homes sunday

STARTRIBUNE.COM/HOMES • SECTION H • SUNDAY, JUNE 27, 2010

WEDNESDAY
In Home + Garden: Some gardeners go to extremes to keep critters out of their yards.

GARAGE as GETAWAY

Converting a garage into a multipurpose space that includes a rec room, gym, home office or even a bedroom can be a cost-effective alternative to a full-fledged addition. **H11**

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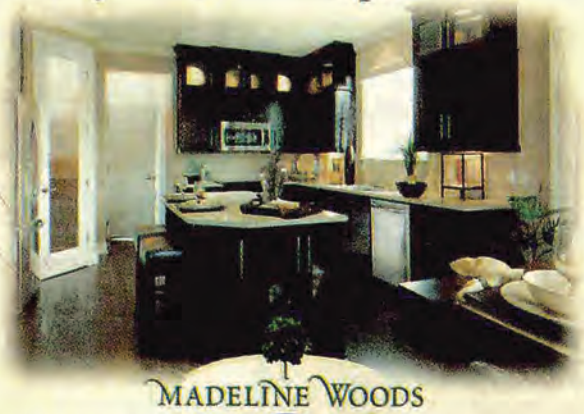

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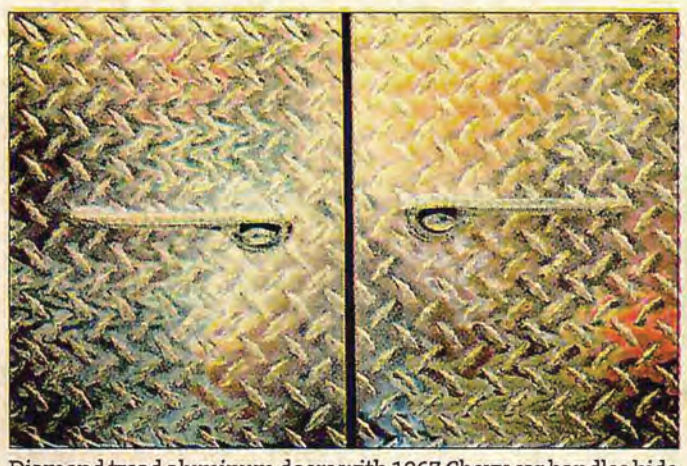
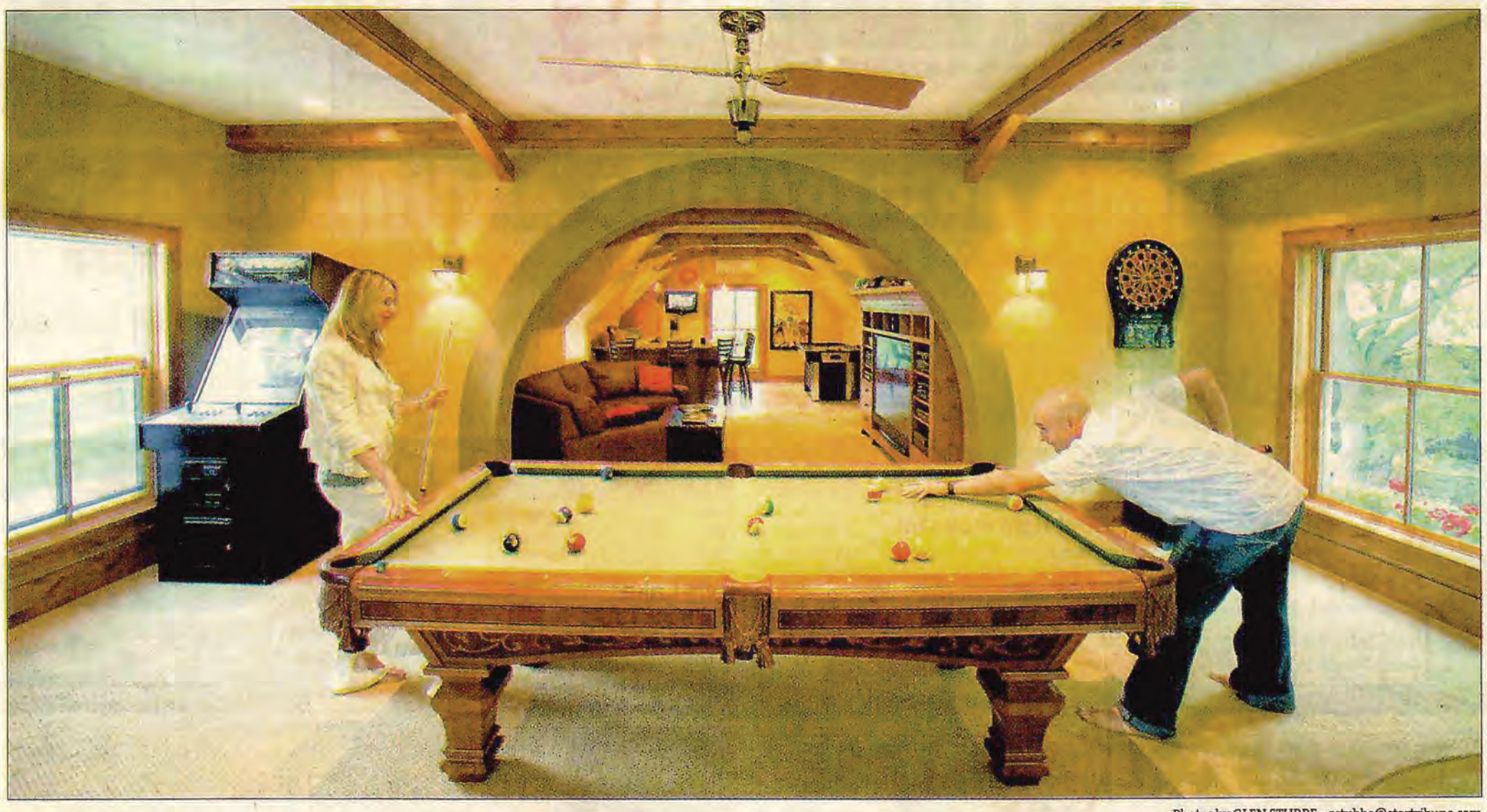
Jeff Murphy designed different "entertainment zones" that include 1980s arcade games in the garage rec room.



Diamond tread aluminum doors with 1967 Chevy car handles hide the garage's mechanical systems.

Modular aluminum cabinets store tools and stuff. There's also a wall-mounted TV so Murphy won't miss his favorite shows.



Photos by GLEN STUBBE • gstubbe@startribune.com

Jeff Murphy and his wife, Jill, shot pool in the upper level of their Buffalo garage, which houses a rec room, bar and a work area for their motorized toys. **BELOW** The exterior of the carriage-style garage.

GARAGE as GETAWAY

Converting a garage to a multipurpose space with rec room, gym, home office or even a bedroom can be a cost-effective alternative.

By LYNN UNDERWOOD
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Jeff Murphy has a place to play billiards, watch football on one (or all) of his three TVs and serve beverages from a granite-topped bar. It just isn't in his house. It's in his garage.

He still parks vehicles in his 1½-story carriage-style garage, but he's made sure there's also plenty of room to play. On the first floor is a heated "man cave" where he can tinker with his toys — snowmobiles, personal watercraft, ATVs — and an automotive-themed bathroom with a vanity crafted from a used fuel drum. Upstairs, his wife, Jill, and their three children often join him to watch movies or play 1980s arcade games. "It's like going to a cabin for a weekend," he said.

The Murphys' home, on Lake Pulaski in Buffalo, Minn., has no basement. So when they added a second garage for storage, they decided to build more than a basic shell.

"After the kids are in bed, I'm out there until midnight," said Murphy, owner of Murphy & Co. Design, a Buffalo residential design firm. "It's my time to collect my thoughts. I can turn up 38 Special and install a new carburetor on a Jet Ski."

Murphy is among a growing number of garage owners who have taken the typically grungy, cold, cavernous space and transformed it to an inviting retreat. In the past several years, more people have built multifunctional garages or converted existing garages into lower-cost rec rooms, home offices, exercise rooms or even spare bedrooms.

"The garage is the final frontier of the house," said Kira Obolensky, author of "Garage: Reinventing the Place We Park." "People see more opportunities to use this flexible overflow space," she said.

Jim Kuzzy, project manager for Plekkenpol Builders in Bloomington, said he's noticed a rise in the number of homeowners tapping into the often underused space. "Cost-effective garage conversions are an area showing growth even in this economy," he said.

Among the more popular garage remodeling projects he's encountered are main floor combination mud/laundry rooms.

Although the National Association of the Remodeling Industry doesn't track different types of projects, members say garage conversions are on the rise.

"It can be a cheaper alternative to putting an addition on a house to get livable, usable space," said Dave Vinje, owner of Attics to Basements Building and Renovations in Elk River. Vinje is currently working on a project to create a handicapped-accessible apartment for the owner's mother by adding square footage to a two-car garage.

Brian Cornell of Minneapolis gained usable space not from the interior of his new garage — but from the exterior.

Cornell worked with DiGiacomo Homes and Renovation in Minnetonka to design a fireplace on one side of his new 2½-stall garage to create his version of a French garden grotto. The wood-burning fireplace faces a pergola-covered patio that serves as an al fresco dining space.

The project added about $5,000 to the cost of the new garage, but Cornell said it was well worth it.

"It's more than a garage attached to a patio," he said. "It brings our family together."

Now that garages have moved beyond simple storage structures, it's likely that we'll see more creative uses for them.

"It's become a unique space in American culture," said Obolensky. "It feels like a stage when the garage door goes up. Anything can happen."

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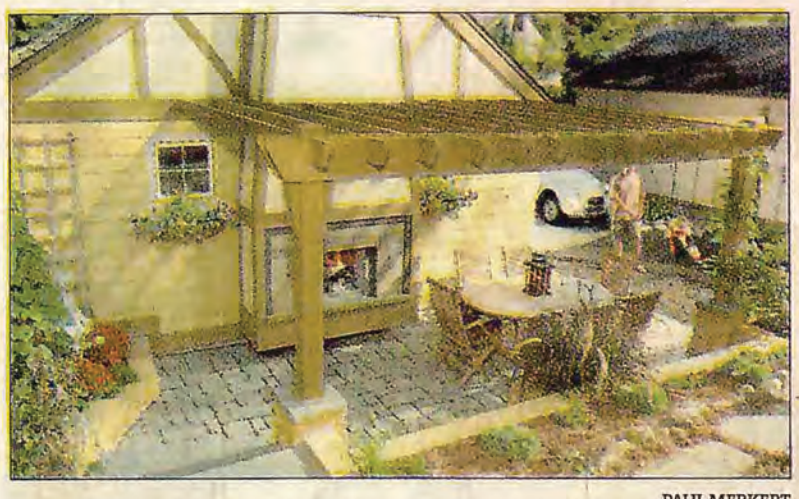
The RaceDeck floor is softer than concrete. "It's great if you're on your back, working on a Jet Ski," said Jeff Murphy.



PAUL MERKERT

Brian Cornell built a fireplace on the exterior of his new Minneapolis garage and created an intimate outdoor dining room.

The automotive theme continues with the bathroom's fuel drum vanity and antique side door mirrors.