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CONTACT:
ALLEN PFENNINGER OR
MELISSA KOSKI
216.781.2400

STYLE TIPS FROM THE YEAR'S BEST DRESSED HOMES

Turn off your television and throw out your latest fashion magazine. For today's latest styles, all you need is the Internet.

A new non-commercial website, GarageWowNow.com, features a storehouse of information about your home's largest and most-visible design element – the garage door.

Think about it. Garage doors often make up more than one-third of the home's front façade. If your garage door is bland, chances are your home looks bland and boring, too. Look at your garage door. Is it attractive and distinctive, or does it look like every other door on your street?

Curious about what the best-dressed homes are wearing this year? At GarageWowNow.com, you can see photos of this year's most fashionable garage doors and read design tips for finding the right door for your home.

THE HOTTEST STYLE TODAY: CARRIAGE HOUSE DOORS

So you've got this gaping hole in the front of your house that fits two to three cars. That's a huge design opportunity! Carriage house doors are hot, hot, hot this year! They open just like your old door, but they fool the eye by echoing the hinged, swing-out door style of quaint and charming carriage houses.

New carriage house garage doors are available in real wood or wood composites and can be stained or customized to match the décor of your home. Steel carriage doors offer a low-maintenance yet attractive and durable choice.

Fitted with all the latest accessories, from gorgeous glass window designs and wrought-iron decorative hardware that adds a distinctive period look, new carriage house doors give any home a spectacular makeover.

A MODERN LOOK: CONTEMPORARY GARAGE DOORS

Does your home boast a sleek, modern style? If so, a wide variety of contemporary designs are available that will truly make your home the envy of the neighborhood. Vibrant colors and a range of metallic finishes allow you to express your sense of style.

Most manufacturers now make an attractive opaque glass and aluminum door that creates a "screen" effect that would be as much at home in San Francisco or Phoenix as it would be in the Far East.

If your home has more of a Mediterranean or southern European look, you might consider French door styled garage doors. They appear to swing outward, but feature the hinged panel operation of a traditional garage door. Opaque glass adds to the elegance of these classically styled doors.

RAISING THE BAR: RAISED PANEL DOORS

The most common style is the traditional raised panel steel garage door, which has dominated the American neighborhood for 25 years. These steel doors are now available in “woodgrain prints,” beautifully imitating the rich colors and patterns of real wood. This stunning appearance was all the rage at the 2008 International Garage Door Expo, and many manufacturers now offer it. Garage doors can now offer the rich look of real wood with all the maintenance and durability advantages of steel.

FASHION WITH FUNCTION: INSULATED GARAGE DOORS

This year, insulated garage doors will not only help keep your home cool in the summer and warm in the winter, but they can also save you money thanks to a tax credit. The federal government’s “Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008” extends tax credits for energy efficient home improvements. A long list of insulated garage doors qualify for this credit.

That means that a new garage door in 2009 can lower home energy consumption and costs AND lower your taxes. So if you’re going to makeover your home, why not start with a garage door that adds style and value to your home – and could earn you up to \$500 off your taxes?

DESIGN YOUR OWN

Fancy yourself a designer? Do you have a one-of-a-kind home where only a one-of-a-kind garage door will do? Some garage door manufacturers will create a custom door that would look perfect on your home. A warning to the designers-to-be: custom doors are not the most inexpensive way to go. But since the garage door is usually the largest design element on a home, this investment can create a showcase garage door that will set your entire home apart from the rest.

PROTECTIVE GEAR: STORM-STRENGTH GARAGE DOORS

Whether you live on the coast, inland or in the heartland, your home needs to stand up to the powerful winds that extreme weather brings. Whether this means winter snowstorms or the howling, battering winds of more severe storms, new wind-resistant garage doors are tested to face the raw challenges of Mother Nature.

During hurricanes, tornadoes and extreme winds, houses with an attached garage can literally blow apart if they’re outfitted with flimsy garage doors. Wind damage experts know that garage doors are a home’s first line of defense against strong winds. Weaker garage doors are often the first to succumb, letting pressure build-up in your house, blowing off the roof and destroying your life’s investment.

Responding to new, more stringent building codes, many manufacturers now offer garage doors that can withstand hurricane-force winds of up to 145 mph. This means that garage doors can help maintain your home’s structure during a hurricane or other severe storm.

TIME TO DRESS UP YOUR HOME!

With today’s assortment of styles, finishes and strengths, garage doors make it easy to makeover your home’s look, express your own personality and make fashion headlines in your neighborhood. What’s stopping you from making your home one of the best dressed this year?