

How To Build Your **Dream Garage**



- *Navigate the Planning Process*
- *Design the Perfect Floor Plan*
- *Workbenches & Storage Solutions*
- *Heating, Plumbing & Lighting Ideas*
- *Create Game Rooms & TV Rooms*

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Create Custom Building Plans

What You'll Need: Local architect

Research

Planning

Time: 1–8 hours

Tab: \$200–\$1,200

When you have a garage in mind that departs from the ordinary or you are doing a remodel job, a custom plan is the best way to go. This tailors the space to your needs as well as your lot's physical properties.

You can, of course, try to draw the design yourself with a computer-aided design (CAD) program or on graph paper. While this is a good way to get your ideas on paper, creating your own plans without the help of a pro is risky business. You need someone who not only understands structural needs but also the local codes in order to create a complete design necessary for a well-built structure. The good news is that working with an architect on a custom plan may cost as little as \$200 for a simple structure. More complex designs that incorporate two floors, hot tubs, and living space may cost you more, but \$1,200 should cover most drawings.

Working with an architectural firm will give you not only a custom plan but the help of experienced professionals able to foresee issues and problems you might miss. You'll find an assortment of architectural firms that offer everything from a consultation to complete services that include design, planning, and contracting to have the work completed. See a list of resources and a few good firms in this book's appendix.

The first step is to determine what kind of structure you want and need. Put some time and thought into what is going to go into your garage, what kind of activities you'd like to do out there, and how you want the structure to look.

Your neighborhood can give you clues as to how your project should look. "You don't want the garage to look like it dropped in from heaven," says architect Laura Orfield. "A garage palace with columns is not going to look right in an old, modest neighborhood." Also, look at magazines, books, and Web sites for ideas on the look and features you'd like. Make a list of the things you find appealing, then prioritize and be prepared to let go of a few things if you need to meet your budget.

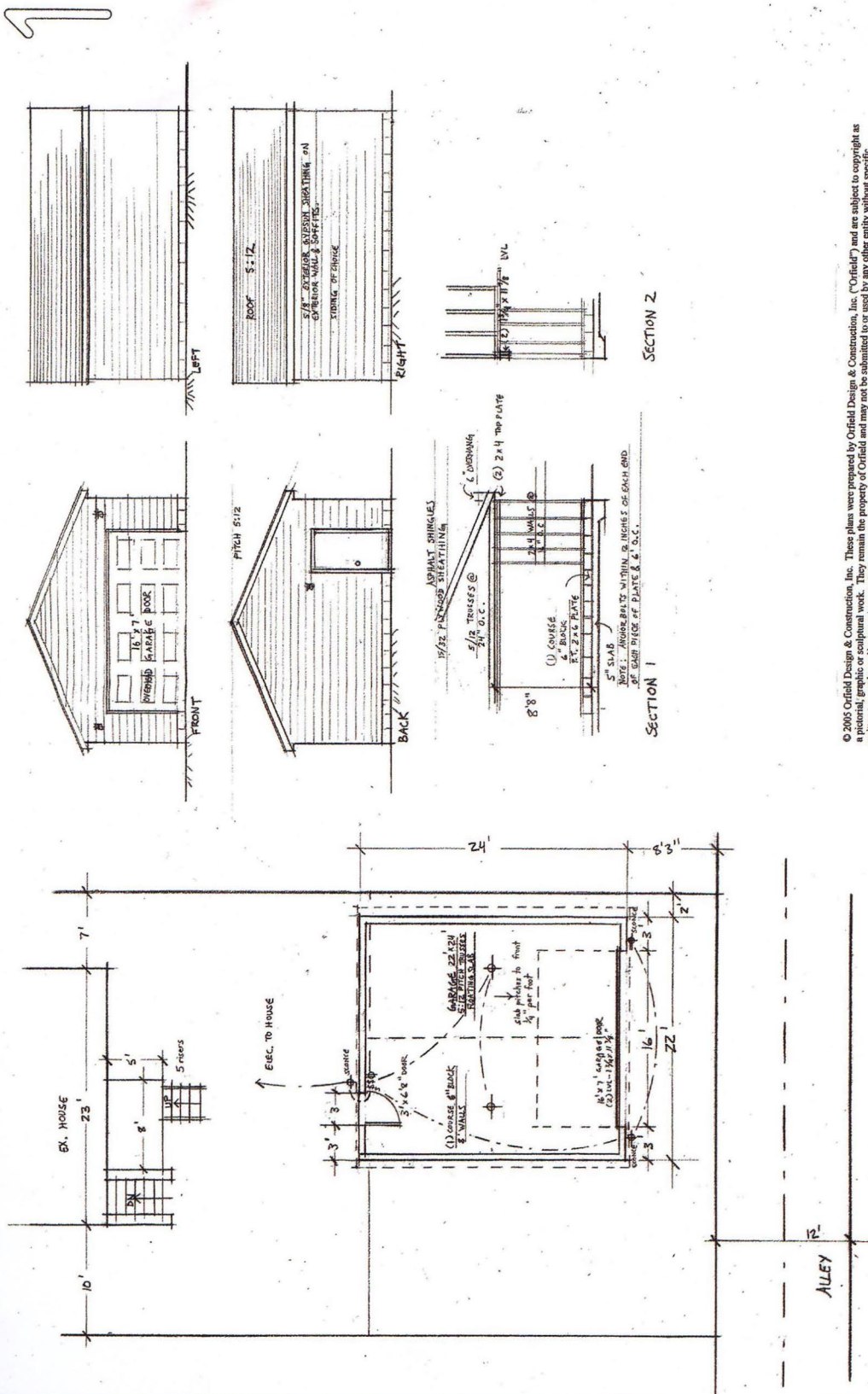
Bear in mind that you are going to want a site survey in order to do an architectural plan. A site survey is a precisely measured plot of your property that includes dimensions of everything on your lot. Nearly anyone who is doing remodeling should have one of these. It is also helpful if you ever plan to sell your house.

Once you know the structure you want, at least roughly, think about how much you want the architect to do. Do you want them to just draw up a plan? Or would you also like them to contract to have the work completed? (You can also call a couple of contractors yourself and talk informally about what you have in mind and see if they can give you ballpark ideas of the cost.)

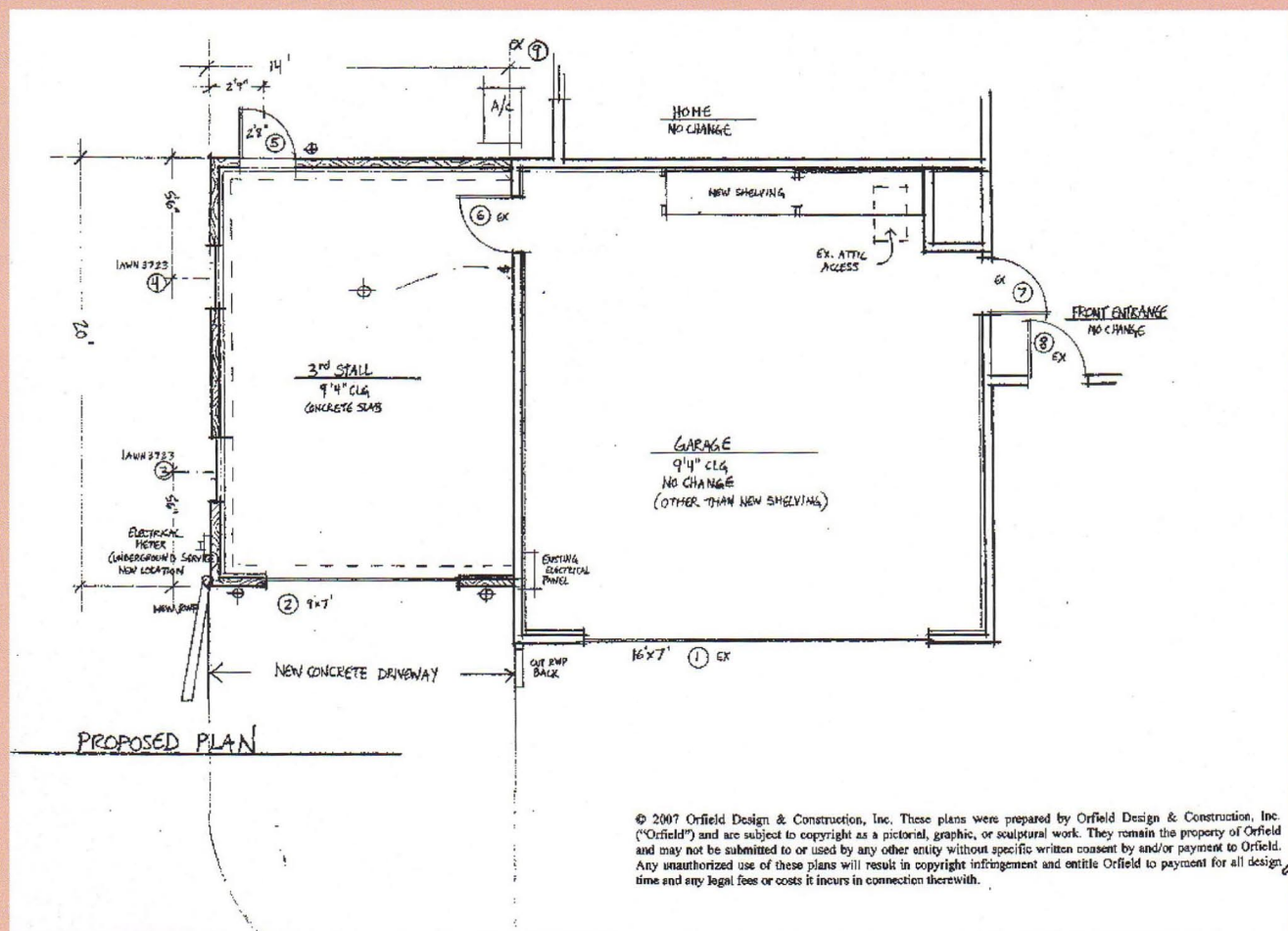
One of the most important things to bring to your architect is a realistic budget. They need to know how much money you have to work with so they can plan accordingly. In order to get a good idea of what it might cost to do the work you have in mind, open your eyes to what's happening in the neighborhood around you. If someone has recently built a garage you like, stop in to ask for a tour. Most people love to show off their new projects and will be happy to show you around.

In order to find a good architect, start by asking people you know and trust. Put the word out and see what comes up. Also, you can go to the Yellow Pages or consult several Web sites such as the American Institute

A detailed plan is key to building your garage, and this hand-drawn example from Orfield Design shows all the detail you'll need to get permits and bids, and build the structure. While you can purchase a plan with nearly this level of detail, working with an architect gives you the advantage of being able to customize it to your needs, and it can cost only a few hundred dollars more than a generic plan you purchase. Orfield Design



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When you are doing a renovation or designing a custom garage, working with an architectural firm is a must. They will come out and measure your space, and their experience will most likely provide you with some new ideas on how to make the most of your space. Orfield Design

of Architects (www.aia.org), Architects USA (www.architectsusa.com), and BuilderSpace.com, which offer online architect finders that allow you to search by region and specialty.

Once you find a few who look like they meet your needs, spend some time meeting with them. Just as with your contractor, work with a person you enjoy and communicate effectively with rather than the lowest bidder. Rapport is important to getting the building you want!

Once you've done your research on what you want from your garage and have found an architect who is a good fit, you can get started. The process typically begins with a walk-around of your property in

which basic parameters are discussed. The architect will take some basic measurements and get an idea of what you want.

One key thing here is to clearly explain what you want and listen to what the architect suggests. They do this every day and will most likely offer some ideas you haven't considered. Make the most of your investment by taking advantage of their expertise.

After that, plans will be drawn up for you to inspect. Initially, these are typically rough drawings followed by detailed plans created once you have settled on the design. These plans will allow you to get bids from contractors and, if you are doing much of the work yourself, apply for permits at city hall.