

## **Garage Doors Aren't Plain Jane Anymore**

For something that has been so prominent in the design of new homes over recent years, the garage door has generally been seen as a Plain Jane. But who cared, really? It was just a two-, three- or four-car structure to house the occupants' vehicles. No one expected anything so utilitarian in nature to be a thing of beauty. But that has been steadily changing since 2000, says John Jella, president of 1<sup>st</sup> United Door Technologies LLC, when an amazing trend started to gain traction in the garage-door industry.

That trend? Curb appeal. It's a phrase 1<sup>st</sup> United Door has been using for a while, and other garage-door manufacturers have since picked it up. "In the door industry, people like to refer to the garage door as the largest moving object in the home," Jella says. "In today's home, it's become the focal point. As the home shrinks, the garage door becomes more prevalent, particularly when it faces the street." The garage door makes up from 50 percent to 80 percent of a home's front elevation. Viewed from the street, that's a big part of the home. Builders haven't traditionally spent much money on the garage door, despite its prominence or its 25- to 30-year lifespan. But that, too, is changing, Jella says, because builders are realizing that a handsome garage door has a huge impact on a home's salability.

1<sup>st</sup> United Door originated the steel carriage house door in 2000. In the six years since, other manufacturers have jumped on the bandwagon and today the carriage house style has taken over an increasing share of sales. Further, over the next three to five years, the carriage house door will own at least 20 percent of the market.

It's not just the individual homebuyer who wants his garage door to look more like it's fronting a stable for his horse drawn carriage and a team of high steppers. Municipalities now are enacting ordinances requiring that curb appeal be incorporated into a home's design, to beautify neighborhoods and increase home values. That means builders face a choice: Either install a garage door that meets neighborhood standards, move the garage to a side entry, or put it in the back, where it won't be readily visible from the street. The latter two reduce the builder's profits, Jella says, because the additional space they demand will mean he can't put as many homes in a development as he may have liked.

The base price of a steel carriage house door is typically higher—roughly \$1,000 compared with \$400 typically spent by production builders for a garage door—but it's still a bargain. "There just simply isn't another product that's made that's as inexpensive and that will have a bigger impact on the home," Jella says. Steven Berry, manager of residential design for Verrado in Buckeye, Ariz., says the design principals at Verrado are addressing the consumer's shift away from the mass-produced home, and carriage house doors are a part of that. "Like great front-yard landscaping, good carriage door designs enrich the appearance of the home and generate tremendous value," Berry says. "If all homes on the block have them, the entire street and neighborhood become more valuable."