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Goodbye, garages: 10 carports worth craving

Come hither

Architect Christopher Gosch, principal of Bark Design, is a big believer in carports, even for his frosty Madison, Wis. At his Doris house, a long carport leads to a recessed door.

"From a design perspective, a carport is so much better (than a garage)," Gosch says. "A garage has this unwelcoming, blank face. A carport is much more inviting."

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Carports reclaim their cool

Belittled and sometimes banned, humble carports are making a high-design comeback. Here are 3 reasons why.

By Alyssa Ford of [SwitchYard Media](#)

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At its most elemental, a carport is just a roof with four posts — the simplest of structures meant to keep away the rain and snow. In its heyday in the 1950s and 1960s, the carport was a place not only to park the car but also to play pingpong, crank up a radio or emancipate a cold beer on a hot summer day. It was a gathering spot, a party space and a shady refuge.

Over time, though, the classic suburban carport gave way to two-, three- and four-car garages that could store the weed-whacker and the holiday wreath. Some cities even started banning carports to help "upgrade" the housing stock.

But a few contemporary designers have returned to the humble carport, noting its "green" attributes, stylish possibilities and versatility. Now, modernistas are adding new, retro-cool carports to their homes, sometimes in lieu of traditional garages. Here's why.

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Carports have eco-credibility

Driving a car may not be the greenest lifestyle choice, but carports are certainly better for indoor air quality than attached garages. According to a 2005 University of Alaska Fairbanks study, homes in Alaska with attached garages had heightened levels of toluene and benzene, gasoline-related pollutants. The problem is particularly pronounced in the summer, according to the study. The researchers also found that houses with carports or detached garages had no traceable levels of

toluene and benzene, even in the height of summer heat.

[Slide show: 10 carports worth craving](#)

Husband-and-wife architect team Lawrence Scarpa and Angela Brooks say they had heard this about attached garages, so they opted for something different when they designed their home in Venice, Calif. Rather than adding on a traditional garage, they designed a 13-foot-wide carport with a steel-framed canopy. They went further by adding a charging station for their electric car and photovoltaic modules, or solar panels, to the roof.

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San Diego's Envision Solar sells its LifePort carport as a ready-to-assemble kit with all the framing, roofing, inverters, solar panels and screws included. For \$43,000, plus installation, homeowners can have a 24-foot-wide carport with built-in storage and a photovoltaic system. A typical configuration can provide 5,600 kilowatt-hours a year, which in most cases can power a 3,000-square-foot home, according to Envision Solar.

Aside from the carport's concrete platform, the company says a typical residential kit can be assembled in less than a day.

Carports are stylish

From a designer's perspective, few elements are as difficult to work with as attached garages.

"It's tricky to beautify an attached garage," Dallas architect Susan Appleton says. "Designwise, if a garage is heavy, then a carport is light."

Article continues below

Architect Christopher Gosch, principal of Bark Design in Madison, Wis., says the difference is emotional.

"A garage door is this blank, unwelcoming space; a garage door says, 'Stop, not welcome,'" he says. "A carport, on the other hand, is much more inviting and interesting."

One of Gosch's favorite carports accompanies the flat-roofed Doris house he designed using simple, boxy shapes. The carport is fundamental to the house's integrity and juts out at the front with a guest bedroom atop it.

"Carports really work best when they are included as part of the overall design," Gosch says.

Architect Michael Green, a principal at the design firm McFarlane Green Biggar in North Vancouver, British Columbia, has designed a number of garages, but for his own house, he wanted a carport for his beloved, biodiesel-fueled Land Rover. The architect and his workmates designed an open-slatted, cedar carport that resembles a train car. The roof is made of a semi-opaque material called Rodeca. It allows light inside the carport and extends over a small outdoor sitting area.

In the future, Green plans to retrofit his carport as a small biodiesel factory using plastic wall pockets full of algae.

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"The algae (are) this gorgeous, fluorescent green color, which will just look amazing in my carport," Green says.

For homeowners who don't hire an architect, there are plenty of prefab-carport makers who focus on design. Sankyo Tateyama Aluminum Inc. in Japan sells several residential carports with and without solar modules. Its elegant KDR series has a slightly tilted roof and smooth polycarbonate panels that can be blue brown or clear.

Carports are versatile

Carports can be designed with a certain level of flair, but what really sells them is flexibility.

At the Banbury house in Raleigh, N.C., architect John Reese designed an outdoor pavilion with a lap pool on one side and a carport on the other. The owners maneuver up an S-shaped drive to the pavilion and then park on what is essentially the pavilion's front porch.

"There are two walls, so the cars are entirely hidden from view," Reese says.

The wall dividing the carport from the pool is made of polycarbonate, so the light reflecting off the water fountain and pool on one side casts magical shadows on the other side.

When the owners want to throw an outdoor soiree, they simply move their cars, and the carport becomes a sheltered party space with built-in ceiling speakers. Storage closets on either side are easily converted to catering alcoves.

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"This is a true entertaining space that houses cars the rest of the time," Reese says.

The Oakmont house in Austin, Texas, has a similar setup. Architect James D. LaRue designed the house with an automated glass-and-aluminum garage door. But the car drives into a burnished concrete carport, rather than a garage. This hidden carport faces an outdoor living room with a fireplace, a square of lawn and an elm.