

garage tale

Reimagined space in South Minneapolis meets many family needs — form, function and philosophy.

BY EMILY GURNON

PHOTOS BY BEN GARVIN

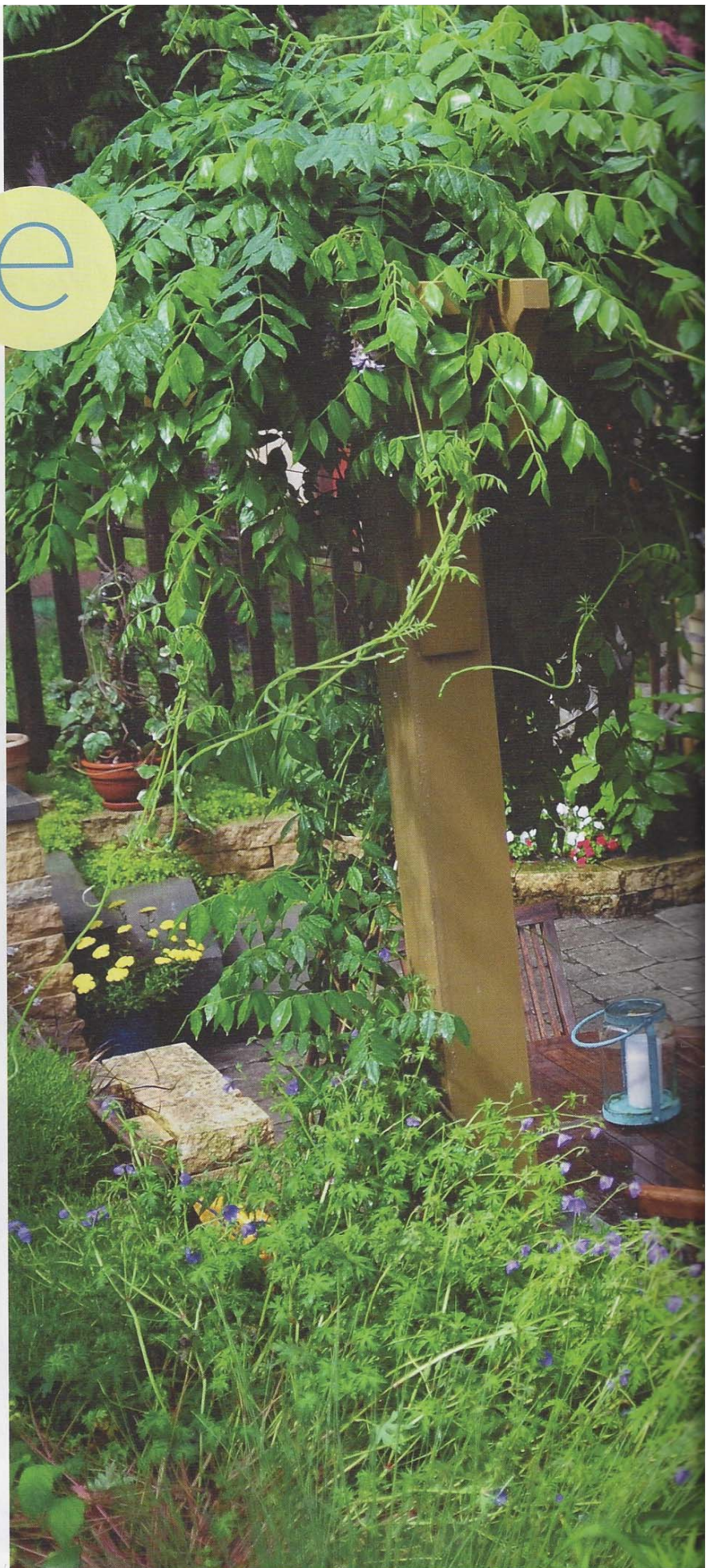
Brian and Kari Cornell had a wish list a mile long of features they wanted their new garage to have.

They hoped to transform their detached, one-car garage in South Minneapolis into a 2-1/2-car structure with enough room for storage. But the building itself was just a start. They also wanted a play area for their two young boys, a garden, a patio with a place to roast marshmallows and plenty of space for entertaining.

To top it off, they wanted the major remodel to be environmentally friendly, locally sourced and in sync with the neighborhood.

"I didn't want it to feel huge — not the 'Garage Mahal' that ate our alley," Cornell said.

One of Cornell's priorities was to be

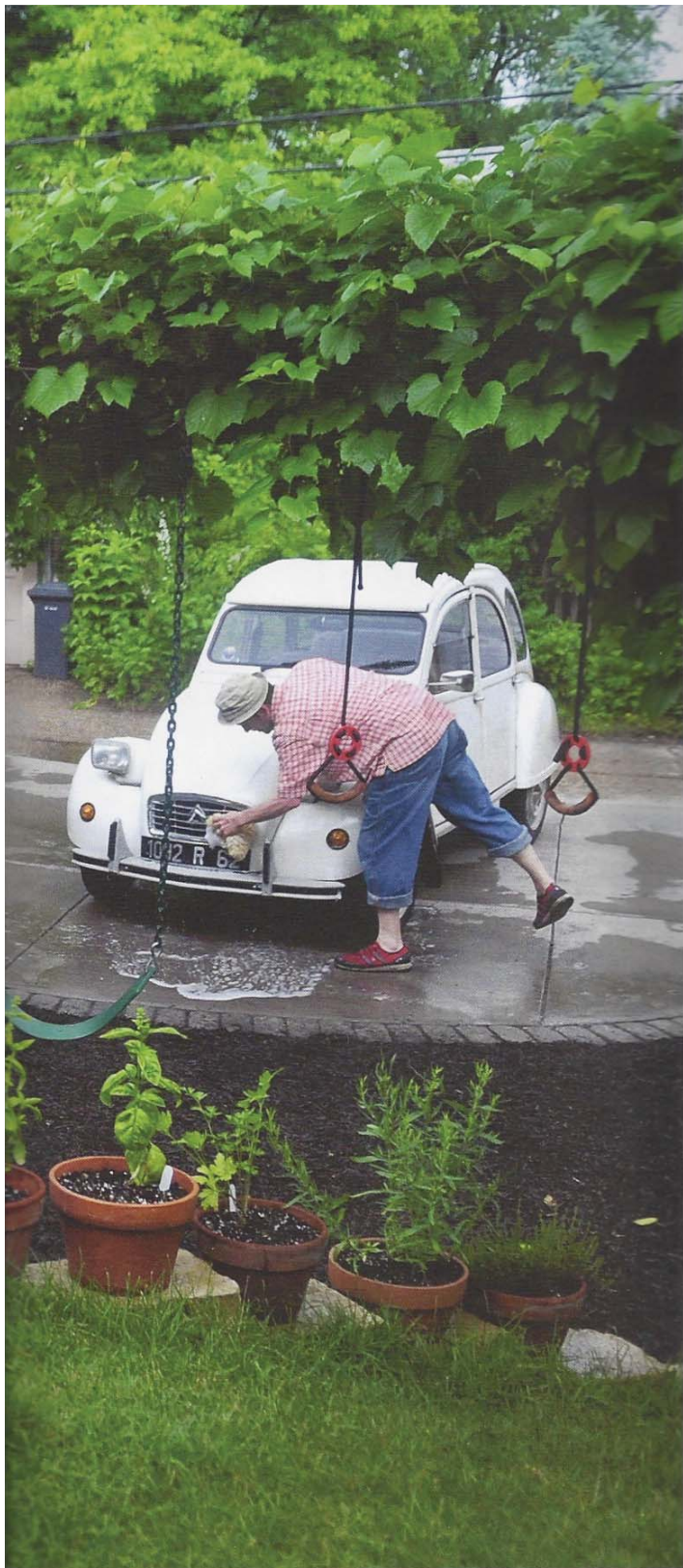




DiGiacomo Homes and Renovation built the side of Brian and Kari Cornell's new south Minneapolis garage so that it functions as one end of an outdoor patio area - which helps make the most of the small space. They chose only those wood products certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council, which promotes the use of wood from well-managed forests.



The Cornells' 2½-car garage accommodates the family's two main vehicles, plus eight bicycles, a motorcycle and the "half" car, Brian Cornell's 1986 Citroën 2CV, which he washes in the driveway.



The homeowners wanted someplace to roast marshmallows in the back yard, like a fire pit. The remodelers convinced them that a fireplace attached to the garage was relatively easy and inexpensive. They made the chimney 25 feet high to keep smoke out of the immediate area. "It's become a way to connect with neighbors," Brian Cornell said.



able to wash his beloved 1986 2CV Citroën in the driveway without worrying about all the soapy water draining minutes later into the nearby Mississippi River.

After all, he was taking a former plot of grass, albeit small, and covering it with concrete.

The solution: a French drain next to the garage.

Instead of sloping the pavement toward the alley, which is typical, Cornell suggested that the remodelers do the opposite — route the water into a rubber-mulch-covered area in the yard. A French drain, essentially an underground tank perforated with holes, lies beneath that.

Because it directs the water underground and lets it disperse slowly, the drain prevents runoff.

"It mitigates my concern about being two blocks from the Mississippi," Cornell said.

That's a worry, and not just for those so close to the river.

"Pretty much anywhere you live in Minneapolis, your water is going to end up in the Mississippi," said Rocky DiGiacomo.

ECO-MINDED APPROACH

DiGiacomo and his wife, Gigi, owners of DiGiacomo Homes and Renovation of Minnetonka, designed and built the Cornells' remodel in consultation with the homeowners.

They ensured that the underground barrel of the French drain would be large enough for a single heavy rainfall event. And before it even gets to the drain, the water is collected in a rain barrel, which Cornell uses for his gardening.

DiGiacomo also told Cornell that his company doesn't use wood materials unless they are certified by the Forestry Stewardship Council, which promotes the use of wood from well-managed forests — such as those that don't do clear-cutting.

"He's, like, 'It's only 10 per-



A view toward the alley shows some of the landscaping and gardening that the homeowners takes such pride in – including Delphinium flowers that have reached as high as 5 feet this year. The couple's two boys and visiting friends enjoy the swings and rings hanging from a long beam off the garage.

cent more, and we're just going to use it. I had no choice," Cornell said. In fact, he was happy to do it.

Buying FSC-certified products "support(s) people trying to find out better ways to do stuff," he said. "There are certain things that are worth the extra money."

DiGiacomo said the price of FSC materials has come down since he did the Cornell project in 2007, and continues to fall.

"It brought about a 10 to 15 percent premium to the lumber" when it was first being used, DiGiacomo said. "Now, for most products, the premium is more like 5 percent, sometimes as low as 1 percent."

DiGiacomo used pine for the garage framing and cedar shakes for much of the siding. The beams and trim are made of a wood composite called MiraTEC. MiraTEC

was also used for the "lines" on the upper level of the garage's gable ends, which mimic the Tudor design elements of the 1925 house.

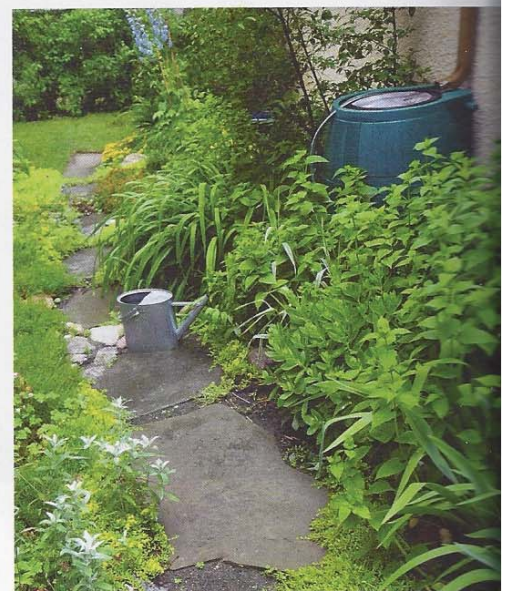
The MiraTEC boards are preprimed on three sides, making painting easier. And since it is a composite, "cutting of old growth is not necessary," DiGiacomo said.

Most of all, it's durable.

"The advantage to that product is that it lasts much longer and resists water and fungal growth. So, it doesn't rot," DiGiacomo said.

The overhead trellis, which extends from the side of the garage to the edge of the patio area, is made from a material called Azek.

"That's essentially a plastic wood," DiGiacomo said, noting that it holds paint and has a long life span. "The trellis is obviously exposed on all sides and would



A 75-gallon rain barrel made from recycled plastic collects runoff and allows the homeowners to water their garden and landscaping without always turning on the tap.