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Shelve It! Garage tour to offer 'man-cave' insights

By Chris Lavin



Gary Fulcher in his "man-cave" in Lafayette - his retreat will be on the first Garage Tour sponsored by the Lafayette Community Foundation. Photo Chris Lavin

It's the perfect "man-cave" if you're into building your own boat. Or cabinets. Or twirling salad bowls on a lathe. Or just having great parties.

The Garage Tour begins at 1 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 10, at Blodgett's Flooring, 3291 Mt. Diablo Court, in Lafayette. Tickets are \$35 online at www.lafayetteCF.org, and at Blodgett's, Lafayette Car Wash, and the Lafayette Chamber of Commerce. Food trucks and music will be everywhere, starting at the beginning of the tour, where tour-goers will receive their maps, wristbands and parking instructions.

"The tour is self-guided, but there will be lots of refreshments and time to talk with the garage owners," said Teresa Gerringer, an organizer with the Lafayette Community Foundation. "Two garages on one cul-de-sac will have classic cars."

Yes, some garages are actually used for cars, she said.

The classic car show will be held all afternoon, ending when the tour does at 5 p.m. All proceeds go to the foundation to support neighborhood projects.

Yet the heart of the tour will be behind the garage doors. (Or in Fulcher's case, works of art by Real Carriage Doors he went and fetched himself from Washington state.) Gerringer said the foundation modeled the garage tour after the Lafayette Juniors' kitchen tours, but instead targeted those who have "boring, cluttered" garages and want inspiration for fresh ideas for storage, storing tools, or a place to hang out.

"We have a good cross-section," she said.

Fulcher started the actual work on his garage about five years ago, but he dreamed of it for decades while working in the GIS (geographic information systems) field. He would call it the Green Barn Canoe and Kayak Company, he mused to himself for many hours while writing code. Finally, when he retired, he got to work to make his dream come true.

And so it has, although now he's hardly retired, having built some 14 or 15 canoes and rehabbing a fishing trawler. He designed the spacious workshop himself, then worked with a company in Canada that cut the timber and framing, ordered up the SIPs (those are "structurally insulated panels," which is the kind of thing you learn on garage tours), then he and friends from Lamorinda Sunrise Rotary Club did the rest.

To say the least, Fulcher has taken the "tool bench out in the garage" to another level altogether. He will list his power tools for you, "drill press, band saw, table saw, edging sander, joiner, planer, lathe..." until you tell him to please stop. Then he won't be able to help himself and show you the rotund dust-collection system he installed. He will even proudly open his cabinets to reveal pull-out shelves and tools precisely placed so there is never a "where's the Phillips head?" kind of discussion.

"In the whole place, though, people like the ladder best," Fulcher said, which reminds visitors that one would indeed need a way to access the loft. Fulcher reached up and gently spun a horizontal ladder on a fulcrum that he built himself using a big lazy Susan, and popped it into place. Voila.

"People are going to like this," he said, and lifted the ladder back up, just as effortlessly.

There was a time when the idea of a "man's garage" meant having perks like a black-and-white TV with rabbit ears and a Styrofoam cooler full of beer set up in time for the Sunday football game. Plastic lawn chairs come to mind.

Well ... we've come a long way. To show just how far our neighborhoods have come in the way of haute garage design and use, the Lafayette Community Foundation has organized a tour of four of the best they could find, including one that would be worth the tour all on its own.

"This is my man-cave, I guess you could call it," said Gary Fulcher, who did not appear to like the term "man-cave." He lives in Orinda but his three-door garage is in Lafayette.

He does have it all: a kitchen (no Styrofoam cooler here, but a built-in fridge that looks like tool storage, which is next to a dishwasher, also disguised as a tool area), a workspace, a loft for sleeping or watching a flat-screen TV, exercising, and most importantly, a fully equipped workshop for him to build his custom wooden boats. "When I was building this (the garage), my kids said, 'Are you leaving Mom?' It has everything anyone would need, so they were wondering."

The garage is that extreme. (And no, he certainly is not leaving his wife.) One could live in it, quite comfortably.



Fulcher with Teresa Gerring of the Lafayette Community Foundation in front of his garage, which he lovingly calls the Green Barn Canoe and Kayak Co., in Lafayette. Photo Chris Lavin

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