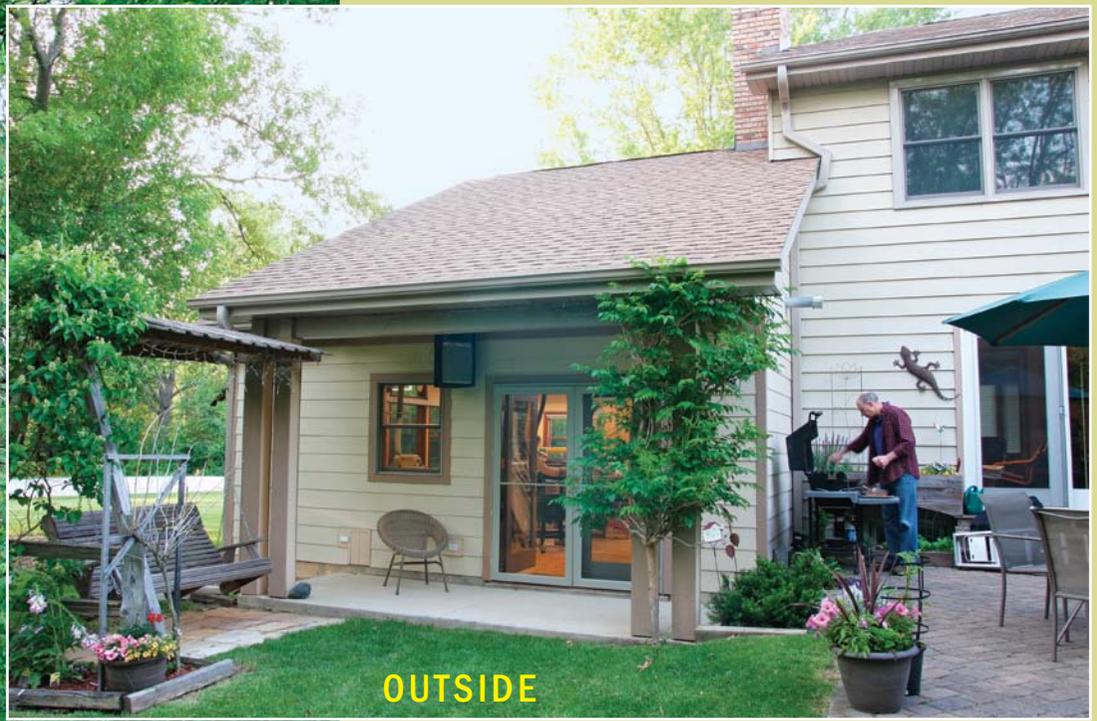
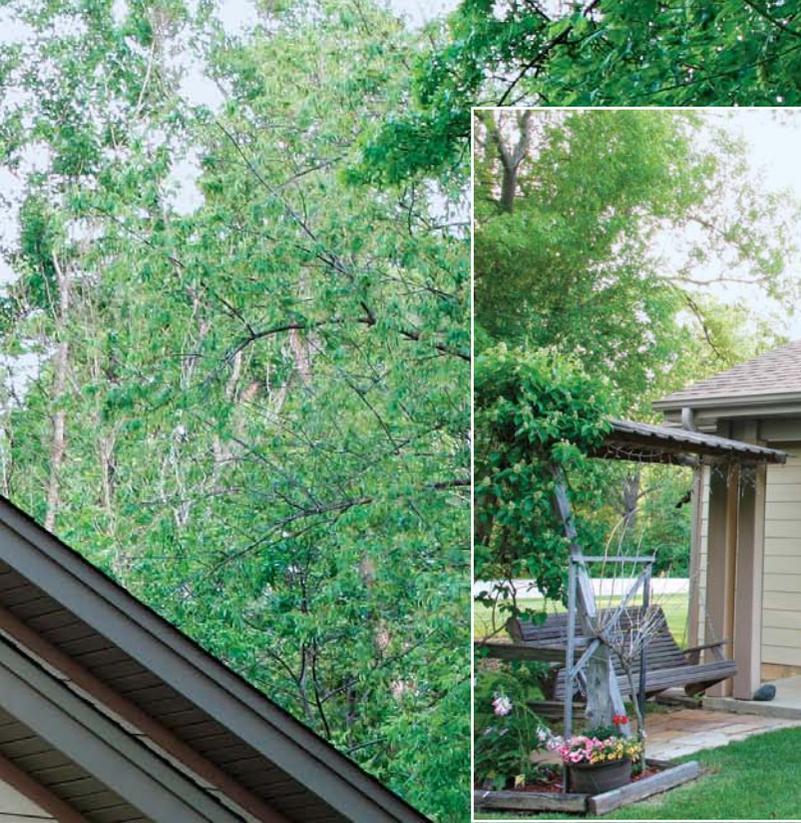




Bring Your Shop into the
Great-room concept offers great advantages—both now and later



OUTSIDE

Seamless addition. Fletcher's new addition is a roomy workshop for him but will likely be a "great room" for the next owners. He consulted an architect to make sure the addition blended nicely with the house and created bonus spaces for outdoor living.

I have been a woodworker for almost as long as I have been walking, and I've been through many shops, starting at my parents' home and then my own, both in my native South Africa and here in the United States. I have renovated, insulated, electrified, floored, and added windows and doors to garages and barns alike. I've built new structures and added on.

The outcome in all cases has been the same: When it came time to sell, I left money on the table. In my experience, nobody cares about how fine your garage or shed or barn is.

So when it was time to start over outside Chicago, I decided enough was enough. I had a little meeting with my wife and sold her on a new approach. My simple plan was to build an addition on the non-garage side of the house and effectively create a utility room, one that can very quickly and easily be converted into a beautiful great room when it is time to sell, simply by applying a fresh coat of paint, swapping out the lights, and dropping down some carpeting.

The outcome has been a fantastic success, with many benefits. For one, we appreciate the value added to the property, which made it possible to spend more and do the job right. By consulting an architect, we also improved the overall appearance of the house, for us and whoever follows. Second, the attached structure is far more energy efficient than a stand-alone would be, because of the shared walls and also the shop's insulating effect on the rest of the house. There are lots of other upsides. My wife loves it because it is easy to visit, and I appreciate the tea and cookies. My tools are all mobile, so we can use the space in other ways when the need arises. And last but not least, it is an awesome, comfortable workspace in all seasons.

House

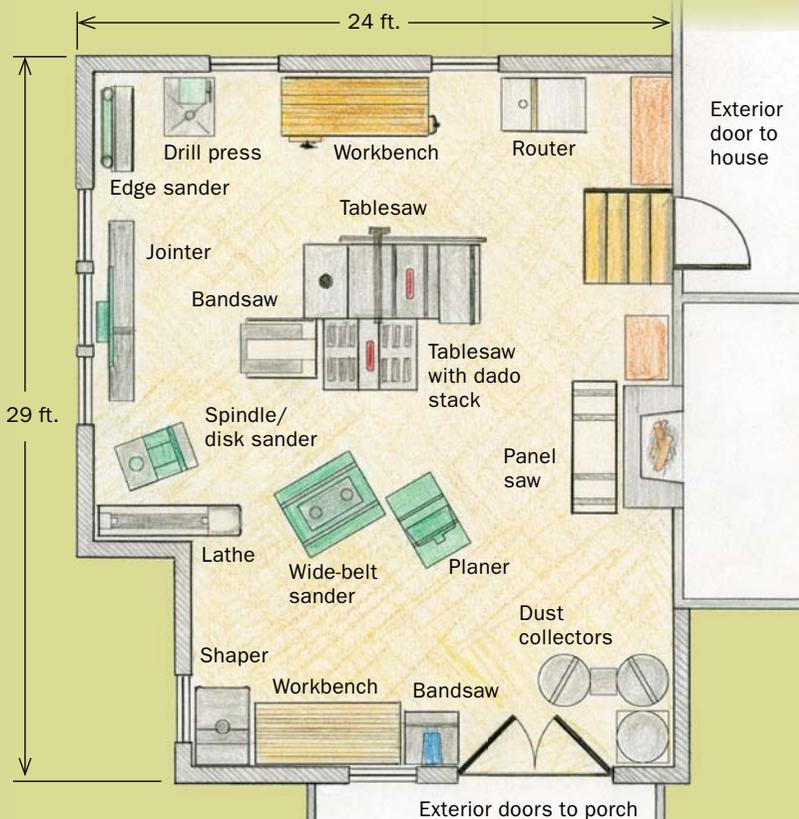
BY MARSHALL FLETCHER



INSIDE



Roomy and well-lit. Fletcher built skylights and large windows into the design for plenty of natural light. High ceilings make the room more comfortable in the summer.



Spend plenty of time on design

I did the first floor plan myself, placing stakes into the ground with connecting tape so we could live with it for a while and be sure it would enhance the outdoor space and not compromise the existing dwelling. I then provided a basic layout to an architect, including suggestions for the placement of windows and doors. He gave expert input, enhanced the design, and produced the construction drawings.

There were key decisions along the way. One was the type of floor: wood frame or slab. A framed floor must be designed for the weight of the machines. It could give you the advantage of extra basement space, but that could also increase the cost, requiring additional excavation and concrete. I did not want to disturb our existing basement walls, as we live near a river flood plain and have no current water problems, so I chose to build on a slab.

I went for a single level, with a high ceiling that still leaves the upper windows of the house unobstructed and creates appealing roof lines. But there is no reason why you couldn't build a second floor above a shop like this, adding living space or shop space.

When it came time to submit the plans for a building permit, I categorized the addition as a "seasonal recreation room," but was up front about the fact that it would be converted into a great room at some point. My local zoning board OK'd the plans and was super-cooperative throughout the building process. Overall it was comparable to building a garage or other structure.

How much you do yourself is a balance between speed and cost, and must take into account your skill level and what you are willing to try. I used a builder for the big stuff, but did a lot of the smaller jobs myself. By the way, I strongly suggest getting three prices before selecting a contractor, submitting the drawings to each one.

Make smart choices inside

For most workshops, power is a big consideration. I ran a new 220-volt feed to a subpanel in the shop. That saved me routing a lot of extra wiring through the existing structure.

One advantage of a great room over a basement shop is the ability to isolate noise and dust from the living space. Because this is an addition, you are dealing with fully insulated external walls, and no sound channels into the rest of the house. That's why I highly recommend installing an exterior door at the entrance to the room, which seals tight against noise, dust, and temperature.

It's also a good idea to keep heating separate to avoid airflow from shop to house, eliminating another highway for sound and dust. For now, I heat the shop with a wall-mounted, gas-fired heater on a thermostat. It is an externally vented unit so I do not get the smell of burnt dust or volatiles such as oil and varnish in the workspace. Because of the high ceiling volume, the room feels comfortable even in summer. Before selling the house I would trade the gas-fired heater for a split heating/cooling unit. The separate subpanel will make it an easy retrofit.

If your HVAC system is large enough for the additional square footage, and if the ducting design permits, you could run a feed-and-return duct to the new addition and just cap it for later. □

Marshall Fletcher, an engineer, lives in Libertyville, Ill.



A few tips

Bring an exterior door inside. Used indoors, an exterior door's thickness and weatherstripping seals out noise and dust and prevents them from getting into living areas.



Install a separate subpanel. This lets you tie into the house's power supply with just one line, and ensures plenty of power for the shop (left).

Simple solution for slabs. DRIcore tiles (below) are affordable, widely available, and easy to install. They include a moisture barrier (concrete tends to wick moisture from below), and have plenty of weight capacity for heavy machinery. Fletcher applied a floor finish to his.

