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4 Ways to Make
a Garage Your
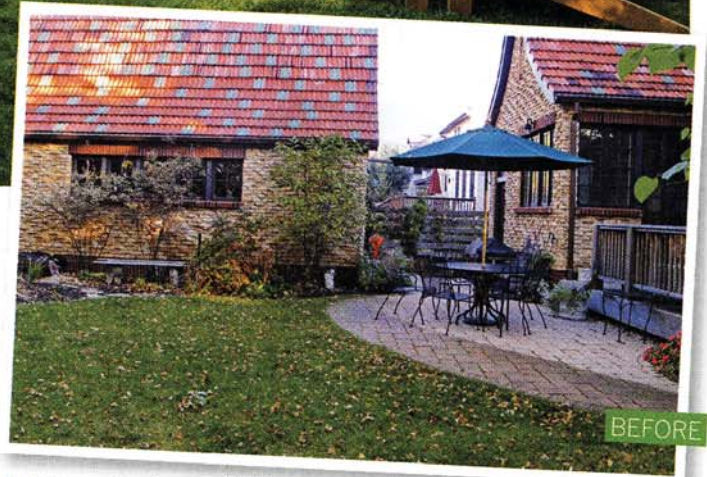Garden's Top Feature

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BEFORE

Co-opt Your Garage

Most classically beautiful gardens incorporate some sort of structure to give shelter, frame a view, or provide a destination. In small lots, adding something like this gets tricky, so your best bet is to utilize a feature that may already be there. For many, this would be the garage.

Since garages are used only for storage or parking and are usually unattractive, the typical strategy for landscaping around a garage is to hide it with foundation plantings. But take a second look. There are huge advantages to co-opting a garage into the garden scheme by treating it as a theatrical backdrop for an outdoor living space. Changes that can be made include enlarging the entry door, incorporating vertical greening, or adding a faux porch. Stylish alterations can imbue a service building with personality and charm, turning it from intruder to welcome addition. The benefits of such improvements go beyond cosmetic—they can reinvent the way you use and enjoy the garden. —*Doug Hoerr*

▲ New Point of View

While this house had a charming detached garage, it wasn't incorporated into the property effectively. As in most back yards, all of the high-use areas hugged the house, giving the homeowners seated at their alfresco dining table a better view of their neighbor's house than their own. Simple changes made the garage's garden-side space more intriguing. We removed the foundation plantings that obscured the best features of the garage and softened the brick facade with new planter boxes. Bluestone paving and a table in front of the improved facade established it as a destination—a new "cottage" that is an inviting place to eat a meal, appreciate close-up views of the garden areas on either side, and take stock of all the work the homeowners put into making their home a place they love to live in.

DESIGN DILEMMAS

BEFORE

▲ Porch Perfection

The owners of this pretty Georgian-style house wanted more garden space. Seeing an opportunity in the architectural features of the existing garage, we moved its door to another side and replaced it with a faux front porch accessible only from the garden; a swing bench completes the "guest house" stage set. The dollhouse style works perfectly with the architecture of the house, and because the garage is home for a classic car that hits the road only about five times per year, the homeowners simply drive over the lawn to get to the driveway, but can enjoy the view of the "guest house" every day.

◄ Walled Garden

The garage in this urban Chicago back yard sets the tone for an entire garden. We continued the brick pattern and tile of the existing garage along a new brick wall to create a quaint courtyard that feels as if it were always there. Adding a retractable awning along the top of the garage created a shady and private destination that invites guests to walk through the garden on their way to the alfresco dining table. From there, they enjoy views of the garden in the foreground and a beautifully renovated 1906 townhome in the background. To further embellish the wall, we fixed iron flowerpot holders onto the facade for a garden wall that can easily be replanted to suit the season.

Playing Around ▶

The owners of a center-city townhouse wanted to maximize space to encourage their active kids to spend time there every day. Since the new landscape would devote all available space to active play, there was no way to use plantings to soften the intrusive look of the existing garage. Instead of hiding it, we expanded the garage and created new ways to use it: a tennis backboard on its facade; a wide door that opens to a sheltered play space. Add a Ping-Pong table and table games, and you're ready for the best kid party on the block! At night, the translucent, backlit door glows and the entire garden is transformed into a courtyard that's perfect for entertaining grownups or kids. The space feels larger because it is multifunctional.

BEFORE