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# Where's wheelie?

Who needs a rubbish bin when you can buy a smart one? **Hugh Graham** finds ways to boost your kerb appeal – and keep up with the Joneses

The Wheelie Bin Cover Company sells vinyl bin sleeves adorned with photographs of foliage and plants. Covers start at £15 each; covered bins are £76. 0161 703 8188, [wheelie-bin-covers.co.uk](http://wheelie-bin-covers.co.uk)

**T**here's a new must-have design feature in our smarter homes. Now that everyone has bifold doors, a woodburner, an open-plan layout and an outdoor kitchen, the chattering classes have discovered another accoutrement they can't live without: posh bin sheds.

In the better neighbourhoods around the country, but particularly on terraced streets with small front gardens, showing your wheelie bin is now considered vulgar: there's nothing like an ungainly plastic tower to cheapen your elegant Georgian facade. Even in areas that don't have wheelie bins, the smart set are concealing their rubbish bags in bespoke outdoor storage cupboards fashioned out of exotic hardwoods or brick. Some architects are designing permanent stone structures for five-figure sums.

It's certainly a timely trend. Waste separation is becoming increasingly byzantine: in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, residents are now required to divide their rubbish into nine separate containers, never a good look in your front garden. And with collections becoming less and less frequent – in September, Fife council announced that it was reducing pick-ups to once a month – bins full of rubbish are sitting around outside for weeks, fouling the air and attracting flies.

The backlash against "bin blight" is gathering pace. Last month, a survey by the storage firm Keter revealed that 70% of homeowners believe wheelie bins and recycling boxes should be hidden from view. Earlier this year, the government issued statutory guidance on the subject: it said that "unsightly bins can damage the visual amenity of an area" and advised developers that "bin storage should be planned carefully". Shortly afterwards, the National House Building Council (NHBC) issued a guide to creating aesthetically pleasing bin stores called *Avoiding Rubbish Design*.

"It's a recent thing, within the past two years, that bin storage has become more popular," says Ivy Ngeow, an architect who has worked in upmarket areas of London such as Holland Park, South Kensington and Wandsworth for 17 years, and reckons that 20% of homes on some

genteel streets now have bespoke bin sheds. She charges between £5,000 and £10,000 for her built-in bin nooks ([ivyngewow.com](http://ivyngewow.com)).

"I think affluent neighbourhoods are creating more waste," she says. "There's a lot more packaging, mail-order shopping, things being delivered. You can store more rubbish inside the bin enclosures, and you can put your tools and bikes in, too. It's just tidier."

The trend has "steadily been building momentum over the past five years", says Julian Furness, director at the Garden Trellis Company, in Essex. His firm sells about 15 containers a month, twice as many as five years ago, with prices ranging from £254 (budget) to £3,000 (bespoke). He operates around the country, but most of his clients live in high-end London neighbourhoods such as Kew, Chiswick and Hampstead.

There's definitely an element of keeping up with the Joneses, adds James Walsh, founder of Living Colour Gardens, in west London, and whose designs cost £1,500-£2,500. "As soon as a neighbour does something, you want to keep up. As people have more and more disposable income, it makes sense to make the front look smart and tidy – and you can sell your house for more."

So which designs will boost kerb appeal? Not the fanciest ones, Furness says. "It's not like having a Ferrari – if people walk past and don't notice it, then it's done the job." Indeed, Ngeow says the current trend is for building a brick garden wall that contains a bin enclosure, then topping it with greenery or sedum roofs so it becomes camouflaged or part of the landscaping – these cost £5,000-£10,000. Topping the sheds with plants has more than just visual appeal: Walsh crowns his contraptions with rosemary, lavender and thyme, as "the scent from the herbs conceals odours".

Other trends include using luxurious hardwoods such as ipe, although Walsh thinks the vogue is for bin stores made from reclaimed timber: he's designing a salvaged pine number for a family in Queen's Park, northwest London. Painted timber, for that New England/Hampton look, is also popular, Furness says. But the contemporary slatted look is his firm's bestseller, in woods such as western red cedar and iroko; ornate trellises go better with more traditional homes. The modern slats have a practical advantage, too: they allow the air to

This garden wall in west London has a bin shed built in and is topped with greenery. It cost £15,000 and was designed by Neil Harris, of 4 Tech Solutions. 020 3542 6430, [techsolutions.btinternet.com](http://techsolutions.btinternet.com)



The bespoke bin store on the right holds 240-litre bins and starts at £780. The one on the left is for recycling boxes and starts at £870. [gardentrellis.co.uk](http://gardentrellis.co.uk)



Living Colour Gardens offers a range of bespoke bin sheds, from £1,500 to £2,500. Add £300-£500 for planting. [livingcolourgardens.co.uk](http://livingcolourgardens.co.uk)



circulate, so, in summer, you don't get a burst of unpleasant odour when you open the door.

As well as banishing smell, bin enclosures keep rubbish out of reach of vermin, and can be designed to fit air-conditioning units. They also prevent bins from blowing over, going missing or, if you have a lock fitted, being sifted through by strangers. And, if they're in your front garden, you don't have to drag out a bin from the back of the house.

The huge size of wheelie bins (240 litres) is another reason for the trend, according to Neil Harris, head of research and innovation at the NHBC; in the 1960s, 90-litre steel dustbins were standard. "When you had a single steel bin, you could easily hide it behind a hedge. There was less waste. You wouldn't throw away milk containers, and you'd be returning your Coca-Cola bottles to get back your deposit. The wheelie bins we have now are much bigger, and are hard to conceal if you have lots of them."

We could soon be having more, if the plight of Newcastle-under-Lyme residents is anything to go by: that's why experts suggest future-proofing your bin-store design to accommodate a potential increase in the number of containers. Furness, for instance, can build sheds with room for four bins. But be careful how big you go: sheds more than 2.5 metres high need planning permission, as do structures that take up more than half of your garden; many councils also require you to apply for consent if you build in front of the house.

If that all sounds like too much of a faff, and you don't have a Chelsea budget, a Manchester company has come up with an ingenious way of disguising bins. The Wheelie Bin Cover Company covers them with photographs of beech hedges, leylandii and conifers, so they blend into foliage; vinyl covers start at £15, customised bins are £76.

The firm's founder, Lee Parrott, had the idea 17 years ago while in his father's garden, looking at a bin standing against a hedge. He now sells 1,000 bins a year, and makes bespoke designs if you send in pictures. They might not pass muster with the taste police in prime central London; then again, people might not notice. "The first time we put out our beech-hedge wheelie bin, it was against the beech hedge in front of our house," Parrott says. "The bin men didn't collect the rubbish – they couldn't see the bin."