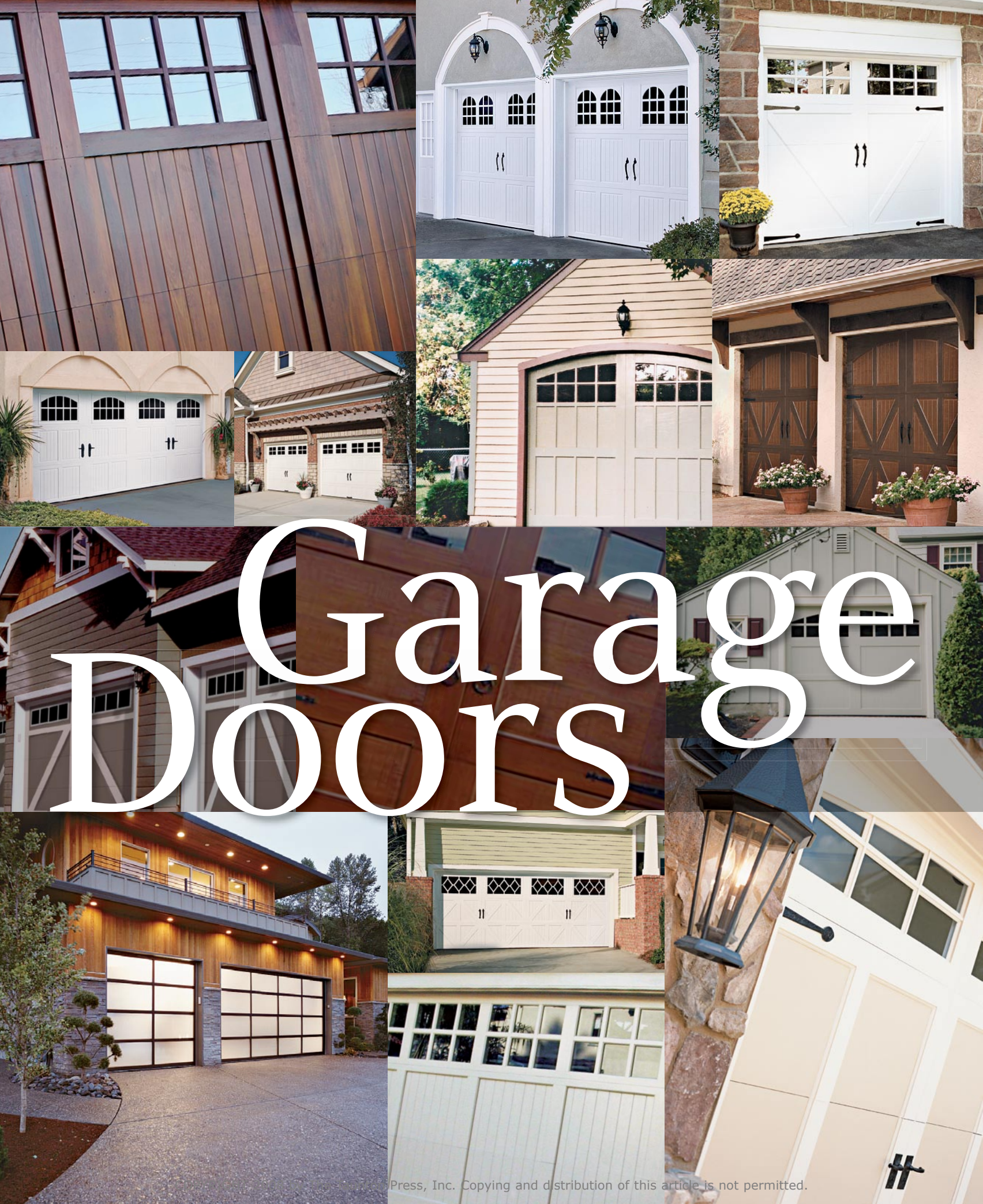


Style is on the upswing with improvements that truly fool the eye

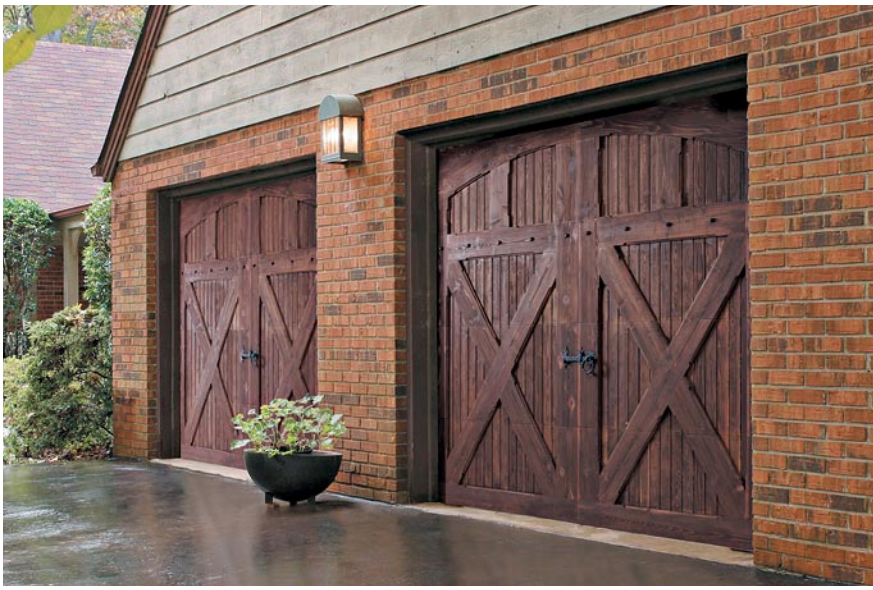
BY JOSH GARSKOF

There's no denying the convenience of overhead garage doors. But their standard motif—a field of rectilinear panels, sometimes with a row of windows across the top—is as bland as it is architecturally out of place on many houses. "At their best, these doors are unimaginative," says Denver architect Doug Walter. "At their worst, they look like 1950s suburban fantasies tacked onto Tudor, Victorian, and colonial houses."

But just as garage doors are taking up an ever-larger share of our homes' façades—to the point where some houses have become what Walter calls "a garage with a house attached"—those old sectionals have undergone a collective face-lift. More than 99 percent of today's garage doors follow the mid-century sectional design, but fewer and fewer look the part. Many of today's sectional garage doors aptly mimic the handcrafted swing-out and slider types you see on old carriage houses or on the detached garages of the pre-World War II era. It's only at the push of a button—or on close inspection—that their true nature is revealed.

Replace your garage door, and you'll see how just a few hours of on-site work and a relatively modest outlay can yield an incalculable boost in curb appeal. You can spend big, choosing a door from a custom wood shop that will run you $3,000 or more, but you don't have to. These days, just about every major garage door manufacturer sells "carriage house" doors as stock items, costing $500 to $1,000 each.

And that's a bargain considering what you get in return. In addition to a major aesthetic upgrade, a better-insulated garage door translates to energy savings if your garage is adjacent to or underneath your living space. And because new doors come with fresh tracks, springs, and operators, life with new doors will probably be much quieter. If you're replacing a door and operator that are more than 20 years old, you'll also be adding to your family's safety. Since 1993, garage doors have been required to include an automatic reverse that kicks in if the door hits anything on the way down and a sensor that won't let it close if something's in its path.



Construction basics

High-end garage doors consist of two main elements: the sections (typically three or four horizontal pieces hinged together) and the overlay, a decorative face that gives the door its style. Good- and better-quality doors have sections built of wood or steel that include a "sandwich" of foam insulation; economy doors, including stamped steel "pan" doors and wooden "panel" doors, have no overlay or added insulation. In the case of overlay doors, the overlaid design separates as the sections roll up, but the horizontal joints should be imperceptible when the door is closed. In carriage-house-style doors, a vertical shadow line, or indentation, at the center creates the illusion of a pair of out-swinging doors.

WARMTH OF WOOD, STRENGTH OF STEEL *Doors from Amarr's Biltmore Collection are made of wood mounted on a commercial steel door. Their carriage-house design is inspired by the famous 19th-century estate. (www.amarr.com)*

All photos: courtesy of the manufacturers; facing page, see Resources, p. 86

GARAGE DOORS:
A CLOSER LOOK

All costs cited in this article are for a standard 8-foot by 7-foot door.

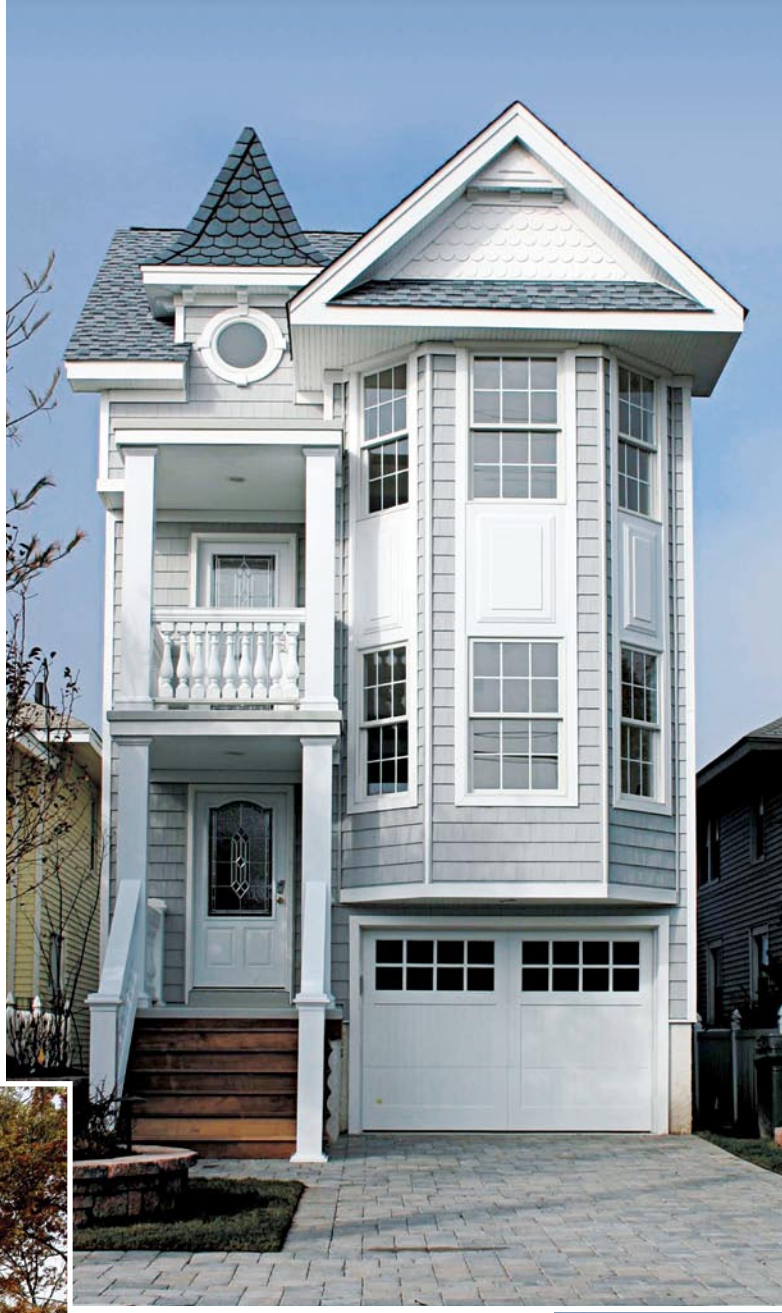
Wood

On high-end wooden doors, the overlay is made of the wood species of your choice, from cedars to tropical hardwoods to salvaged barn woods. "Carriage house" designs typically consist of vertical tongue-and-groove boards covered with flat trim that represents stiles, rails, and cross-bracing. Once the overlay is fastened to the sections, which may be made of wood or steel, it is sawn apart along the section breaks to create a joint that all but disappears when the door is closed.

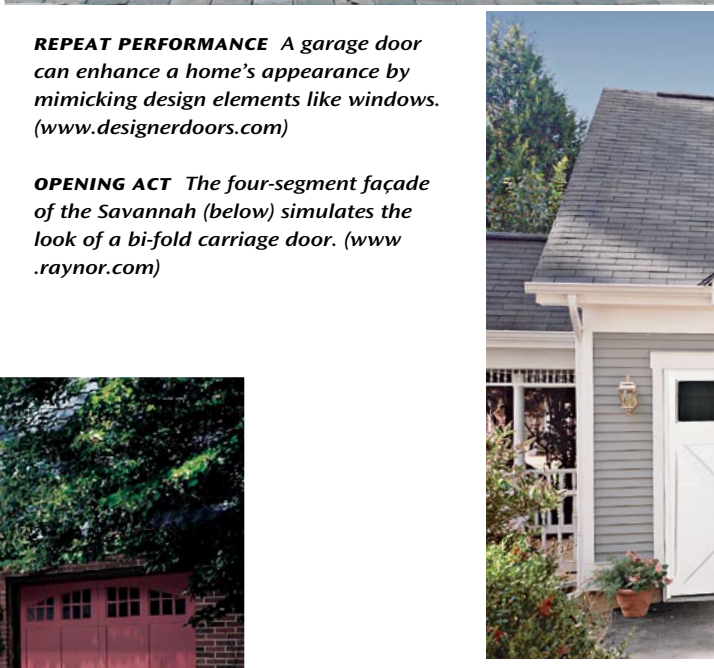
PROS: Natural beauty; can be completely customized; can be clear finished; horizontal section seams are nearly invisible.

CONS: Needs regular painting or sealing; the weight can wear on springs and make it difficult to raise the door without electricity; the most costly option.

COST: $1,700 (stock) to more than $5,000 (custom).

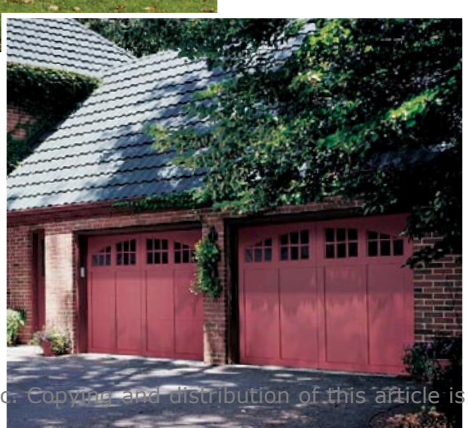


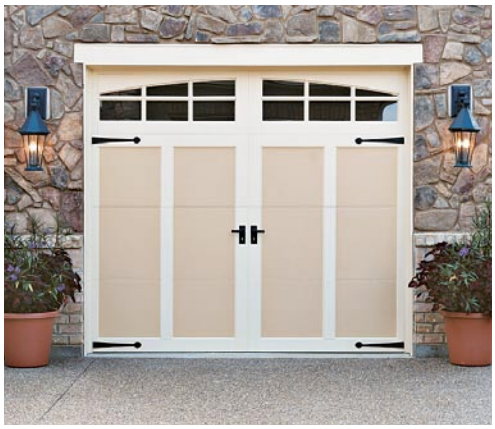
INDIVIDUAL STYLE *Many wood doors, such as this one from Overhead Door's Ranch House Series, are available in both custom and semi-custom styles. (www.overheaddoor.com)*



REPEAT PERFORMANCE *A garage door can enhance a home's appearance by mimicking design elements like windows. (www.designerdoors.com)*

OPENING ACT *The four-segment façade of the Savannah (below) simulates the look of a bi-fold carriage door. (www .raynor.com)*





VINYL GOES VINTAGE *in doors from Clopay's Coachman Collection (left and below), which feature PVC overlays mounted on a "sandwich" of insulated steel. (www.clopay.com)*

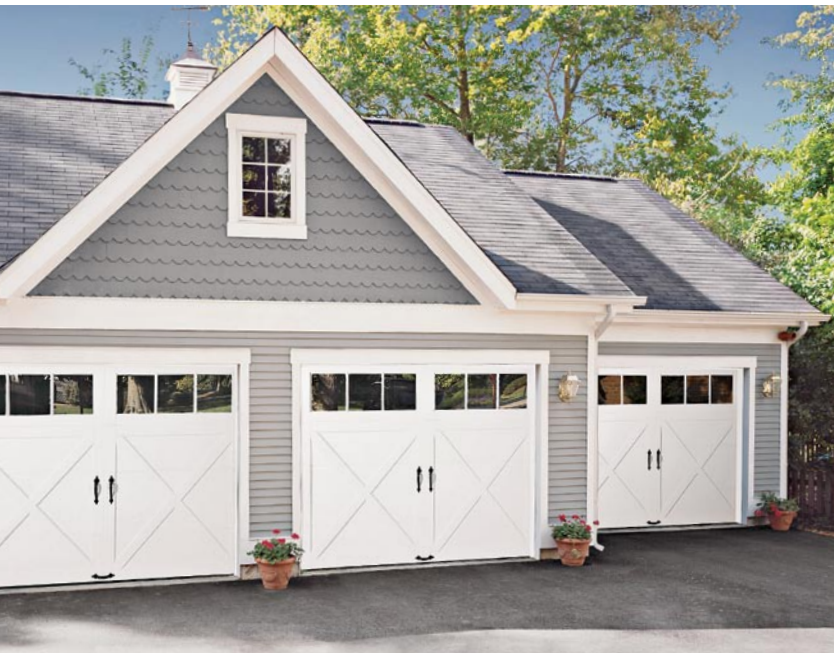
Cellular PVC

Instead of using wood to create the overlay, manufacturers use "boards" made of cellular PVC, a vinyl that's whipped with air when it's molten, then extruded into lightweight, woodlike pieces. These boards are applied as trim over wood-grain-embossed sections made from either PVC or steel.

PROS: Lighter weight than wood; ⅝-inch-thick boards offer shadow lines almost as deep as those on real wood; can be completely customized; won't rot or absorb moisture; holds paint better than wood does; more economical than wood.

CONS: Cannot be painted with medium to dark colors, which absorb ultraviolet heat, resulting in warping and cracking. Since it's such a new product, nobody knows for sure how long PVC will last out in the elements.

COST: $1,400 to $2,000.



BUILDING A BETTER DOOR

Once you decide on the basic style of your garage door, you might consider a few options, such as:

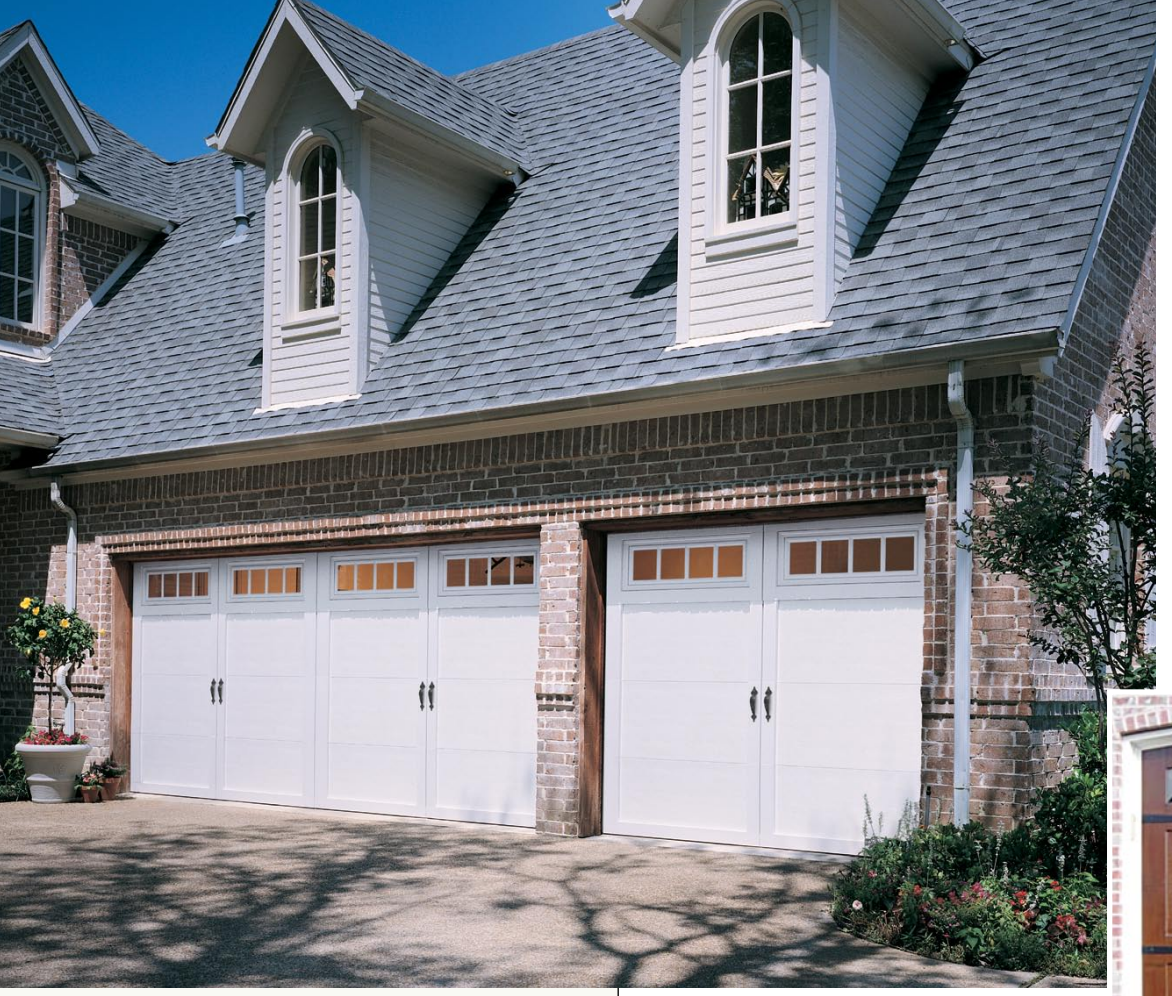
Windows: Most manufacturers of standard doors allow you to choose your window design (if you want windows at all). For a single pane of clear or translucent glass with a snap-in grille that gives the impression of divided lights, you might pay less than $100. For true divided lights in a four-over-four pattern, you'll pay $500 or more.

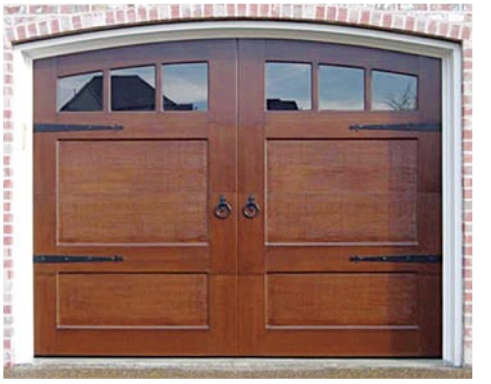
Insulation: If you live in an area with extreme temperatures—either hot or cold—and your garage is attached, insulating the door can yield serious energy savings. Check the door's R-value: The higher the number, the better the insulation. R-values for garage doors typically range from R-3 to R-10. Make sure when comparing doors that the number represents the R-value of the entire door; some manufacturers advertise the R-values for the sections themselves.

If you are buying a door with steel sections, ask for a thermal break, which is a rubber seal between the front and back panels of the section that prevents heat from transferring through the metal.

Operator and installation: A new garage door also means a new track and operator, which isn't always included in the price of the door. If not, expect to pay another $250 to $500 per door for installation (including materials and labor). If you're installing wood doors, and the manufacturer isn't providing an installer in your area, look for a company with experience installing heavy-duty commercial garage doors, suggests Roger Jurczak, of Hahn's Woodworking, a custom manufacturer in New Jersey. "Wood carriage house doors can weigh 500 or 600 pounds," he says, "and most installers are accustomed to standard doors, which weigh less than 200."

Safety: Many sectionals are now manufactured with "pinchless" designs that prevent fingers from being caught between the sections as the door closes. But the greatest safety concern with garage doors is entrapment. Because of this, garage door openers sold since the early 1990s have been required to be outfitted with an electric eye or other device as well as an automatic reversing system to prevent anyone from being caught beneath. So if you're updating an old door, be sure to update the operator as well (see above). No matter what their age, garage doors should be checked regularly to ensure that they are operating safely; consult your manufacturer or a professional installer for advice. *—J.G.*





A NEW LOOK FOR STEEL *The ubiquitous steel panel door has given way to a new generation of steel doors with a convincing carriage-house design. At left, steel doors from Overhead Door's Renaissance Collection (www .overheaddoor.com) are embossed with a wood grain; below, the wood-like look of a steel door from Carriage House Doors is enhanced with a faux finish. (www.carriagedoor.com)*

BOOST YOUR CURB APPEAL

■ **Design details.** Take cues from the house's detailing for your new garage doors. The divided-light patterns of windows and the panel designs of entry doors can become models for your project.

■ **Painted doors.** Even steel and PVC doors, which don't require paint for protection from the elements, can be painted to match the color scheme of the house. This blends the doors with the structure and helps hide the use of non-wood materials.

■ **Seeing double.** A double door can make it easier to park two large vehicles in a small garage. But it needn't look like an oversize door. Consider a door with a simulated center post to give it the appearance of two single doors.

Steel

Most embossed steel garage doors have no overlay; the face of each section is simply stamped with faux stiles, rails, and cross-bracings in a host of stock designs, which include both the standard panel look and the currently popular carriage-house design. Though less common, there are also steel doors for which an overlay of trim is made from steel "boards" applied over the steel sections. These produce a similar look but with a more realistic relief.

PROS: Embossed steel doors cost much less than other options; all steel doors are durable in that they won't rot, crack, or warp, and galvanized steel won't rust; standardized sections can usually be replaced if damaged; light weight requires less spring maintenance; those at higher price ranges can have better insulation than all-wood doors.

CONS: With most embossed doors, the detailing is pressed from a single sheet of steel, and the shadow lines are typically only ⅛ inch deep, far shallower than on doors that have overlays, so they don't completely fool the eye (steel board types are more convincing). Section joints are more noticeable than with overlaid doors, and the embossed wood grain may appear unconvincing. Left with their factory paint jobs, these doors don't quite pull off the look of wood, but painting them once means you'll have to repaint routinely, which removes the material's maintenance-free advantage. If dented, steel can't be repaired easily, so the damaged section will need replacement.

COST: Embossed, $450 to $1,000; steel board, $750 to $1,000.

Glass

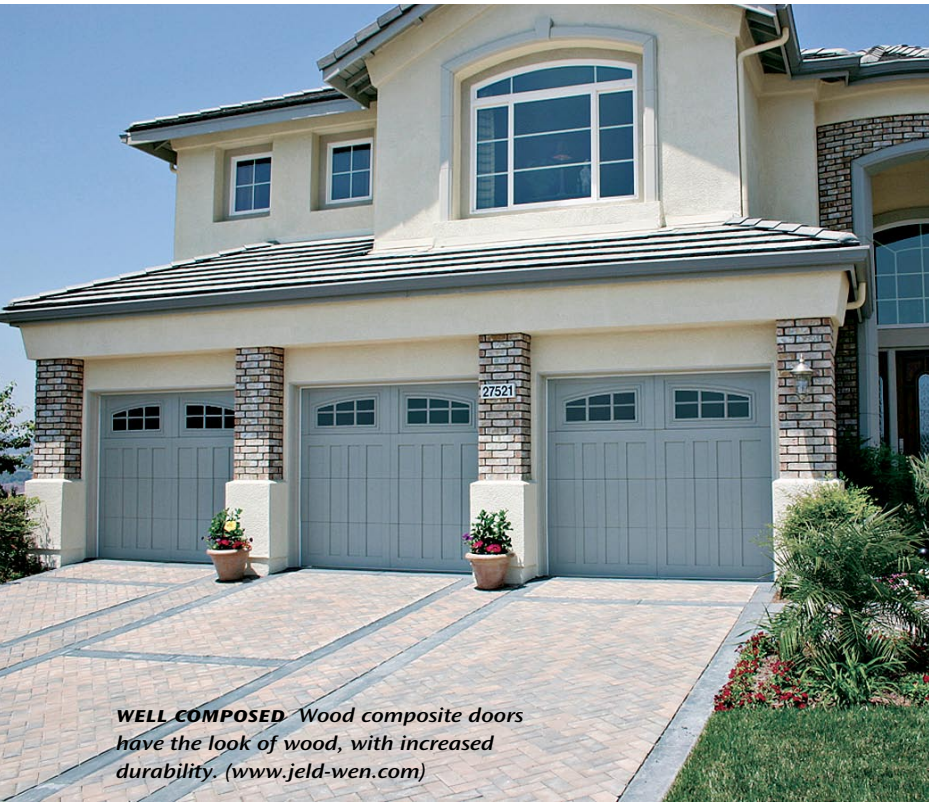
Insulated panes of clear, frosted, tinted, mirrored, or one-way glass are set into wood or—more commonly—aluminum channels. The degree of translucency generally depends on the type of glass or glasslike material that makes up the sections. The look can range from shoji screen to French door to vintage service station.

PROS: All-glass appearance can disguise the fact that these are garage doors; a good architectural match with some sleek, contemporary home designs.

CONS: Lower insulation values than other materials; can have a commercial feel.

COST: $1,500 to $3,000.

CONTEMPORARY LINES *Clopay's Avante Collection features glass panels set in an aluminum frame. (www.clopay.com)*



WELL COMPOSED *Wood composite doors have the look of wood, with increased durability. (www.jeld-wen.com)*

Composite

An overlay of stiles, rails, and cross-bracing consists of "boards" made from a mixture of wood fibers and resin that's extruded into woodlike pieces. The sections may be made from steel, wood, or wood composite and have wood grain patterns embossed on their surfaces.

PROS: Rot, warp, and crack resistant; standardized sections can be replaced piecemeal; far less expensive than solid wood; damage can be repaired with fillers.

CONS: Though their longevity looks promising, today's composite materials have not been around long enough to determine how long they'll last.

COST: $600 to $700.

Josh Garskof is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Inspired House.

For more information, see Resources, page 86.