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### East Valley Life



A bright yellow model home in Gilbert's Agritopia subdivision is reminiscent of homes built in the Willo district of Phoenix in the 1920s.

Jennifer Grimes Tribune

## East Valley homebuilders put focus back on people, not garages

By Laura Warner, Tribune

May 1, 2005

Despite appearances, there's no law in Arizona that says garages must be the focal point of a home's front facade.

But homebuilders have done just that for decades — creating neighborhoods dominated by garage doors instead of front porches.

While that trend continues today, there is a movement to tuck garages away from the front or disguise them behind windows and designer doors. The result: A home made for people, not cars, says Greg Smith, president of GW Custom Homes in Carefree.

"A lot of the more progressive developers are trying to create communities with real neighborhoods like you'd find in Chicago and other big cities where garages aren't out front," Smith says. "The front of the house is a large porch and open to the street. So rather than rushing inside through the garage, the people are out on their front porches."

That's the very concept behind Scott Homes' nearly sold-out Agritopia subdivision in Gilbert. Detached rear garages come standard on the homes, which are patterned after cottage homes built during the



*Custom Home Construction and Remodeling*

1920s.

"The rear-entry garages are so different from what you see in the Valley today," says Mick Schofield, sales manager for Agritopia. "Usually, if you have three garages, one-third of the front of the house is taken up by garage doors. People are getting tired of that look and regard (detached garages) as something unique and reminiscent of another time."

The intended result is a community where neighbors stop to chat on the way from the garage to their homes, says Schofield. "Normally, you come home, you go in your garage door, you put down the garage and you're shut out from the world. But here it's totally different."

Ultimately, a garage's location is dependent on a home's lot and community zoning laws, says Smith. However, custom homebuilders are experts at creatively adjusting floor plans to accommodate detached or hidden garages — even on rugged mountain terrain found in posh areas like Paradise Valley and Carefree.

Three-car garages are a minimum standard for Smith's custom homes, though some clients request storage for as many as 20 vehicles. In those cases, Smith builds "a very deep, cavernous garage," which is "more like an airport hangar" to store custom cars and collectibles.

No matter how many garages he builds, Smith either tucks them away from the front or incorporates them into the design with custom garage doors like "carriage style" wooden doors.

Smith says local homebuilders are following suit and are even trying to soften the harsh look of front-facing garages by breaking up garages into several different "bays" centered on a courtyard.

But in the end, "it really comes down to the lot itself," he says. "In the tract environment, builders are trying to break (garages) up, but there is very little a person can do once a home is built. But when you get into the custom environment, the sky is the limit."

#### Resources

GW Custom Homes, LLC *Formerly Smith Brothers Homes*  
(480) 488-5042  
[www.gwcustomhomes.com](http://www.gwcustomhomes.com)

Agritopia by Scott Homes  
Northwest corner of Higley and Ray roads, Gilbert (480) 279-0285  
[www.agritopia.com](http://www.agritopia.com)

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