

Girls Garage: Stereotype Busting Design

This article was originally published by [One Workplace](#). One Workplace and Steelcase Education worked with Emily Pilloton, founder of design firm Project H, on a space for Girls Garage. Pilloton started Girls Garage in the spring of 2016 as a one-of-a-kind design and building program and dedicated workspace for girls ages 9-13.

Close your eyes and imagine that you are attending a shop class and were being taught how to weld. Welding is a mechanical, hands on, knowledge based activity. You need to pay close and careful attention to your teacher as they describe the methods used while welding. After the teacher skillfully shows you how to complete a perfect stringer bead weld, and all of the safety measures you need to take, they hand you the welder. It's your turn and so the teacher asks you to try.

Open your eyes. Who was your teacher? Was the person whom you imagined a woman? How about a 9 year old girl? The answer is most likely, "no", which is precisely why our good friend [Emily Pilloton](#) founded [Girls Garage](#) - to break gender gaps and bust through stereotypes that girls don't 'make' or 'build'.

Photography courtesy of One Workplace

Emily, who founded the design firm [Project H](#) in 2008, launched Girls Garage in the spring of 2016. Girls Garage was born out of one of Emily's earlier projects called Camp H, an "all-girls program for hardcore building and community projects". With the success of Camp-H, Emily's initiative for girls eventually outgrew their space and needed an upgrade.

In downtown Berkeley, CA, a college town with beautiful architecture and historical venues, sits an old brick building with an empty shell; the future site of Girls Garage. It was made clear why Emily and her team chose this space for their girls from our first walk through- the architectural bones, location, natural light, and spatial layout was perfect for their needs. After a little dreaming and some creative vision, Emily and her team got to work.

Photography courtesy of One Workplace

One Workplace and Steelcase Education met with Emily early in the stages of her planning to understand her needs and desires for the site. To design and give Emily the best absolute outcome for her and her girls, we needed to deeply understand the "why." We wanted to know why she wanted this space for her girls, what she envisioned this space to achieve, and how we could best help her achieve it. Boy - did she have an answer!

“[We wanted to] make a statement about what we believe our young girls deserve in terms of a space that is theirs and things that they can do in that space.”

EMILY PILLOTON

Photography courtesy of One Workplace

We uncovered the “why” through an exercise we call “FABI Grid,” taken from one of our favorite books, [The Doodle Revolution](#). In this exercise, we ask that our clients describe their perfect space in Features, Adjectives, Benefits, and Ideas. This simple exercise allowed us to understand the space and the purpose behind it in a much more tangible way. Some of the themes that were discussed about Girls Garage were:

Features of the space:

- Multi-use upstairs area for learning, teaching, and working
- Multi-use area downstairs for learning, workshops, summer programs, individual focus, and large scale group interactions
- Organized and well thought out
- Space designed in a way that’s intuitive for students and professionals
- Safety is a must
- All of a tools need to be visible and accessible

Adjectives to describe the space:

- Safe (a safe space for women and girls to build together)
- Fearless (the encouraged attitude of our girls)
- Big (building things that are physically big, and big ideas)

Benefits that the girls, teachers, and anyone who uses the space will get from being here:

- Skills - Girls learn competency in activities like welding, soldering, building
- Mentorship - Surrounded by women who work in these fields as their profession
- Community - contribute to a greater community, building community within

Ideas that you have about the space specifically that you are thinking through:

- Classroom furniture that’s mobile and adaptable to the session being taught
- Storage for reception area administrative papers as well as a showcase for their
- Girls Garage paraphernalia

Photography courtesy of One Workplace

Steelcase Education and One Workplace immediately started synthesizing and processing the information provided by Emily and her team from the workshop. After a few iterations and tweaks, we collectively came up with a design that was going to encourage the activities in the space for the girls, teachers, as well as Emily and her team.

With the combined support of Steelcase Education and One Workplace, the team was able to outfit the Girls Garage with the furniture and space layout she needed for a successful and inspiring environment.

Ultimately, the Girls Garage was built on the ideals of “encouraging girls to change what they think they’re capable of and the way they think about their own capacity. It’s a place for being motivated by things that sound hard and difficult to do and a mindset that ‘I can do anything, nothing is too complex, and because something is scary, I want to do it.’”

Photography courtesy of One Workplace

We think that the interior space and environment can support and encourage these things through space planning, design, and thoughtful execution. We believe that workshops, exercises, and asking questions are the best way to find your why, which is the first step in our process that drives all of our decisions. We believe in what Girls Garage is about, and the efforts that Emily has put forth in such a powerful and engaging way. We hope that the girls enjoy the space just as much as we enjoyed designing it!

For more information about Emily, the Girls Garage and Project H go to girlsgarage.org.

Kate Rancourt

Kate Rancourt believes in the power of design and the positive impact it makes on learning environments. She has a deep passion for creating interior spaces for the needs of people and employs design thinking as a powerful tool for achieving this goal. As Creative Lead at One Workplace, Kate is able practice her love of design thinking through engaging workshops and exercises to help clients solve problems. Kate is a Certified Interior Designer and has worked with education clients in K-12 and higher education settings in both California as well as in her home state of Virginia. Kate’s most memorable project is her design for the Girls Garage in Berkeley, California. Girls Garage is a one-of-a-kind design and building program dedicated to pre-teen girls to help peak and maintain their interest in building, making, and STEM fields.

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