

- [REAL ESTATE](#)
- [DESIGN](#)

A Luxurious Garage Conversion That Can Still House Cars

How to transform auto accommodations into a homey, multipurpose living space—without giving up your parking privileges



TWO-CAR MIRAGE 'A garage doesn't have to be all metal shelving and a horrible floor,' said interior designer Lisa le Duc, who beautified her Tiburon, Calif., auto accommodations with sage-green and cream paints.

PHOTO: SETH SMOOT, STYLING BY KENDRA SMOOT

By Elizabeth Quinn Brown

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AT FIRST GLANCE, Lisa le Duc's oasis-like garage doesn't appear to accommodate actual automobiles, but it does. "I wanted a space that was an extension of a mudroom and kitchen and just nicer to be in than a garage," said the English interior designer of her Tiburon, Calif., room. She transformed the square footage into a multipurpose retreat that can easily be cleared when she needs to house cars. Her design arsenal: beadboard, sage-green paint, a cream-colored kitchenette and a decorative but drivable epoxy-coat deck. A garage "doesn't have to be all metal shelving and a horrible floor, a room nobody bothered to paint," she said.

She likens the visual organization of the space to that of a kitchen, which "generally all has the same units, the same hardware and the same finished surfaces." The designer honored the room's original purpose through low-tech references, including oil-rubbed pulls and knobs. "They're black, metal, really nice, chunky, solid hardware," she said. "I didn't want it to be brass and shiny and pretty. I needed it to be industrial."

Unifying lines tidy up the design and minimize clutter. All the top cabinets descend to the same horizontal point, an evenness that's easy on the eyes, as is the verticality that recurs in the bead-board paneling, the planks of the cabinet doors and the ceramic tiles that are installed on-end. From a very pulled-back point of view, said Ms. le Duc, "the vision is green punctuated by a cream, and that's it."

Here, more details on how she rescued a garage from a lifetime of ugly utility.



Embellish Subtly

Ms. le Duc relied primarily on a chic, utilitarian aesthetic to banish the banality of her garage, but when it came to the corner where a door connects to the main house, she indulged in pure decoration. Of the African Ankara fabric that covers the bench, she said, “It’s just that small punctuation of different art, color, vibrancy.” The fabric’s pattern chimes with the hand-woven tote atop the bench. Also purely ornamental: the shamrock-green hands of the Swiss luggage clock.

The adjacent kitchenette, which sees “messy water action” from chores like arranging flowers and washing boots, is a windowless nook. Here Ms. le Duc used design to maximize light, cloaking the cabinets and walls in Farrow & Ball’s Slipper Satin, a creamy white, and echoing the hue in the quartz counters and backsplash. For the latter, she

chose glossy tiles that, together with a chrome faucet, deliver a dollop of brightness “to bounce light around and contrast the flatness of the green.”



PHOTO: SETH SMOOT, STYLING BY KENDRA SMOOT

Rack with Style

The bike docks add another bit of unifying verticality to the room’s design. The mounts hold the two-wheelers in tracks that recede 3 inches, ensuring that the bikes’ protrusion into the room nearly matches that of the neighboring cabinets. This helps neaten what can be a messy jumble of handlebars and wheels.

Industrial metal frames around the docks protect the surrounding wood from getting bashed when the bikes are stowed or unloaded—and nod to the utility of the room. “It’s just to reference that slightly more industrial, workshop-y vibe,” Ms. le Duc said of the

reinforced slots. “You can see the welding marks [in the metal]. You know, it’s in its raw form.” Softening the rugged corner: A basket-like straw dog bed from Baba Tree Basket Company.



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Choose Pieces That Can Stow Away

To build a relaxing place that she and her husband would like spending time in, Ms. le Duc painted the millwork in Farrow & Ball’s Lichen, a calming, naturalistic green applied to the cabinet faces in a diluted form that lets the grain show through. Ms. le Duc likes that, when the garage is open, the same color pairing seen inside—that earthy verdigris and the off-white of the tiny kitchen—recurs outside. “That cream is like the craggy rock against the green brush in the landscape that I look out onto.”

A durable speckled flooring reprises these shades and adds a complementary salmon fleck. The beech-wood workbench from Sweden's Sjobergs adds another organic layer, and though the table weighs 350 pounds, it can slide across the nearly smooth floor—to the left to accommodate one car and into the kitchenette to fit two. "I'll do it when we're away for the summer," said Ms. le Duc of storing autos.