



# Residents only

Savvy landlords are extending into the garage, says **Rosie Millard**

**W**e all know that you can add value to your house by extending it wherever

possible. Middle-class terraces in any given city are characterised nowadays by at least one property on the street flaunting a giant tarpaulin in the front garden — a sure sign of a basement conversion. Loft up-dos, meanwhile, are so turn-of-the-mill, a dormer window is something of a cliché. Both basements and lofts, if turned into self-contained flats, mean extra cash to a would-be landlord.

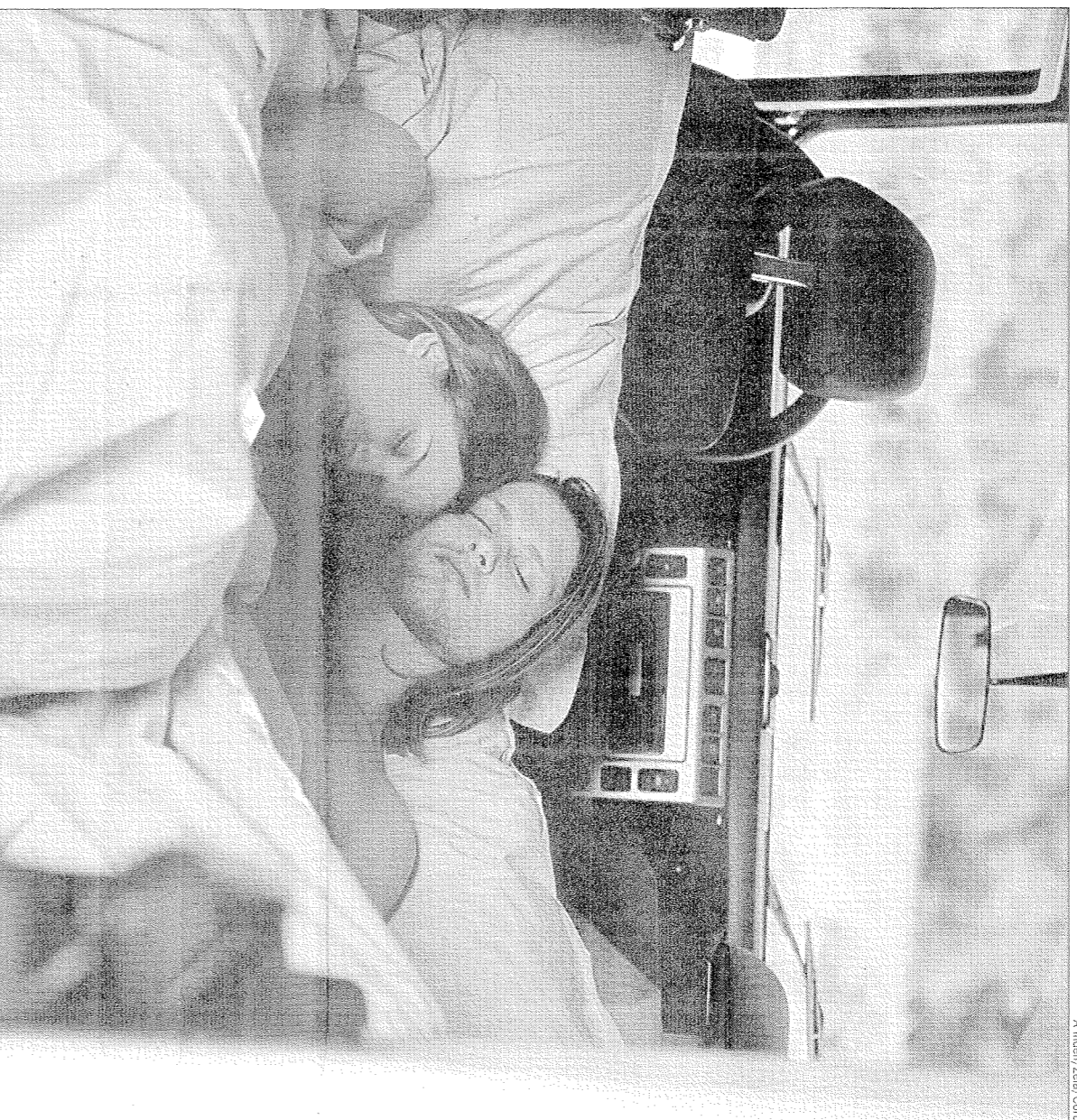
But why confine yourself to the roof or basement? Why not convert the garage into a self-contained, rentable flat? I became intrigued by the notion when an architect mate of mine visited my parents' beachside house in Cornwall, which has an enormous garage attached to the side.

"This double garage is amazing," he enthused. And not because it contains a ping-pong table, either. "You could extend your whole property here. Build up another storey. Have another cottage." Needless to say, my parents weren't keen, but since then I have been rather sold on the idea of using dead space once intended to house a car for something more creative.

Gilly Carpenter is a landlady with a portfolio of eight houses in the home counties. One of them, a substantial three-bedroom home in Barbury, has a single garage attached, which, in the next two weeks, she is having converted into a studio flat.

"It's only 5 metres by 2.5 metres by 3.3 metres at the highest point, but fortunately it backs onto a conservatory, so we will use that for living space," Carpenter says. "I'm having a sink put in, with a kettle and a microwave. It will be perfect." The work is a turnkey project that will cost £20,000 all in.

Outwardly, not a lot will change. The garage door will become the front door, and a window is being installed at the back. "I could have had one in the front, but I am sensitive about my neighbours, who were a bit worried I was building a house of multiple occupancy. I don't think I will need planning permission, because I'm not changing the shape or size of the building," Carpenter says. Unfortunately, she is not quite right. "If the garage is



A Linden/Zefa/Corbis

**Converting garages into self-contained studios is a growing trend — just remember to move the car out first**

your own, and you want to extend your own domestic accommodation within the structure of the existing garage, then generally speaking, you don't need consent," says the Sunday Times planning expert, Michael Haslam. "But if you want to create a self-contained unit to rent out, you will absolutely require planning consent, because you are creating an additional unit of accommodation. The council will need to see where your garage is, and if it is appropriate for this purpose, they may be perfectly happy, but you will require consent."

All being well, this should be granted, although the process will probably take several months. If she does get the go-ahead, Carpenter might be looking at an attractive package: the studio flat and the original three-bedroom house could be let out separately, but

together the complex might make an aluring option.

"What I would like to do is short-let the house to business people at, say, £1,300 a month," she says. "Then I will rent out the studio flat for £400 a month, maybe more. If my tenants are Americans with a teenage child or a nanny who can go in the studio flat, that would be ideal. Tenants aren't interested in gardens, but an extra living space usually goes down well."

Is anyone else in her area doing the same thing? "Not in my street. But I suspect they'll all want to."

Phil Bateman is managing director of the Garage Conversion Company ([garageconversion.com](http://garageconversion.com)), whose team has been charging around the country doing this sort of work for the past five years: they have carried out more than 2,000 jobs. Although most of their clients are looking for an

extra room, a significant minority (about one in five) asks them to transform the garage into a studio flat for a nanny, granny — or tenant.

"The trickiest thing about converting a garage is to make sure it doesn't look like a converted garage," says Bateman. "You have to match brickwork and windows to the existing house." He has an in-house architect, and an office to take care of the paperwork, such as planning consents. It ensures that building regulations, making sure that insulation, ventilation and foundations are all up to scratch.

The cost doesn't sound bad, for what you get: "Putting in a kitchen and bathroom would cost about £20,000." How long will it take? "A single garage conversion will take two weeks, and there is generally a four-week lead time." Although, if you are making

a separate living space, factor in the time it takes to apply for — and, you hope, get — planning permission.

But can you realistically make something designed to house just one car into a bijou residence? Yes — just, says Bateman. "At a squeeze, a single garage, which is usually 5 metres by 2.5 metres, could be a single flat." Double-garage conversions sound more attractive: Bateman says that could give you a living area, open-plan kitchen, bathroom and bedroom. It sounds a great wheeze.

So, why bother hunting around for something that you can rent out when it could just be in your garage all along?

Get more advice from [brigittole@sunday-times.co.uk](mailto:brigittole@sunday-times.co.uk)

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## The Market

Looking to move to the sea? Bridlington, Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth offer the best value for money, with average house prices of £139,645, £141,878 and £142,860 respectively, according to the Halifax. Its annual Seaside Town Review says Christchurch, Dorset, offers the highest quality of life, but the average house price there is £262,472. It is followed by Leigh-on-Sea, Essex (£220,669), and Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex (£193,405).

The property market in the north of England is continuing to slow. Alsop, a northern estate agent, says homes up to £175,000 are still selling easily, but more expensive ones are stocking. "Properties have to be accurately priced if they are to sell without a prolonged period on the market because of the affordability issues across the north," says the firm.

More townies are buying farmhouses, says the estate agent Knight Frank: in the year to July, there was a 50% increase in the amount spent by so-called "lifestyle farmers", who buy farms mainly for the houses and lease the land to tenant farmers. It says this contributed to a 27.3% annual rise in farmland prices, the steepest growth since 1977. The survey was conducted before the recent outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Durham is the most profitable location for investors letting out to students, says a survey from the specialist lender Landlord Mortgages. The annual yield for student accommodation — the percentage of a property's price recovered each year in rent — is 9.12% in Durham, but dips to 3.4% in Crewe. The survey says buy-to-let investors in university towns pay an average of £141,000 for a three-bedroom house and get back £9,290 per year in rent.

Latvia still has one of the world's fastest-moving property markets, with prices up an annualised 62% in the first quarter of this year, according to a study by Global Property Guide. It was followed by neighbouring Lithuania, where prices rose 26%. However, the study showed the focus beginning to shift from central and eastern Europe towards the Asia-Pacific region, with double-digit rises in the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea and New Zealand.

Graham Norwood

### \*HOW MUCH?

see page 2  
France: £365,300  
England: £1.6m