

GREAT GARAGES

A photograph of a row of red Ferrari sports cars parked in a garage. The cars are arranged in a line, receding into the background. The car in the foreground is a Ferrari 250 GTO, featuring a prominent rear spoiler and dual exhaust pipes. The license plate on the rear of this car reads "NEW YORK 9201-HX HISTORICAL". The cars are all in excellent condition, with a glossy finish. The background shows a white wall with some framed pictures and a door.

LOOKING for the LOOK

FINDING THE NEXT
COOL CAR GETS
HARDER EVERY DAY

STORY & PHOTOS BY PHIL BERG



RALPH LAUREN FASHION DESIGNER

AT LEAST EACH WEEK, WORLD-renowned fashion designer Ralph Lauren visits his cars, about half of his collection of 70-some peacefully parked in sight of the ocean on Long Island. The cars are all ready to drive, and often he'll emerge from the secluded cluster of three garages in one of three '96 McLaren F1s, an '88 Porsche 959 or a Ferrari F40 and rack up some miles across the back roads.

"Once you drive the McLaren, it's over," Lauren says. "It's like no car I've ever driven. The McLaren is like *Star Wars*—a hovercraft. I feel like I'm not touching the ground. It's an experience I've never had before.

"Strangely enough, I really don't like to drive the cars when people are around," he admits. "As it turns out, I don't really want to be seen in the cars. There's a part of me that likes the privacy, so the more garish the car, the less I want to drive it.



On weekends, depending on the weather, I love the Jaguars, the XK120 or XK140. I love the Mercedes Gullwing and roadster and the Porsches." In addition to the remarkable 959, he has a Carrera GT, as well as a diminutive 356 Speedster and a 550 RS Spyder.

The street-going Ferraris reside in their own Long Island garage, the Porsches and Mercedes are parked two feet apart in a 10-

car workshop, and the Jaguars enjoy a smaller shake-sided home of their own. They all see a lot of road use from Lauren. But he doesn't ignore driving the race cars when he has a free weekend, according to Mark Reinwald, who is tasked with keeping the rare machines in perpetual running order. Reinwald drives each car every six weeks to ensure that they are all in shape. Reinwald sends the cars cross-country for

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museum tours and shows, the farthest being an Italian concours event.

Lauren created his billion-dollar fashion company on his own and paid his business dues by trusting his sense of how to look cool. He began to develop this sense when he was buying his own suits at age 12 and then honed it as he walked to his job selling ties at Brooks Brothers. His eyes would fall on the beautiful shapes in the Jaguar and Morgan Manhattan dealerships that he passed on foot. To him, these cars looked cool. When he began Polo, the business, he didn't ride around Manhattan in a limo but drove himself in a Mercedes 280 convertible and in two black-on-black Porsche 930s, one a cabriolet. All three cars still look cool today.

Lauren explains, "I never cared about being a collector. It was not my goal. Cars were always something that I loved. It was also about the famous owners and the men who built the cars. I was fascinated reading about what Enzo Ferrari was like, what Ettore Bugatti was about, and getting a sense of why they built these cars and what their lives were like. It's the

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lifestyle, the romance, all of those things together."

In addition to the Long Island garages, Lauren has the newer sports cars and the older classic cars in Westchester, New York, but he is constructing a larger garage that will house all of his cars, plus a few future purchases, under one roof. In the workshop are posters and murals from the races of some of the cars, but otherwise automobilia and neon signs are absent, directing viewers' attention to the cars themselves, and the new building will continue this uncluttered look.

The main reason for the new building has to do not with logistics but with climate. It was designed from scratch to help preserve some of the older cars from the cold and the salty air that come from the ocean. Many of Lauren's cars are original and unrestored, and he has no plans to change them. Like a pair of faux-faded and authentic-oil-stained Polo jeans, they look cooler as is. At his ranch in Colorado, he has a collection of about 20 Jeeps and pickups and a faded turquoise '57 Cadillac Eldorado Biarritz, none of which is restored, all of which fit his sense of cool in their environment.

The garages will remain private, although the cars occasionally can be spotted at the Pebble Beach concours and a handful of other shows and museum displays. Lauren's friends who are invited to the garages include Brian Redman, a Porsche road-race champion, and America's first world champion racer and notable car restorer, Phil Hill, both of whom can help advise Lauren about the next purchases he might add to his collection.

Reinwald says that the special cars Lauren is interested in are becoming scarcer, now that there are more collectors around: "He specializes in quality, not quantity, and it's getting harder to find the next spectacular car." 🍷

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