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DESIGN

You call *this* a garage?

A Brentwood man builds a handsome Modernist palace for royalty — that is, his prized 1984 Ferrari.

DAN NEIL

An MRI exam of Holger Schubert's head might reveal an inner space of bare, winter-white walls, polished concrete, wall-to-ceiling glass and halogen lighting. "I like very pure, minimalist, empty space," says the 41-year-old product designer. Schubert's home, under construction on two acres in Brentwood, will be a symphony in sparseness: three glass boxes as the main living quarters, a pool house with cantilevered roof, a Japanese tea house and a glass-walled guest house facing an enormous Zen stone garden.

"I like to be in a space where things line up and nothing stands out," says the native-born German.

The relentlessly orthogonal Schubert has allowed himself one concession to voluptuousness: a mint-condition 1984 Ferrari 512 BBi "Boxer," gray with black underbody. It took him 11 years to find the one he wanted. And now he's built a garage around it.

That garage — or is it an art gallery with a Ferrari parked in it? — recently won Maserati and Architectural Digest's Design Driven award for best garage. The contest, with categories for "existing" and "concept" garages, drew 125 entries that can be seen at www.designdriven.us. The winners will be profiled in a special section in the October issue. "Once considered merely an extended function of the home, the garage is now a space where people are finding new inspiration architectur-

ally," according to Giulio Capua, vice president and publisher of Architectural Digest.

Schubert's Modernist "garage" — hereafter I use the word with an asterisk of skepticism — is a brilliantly lit 1,200-square-foot space above what will be some kind of workshop/gymnasium. There's a lovely modular couch and two Dodo recliners by Toshiyuki Kita around a metal and stone coffee table. One wall is covered in Homasote, a kind of recycled paper-fiber lapboard, with a single-tier bookshelf built in. Two walls are floor-to-ceiling glass with retractable exterior shades to cut down on the afternoon sunlight. Overhead, the central skylight is artfully bisected with an aluminum enclosure for halogen lights. A flat-screen TV on tracks can traverse the length of the room.

The "space" — as designers insist on calling rooms — is breathtaking. Beautiful. Exquisite. But a garage? Please. Where are the tools, the work benches, the girlie calendars?

Schubert concedes that it isn't a typical, oil-on-the-floor garage, and he's comfortable with that. "I wanted to create a backdrop for the car as a piece of art," he says. The contest had a lot of garages attached to nice homes, but Maserati, which sponsored and judged the competition, "wanted something more."

"This is a space whose only purpose is to enjoy the car."

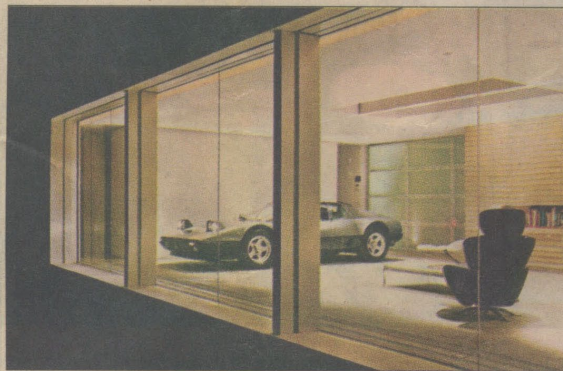
The Design Driven contest is, to be sure, mostly about promoting the Maserati and Architectural Digest brands, but let's take it seriously anyway. What does the Schubert garage exemplify about the changing nature of Americans' relationship to their mobility?

First, the notion of the automobile's machine-ness has been abandoned here in favor of the car as objet d'art. There are no wrenches, screwdrivers or battery boosters lying



Photographs by RICARDO DEARATANHA Los Angeles Times

INSIDE AND OUT: "I wanted to create a backdrop for the car as a piece of art," says Holger Schubert of the enclosure for his 1984 Ferrari 512 BBi "Boxer," which won Maserati and Architectural Digest's Design Driven award for best garage.



around — and Schubert will need them if the Ferrari remains true to form. Such a garage is consistent with the fact that modern cars are largely inaccessible to the tinkering, shade tree mechanic. Most people never open the hoods of their cars.

And to the extent that self-sufficiency with automobiles is a masculine trait, Schubert's

garage strikes me, at any rate, as an oddly neutered space, more like the waiting room of a Beverly Hills plastic surgeon than garage.

Schubert's garage also suggests a growing intimacy with the automobile. For about a decade, amenities such as high-end audio, navigation, driver assistance, Bluetooth phones and even Web access

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The grand tour

See more of the garage in its daytime glory. You'll find a link to additional photos on our L.A. at Home blog.

have gradually turned the car into a work space, a living space. Schubert's garage returns the favor by bringing the car into the living space.

"People in L.A. care so much about their cars and then the cars wind up stuck out in garages," Schubert says.

There has always been good reason to separate cars from living space. Cars are kind of stinky and oily. In modern cars, the passive reeking of gas and oil has largely been overcome by strict clean-air requirements that limit out-gassing. (I think Schubert will find sharing a living room with a vintage

Ferrari more of a nose-full than he expects.

To avoid exhaust fumes when the car is started, Schubert built a hydraulic ramp into the floor. The ramp tilts up about six inches at the front, allowing the car to roll back across a bridge and into the street before it starts.

Soon, however, emission-free electric cars will "really open up the design of houses," says Schubert, so that people will be able to drive directly into the home. It would make unloading groceries easier.

Schubert looks forward to owning an electric car, and his garage is pre-wired for a high-capacity charger and has 49 solar panels on the roof. But the electric car will have to sleep elsewhere, he says.

The Ferrari, he says, "has found its permanent home."

To read Neil's reviews of home design and technology, go to latimes.com/majordomo. dan.neil@latimes.com