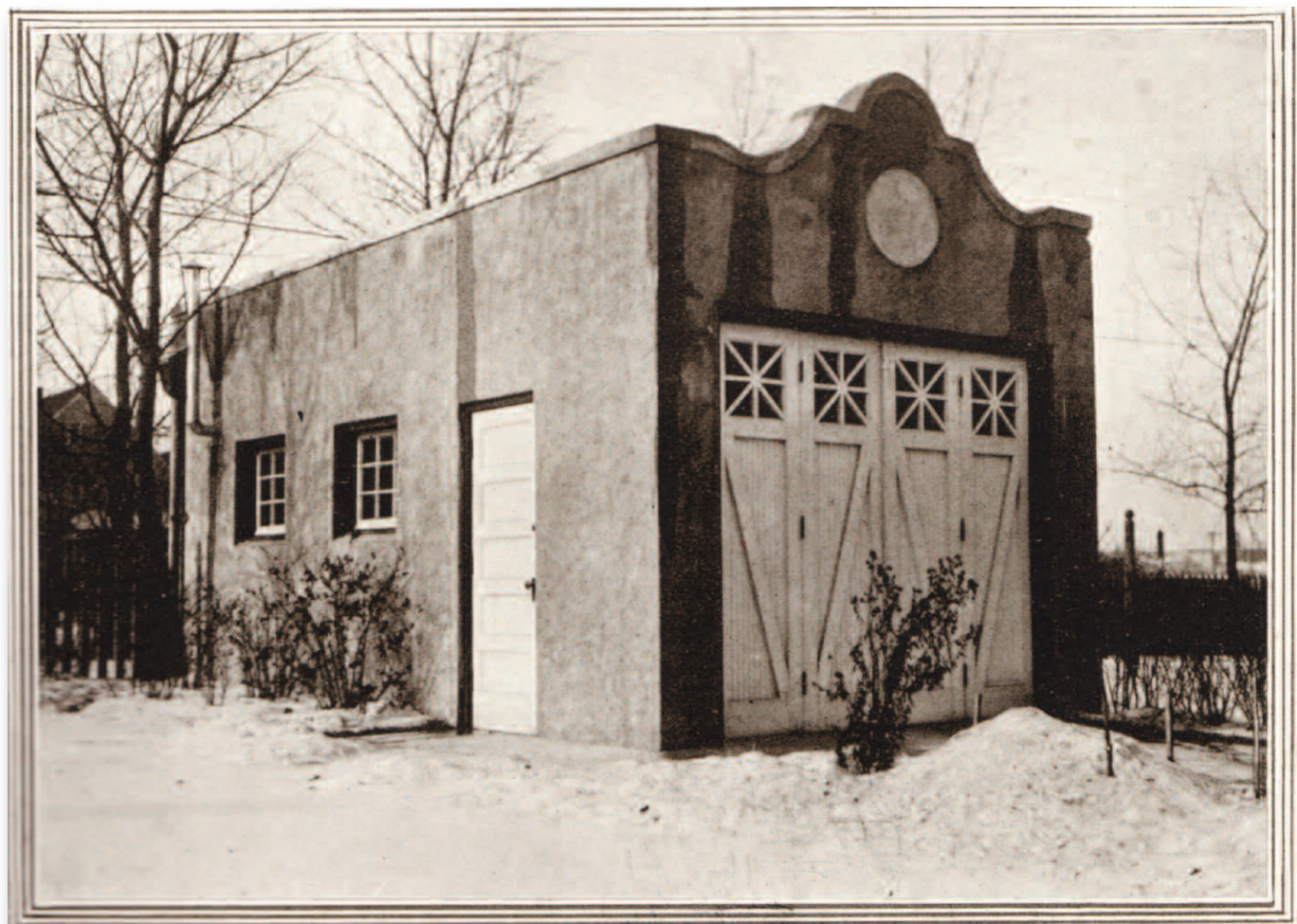


The Evolution of the Auto House

The motorcar's popularity drove the development of the bungalow-era garage.

BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER



above

Garages evolved into fashion statements that tried to emulate house styles. This model, with its stucco siding and parapet front, has a Spanish flavor. Note the elaborate doors.

FOR THE PERIOD OF MODERN AMERICAN HISTORY FROM EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT TO THE TURN OF the 20th-century, people mostly employed two methods of transport: walking and using a horse. Housing for the latter was either in a barn or, beginning in the mid-19th century, a carriage house. Most homeowners did not lodge their horse on property but paid for space at a nearby stable. Some of the more wealthy had lavish buildings built at the back of their lots to shelter not only the animals but the domestic staff as well. Two- and even three-story structures with all the architectural elements of a late Victorian house adorned upscale neighborhoods.

All this changed with the introduction of the motorcar on a mass scale in the early years of the 20th century. In 1900, there were about 8,000 cars on the road in the United States. In just 15 years, the number jumped to more than 2.5 million. Many of these were the Ford Model "T."

With so many "motor buggies" on the streets, many of which were "open-topped" (not having an enclosed passenger area), there developed a massive need for storage facilities to house these machines. At first, autos were placed in available barns and carriage houses, but this proved unsafe—flammable gas and oil mixed with dry straw was very dangerous. The first solution was a common auto stable similar to what was in place across the nation for horses. Vacant lots had buildings erected that could contain several cars, and the owners rented spaces or stalls.

This was not the best solution, as autos needed a good deal of personal attention to run properly, so entrepreneurs began to offer an "auto house," or garage, to fit onto the owner's own lot. One could purchase plans advertised in national magazines and have one built or go to one of the many "kit house" companies and get one ready-made. In 1911, the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan, which had begun selling kit homes in 1906, offered a mail order 10- by 16-foot auto house for \$95. In 1913, Sears Roebuck was offering a 12- by 15-foot model for \$96.50. The Model T was slightly more than 11- by 6-feet wide, so garage size soon grew to accommodate that model. In comparison, a 1959 Cadillac, the one with the elongated fins, was 19 feet long. Many of the garage kits were pre-fabricated with panels that bolted together and went up very quickly. One Sears model, shown



above

An ornate carriage barn from 1891. The building held not only horses, but carriages, wagons and rooms for domestic staff.

below

By the mid-1920s, some families had two cars or shared a garage with a neighbor. This model was offered by a plan service and had ample room for storage on the sides of each car.



Guaranteed Prices-No Extras

Page 177

All Lumber Cut-to-Fit Put Them Up Yourself

Every lot of lumber which goes into these garages is ready-cut. Window frames are factory made and shipped ready to set into the wall. Doors are made on-site in one wide features of clear white pine lumber and are shipped ready to hang. In every detail on the both front door and side door much less than the usual nailed together door. They are 1 1/2 inches thick, mortise and tenon joints and will always hang true and straight. Because all material is sent in such shape, it is but the work of a few hours to build your garage instead of several days. Hundreds of our customers build these garages themselves at big savings and enjoy doing it too.

Note the specifications and see what excellent material we furnish. You get the finest hardware, heavy hinges and a cylinder lock set, two coats of quality paint and all plans and blue prints furnished free.

DOUBLE GARAGES are simple large for two cars, 164 being similar in design to 101; and 105 similar in design to 101. These double garages have two sets of double doors, two windows in each side and one in the end.

Ready-Cut Garage No. 102—Double Garage This Design, No. 104

Specifications of Garages on This Page

SILLS—2x6, No. 1 Yellow Pine, spaced 2 ft. on center.

STUDDING AND RAFTERS—2x6, No. 1 Yellow Pine, spaced 2 ft. on center.

ROOF—1x6, No. 2 Yellow Pine, double and matched sheathing, covered with 1/2-in.-thick asphalt shingles, surfaced roofing in a tropical green-green color.

SIDING—1x6, Clear Yellow Pine Drop Siding.

DOORS—Clear White Pine Doors, each 4 ft. by 8 ft., 1 1/2 inches thick, with solid stile and rail, and beveled panels below with glass panels above—very strongly built. Adequate to hang.

WINDOWS—Single garage has one window in each side and one end; double garages have two windows in each side and one in end.

SASH—8 ft. by 7 ft. by 2 ft. 6 in., divided in four lights. Hinged to swing in. Complete with all necessary hardware.

HARDWARE—Double jammed hardware for doors, including hinges and pull and push knobs, and cylinder lock with small flat key. Hinges and fasteners for sash. Sash for entire building.

PAINT—Two coats of Quality paint for outside walls and doors. Unless otherwise instructed will furnish white paint.

PLANS and blue prints are furnished free. All material cut-to-fit.

Line Your Garage with Wallboard

For real winter comfort. A small heater will keep them from freezing and your car will start easier on cold mornings.

Our Backboard Wallboard is made of three layers of highly compressed pure fibre, treated with a moisture proofing and two layers of asphalt concrete, sealed together to form a tough plastic board—ditch drains. You can put it on yourself. Prices on page 1.

Ready-Cut Garage No. 103—Double Garage This Design, No. 105

Garages Nos. 106 and 107

These fine material furnished for garages of this design, including single sliding doors with complete hardware, 5 ft. by 8 ft. Clear Red Cedar shingles over 1/4-in. asphalt shingles and clear 1/2-in. thick asphalt shingles over 1/4-in. thick asphalt shingles and clear 1/2-in. thick asphalt shingles over 1/4-in. thick asphalt shingles.

IMPORTANT NOTE—These garages are equipped with our Quality Weatherproof Triple Sliding Doors. These doors open by rolling back and require three feet of clear space to operate. Order your garage at least 10 ft. more longer than your car. These doors are good looking, slide easily and are long lasting. They are included in the price of Garages Nos. 106, 107, 108 and 109, ordered on page 1.

These triple doors are also furnished for any other garage on this page. See column on page 1.

STUCCO FINISH—We also furnish this style garage with Stucco Finish, including all plans of this design. In the outside walls, roof and concrete. Dry-laid stucco has special surface to which stucco finish adheres. Single garage with stucco finish walls is known as 107; double garage, 109.

This Handy Side Door for Any Garage

(Except Nos. 101 and 110)

Especially convenient if your garage opens on to alley. Door is 5 ft. wide by 7 ft. 1 1/2 inch thick, has 5-paned glass with frame, built-in lock set and night latch. Costs but little extra.

Price on page 1.

Garage No. 106. Double Garage this design, No. 107. Single Garage with Stucco Finish, No. 108; Double, No. 109



PHOTOGRAPH BY HILLARY BLACK



PHOTOGRAPH BY HILLARY BLACK

in an advertisement, was erected in only five hours and 45 minutes! Other types came via the railroad in pre-cut parts that were assembled with the help of a manual. Bungalow-era garages had doors that slid on runners or side-hinged, or were accordion style. Driveways to reach these new buildings were often just two strips of gravel or rows of bricks. Garage floors were typically dirt.

The term we use today—garage—was interchangeable with auto house or buggy house until the 1920s, when it became the default standard. The term is from the French garer and means to shelter and protect. As the size and

left

By the early '20s, companies like Gordon-Van Tine of Iowa were offering a number of garage models along with the kit homes they sold nationwide.

below left

There are many companies that offer excellent garage doors and hardware to complement the vintage home today.

below

This driveway is typical of the bungalow era in which concrete lanes allow for rain to be absorbed into the uncovered areas. The garage is located at the end of a long driveway that goes under a covered archway, a perfect spot to drop off or pick up passengers in inclement weather.

By 1915, there were more than 2.5 million cars on the road.



PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER

above

A 1930 Ford Model T. A sporting a hard-top and side window. These cars still fit into the older-style garages.



above

An open-topped Ford Model T from 1911. With a cloth top and no side windows, these cars were not made to be stored in the open.



above

What we today call a convertible was the only option on this 1915 Ford T. At a little more than 11 feet long it needed at least a 12-foot garage to store it.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER



above

This early rendering of a bungalow neighborhood shows the difficulty of parking an auto in the 1920s. If lots were too narrow, garages were oriented toward a back of the lot line alley for access.

right

Sears Roebuck offered a fireproof steel garage for \$110 dollars in the years after the World War I.

bottom right

By 1922, Sears had produced an entire catalogue for their extensive line of garages, both in prefabricated panels and assembly kits.




THE ROAD MAP

For more on the bungalow-era garage,
follow these routes:

- Houses by Mail: A Guide to Houses from Sears, Roebuck and Company by Katherine Cole Stevenson and H. Ward Jandl, Wiley Publishers, 1996. Visit barnesandnoble.com.
- Sears Modern Homes, 1913, Dover Publications, 2006. Visit barnesandnoble.com.
- 117 House Design of the Twenties by Gordon-Van Tine Co., reprint of original. Dover Publications, 1992. Visit doverpublications.com.
- Aladdin "Built in a Day" House Catalog, 1917, by Aladdin Homes, reprint of original. Dover Books, 1995. Visit doverpublications.com.
- Auto Opium: A Social History of American Automobile Design by David Gartman. Routledge, 1994. Visit amazon.com.
- For more on Sears homes and garages, visit searsarchives.com/homes/.
- For more on Aladdin homes and garages, visit [leave <http://>]
<http://clarke.cmich.edu/aladdin/Aladdin.htm>
- For more on automobile history, visit http://inventors.about.com/od/cstartinventions/a/Car_History.htm or greatachievements.org/?id=3871



Robert Schweitzer has taught architectural history and historic preservation for more than 25 years. He performs exterior color consulting for a wide range of historical and modern buildings. E-mail him at robs@umich.edu or visit his Web site at historichousecolors.com. 

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