



CREATIVE SPACE

HEINER VON DER LADEN MARCO PROSCH

Are you familiar with AC/DC, the Australian rock band? *Highway to Hell*? Its members took the stage wearing school uniforms. With a nod to tradition. As a boy in the 1960s, lead guitarist Angus Young had been in a band with some friends. “I would get home from school, still in my uniform, and go straight into the garage. I could hardly wait to make music,” he says. No time to change clothes. That early passion turned into the world brand of AC/DC.

The garage. Parents turn that space over to their kids of a certain age. There’s not too much their offspring can destroy in there. Safe within those windowless walls, the kids feel undisturbed and unobserved. They can try things out, and make noise. A garage offers a few square meters of freedom.

The garage also has quite a tradition in business. Boeing, Disney, Harley-Davidson—many big names started off in that small space, for a variety of reasons. Even the first Porsche and Volkswagen were made in garages. There’s something about a garage that invites people to tinker. And they’re also closely associated with the still young history of digitization and developments in Silicon Valley. Young people who don’t have much money but do have valuable ideas start businesses in garages. That’s supposedly also how Apple and Google got started.

Now things work the other way around. Many companies that can look back on decades of success are realizing that the innovative energy in their high-rise office buildings is on the wane. If structures are set in stone, employees hardly dare to propose improvements from the bottom up. So established companies are attempting to provide space for creativity, to stimulate curiosity at all levels, and to promote the desire to experiment. And because the atmosphere at company headquarters tends

to be less than optimal for such pursuits, garages or labs are starting to appear again—laboratories where ideas can be tried out, and where they are also allowed to fail.

True, one won’t see school uniforms such as those worn by AC/DC in these modern-day garages. But instead of the office dress code of yore, a new set of fashion guidelines encourages attire such as hoodies. Comfortable clothes make it easier to think. For conferences the teams lounge on colorful cushions and stackable Euro pallets. If even that seems too staid, they can make furniture of a studied idiosyncratic bent out of scrap wood. Openness applies not only to the space itself. Secrecy is passé. In the obligatory kitchen, ideas are kicked around and spun further over organic soft drinks. The power of the community is what counts, not the ambition of the lone wolf.

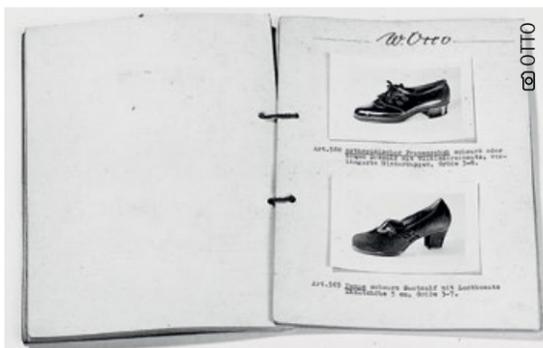
Berlin has the highest density of such labs in Germany. More than 80 of them were registered in early 2017, including the Porsche Digital Lab. But no one knows the exact number. Why should there be so many in Berlin, of all places? The capital city suffers from a weak economy. Corporations have their headquarters elsewhere in the country. But the city is hip, and has strong cultural and media scenes. It is tolerant, worldly, and never sleeps. At the bakeries and newspaper stands in some of its neighborhoods you’ll hear more English than German. Berlin attracts young people from around the world who are eager to innovate. Ever more companies are realizing this and seeking to establish a presence in the city. If they don’t open their own “garage,” they simply use a “lab service” and rent space amongst one of the restless and creative teams.

Maybe Berlin has discovered its forte. Far enough away from the big corporations and the establishment. Silicon Valley was once like that. And made something great out of it. ←

German street artist Claudia Walde, alias MadC, makes graffiti fit for galleries. Her acrylic spray paintings have brought her international acclaim.



William Edward Boeing was actually planning to build a yacht in a simple boathouse at Lake Union near Seattle. But then he discovered his fascination for flying and promptly decided to design aircraft. The son of German immigrants, he had dropped out of Yale a few years earlier to enter his father's lumber business. His knowledge of material engineering proved invaluable. In 1915 he built his first aircraft, a seaplane made of wood, wire, and linen, with the help of a nautical engineer. On July 15, 1916, he founded his own business, which later became the Boeing Airplane Company.



Although Werner Otto had to close his shoe factory in 1948 for lack of success, he didn't give up on the idea of selling footwear. One year later he founded the "Werner Otto Versandhandel" (mail-order company)—with start-up capital of 6,000 German marks. The business was located in two small barracks in the Schnelsen district of Hamburg and had a staff of three. Although Otto's training was in the grocery sector, his first catalogue, which came out in 1950, presented 28 pairs of shoes on its 14 pages. All 300 copies had photos of the products pasted in by hand, and most were delivered to private households by bicycle. Under the motto, "Trust for trust," Otto was the first to introduce payment by invoice. The Otto catalogue still exists. Today the company makes more than 90 percent of its sales online (2.7 billion euros in the 2016/17 fiscal year).

Part of Porsche's early history took place in a garage. In 1931 Ferdinand Porsche founded a design office for engines and vehicles. He had two rooms on two floors in the center of Stuttgart, but still no workshop at the time. Until 1938 when the first building opened of what are still the company headquarters, he occasionally requisitioned the garage at his family's villa. It was from there that he set out on test drives, and it gave him the space to tinker on prototypes—including the car that would later become the VW Beetle.



In 1923 the brothers Walter Elias (Walt) and Roy Disney moved to Los Angeles, California, to live with their uncle. They used the garage next to the house for creative work, and founded the Disney Brothers Cartoon Studio with start-up capital of 200 dollars. They worked on the *Alice Comedies* cartoons, which laid the foundation for the worldwide success of the Walt Disney Company. Today it is one of the largest media corporations in the world, posting sales of 55.6 billion dollars in 2016.



The shed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where Arthur Davidson and William S. Harley founded the Harley-Davidson Motor Company in 1903 is legendary. In a space of about three by four and a half meters, they built their first motorized two-wheel vehicles in the early 1920s. Their motorcycles won races and quickly gained a following—as symbols of freedom and the American way of life. In 1956 the young Elvis Presley posed on a Harley-Davidson KH for the Harley-Davidson *Enthusiast* magazine. The company is now one of the oldest motorcycle producers in the world.

Amar G. Bose was born in Philadelphia in 1929 to a Bengali import entrepreneur and an American schoolteacher. Even as a small boy he was fascinated by technology, and would dismantle electric appliances in order to understand how they work. His passion led him to found a radio repair shop as a teenager in his parents' basement. He made an agreement with his father: as long as he kept up his grades, he only had to go to school four days a week and his father would write him an excuse for Fridays. The teachers knew that Amar didn't have headaches but was repairing radios instead. He studied electrical engineering and then launched what would become the Bose Corporation in a Massachusetts garage in 1964. The first loudspeaker, the Bose 901, came onto the market in 1968, and set new standards in the hi-fi sector.



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