

THE GARAGE LINTEL

by Travis Nech

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THE GARAGE LINTEL

A Texas Homeowner's Guide to the Widest Opening in Your House — Sag, Rust, Cracks Above the Garage, and a Repair That Holds

Travis Nech

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This book is an educational guide based on 50 years of hands-on field experience in masonry and lintel work across Texas. It is not a substitute for an on-site evaluation of a specific house. Every structure, wall assembly, and load condition is different. Where structure is involved — where loads are uncertain, where steel has lost significant section, where a wall is moving, or where safety is in question — hire a structural engineer for that building and follow that professional's direction for that project, and use an experienced masonry contractor for the replacement work itself. Supporting brick over a wide opening is not a do-it-yourself job. Use this book to read your garage wall accurately, to inspect it on a schedule, to understand your repair options, and to recognize a proper job when you see one.

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Introduction: Start Where the Cracks Start

Stand in almost any Texas driveway, look up at the brick above the garage door, and you will find the most honest part of the house. Not the prettiest part, and not the part anyone decorated on purpose. The honest part. Because above the garage is where a brick house cannot hide what it has been carrying, what it has been drinking, and what it has been putting off.

Ask homeowners where brick trouble starts and most will point to a window corner, a chimney, or a long side wall. Those places matter, and other books in this series cover them in full. But day in and day out, across the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex and across the smaller Texas towns where I have worked for 50 years, the opening that fails first, sags most visibly, and gets repaired worst is the garage. It should not surprise anyone once you think about it for a minute. A double garage door is sixteen feet of empty space cut into a brick wall. A single door is eight or nine. No window in the house comes close. Everything above that empty space — brick, mortar, sometimes a second story, sometimes a roof line — has to be carried across it by one piece of steel most homeowners have never seen, never painted, and never thought about until the day the cracks arrived.

This book is about that one piece of steel, the brick it carries, and the decisions that decide whether the repair you pay for is the last one or just the latest one.

You do not need a construction background to use this book. You need a driveway, a pair of eyes, and a willingness to look up twice a year. I will explain, in plain English, what a lintel is and how it carries weight across a wide opening. I will show you how rust works — not just as a stain, but as a slow, powerful force that expands, lifts brick, and thins the very steel the wall depends on. I will teach you to read the crack patterns above a garage the way an experienced mason reads them: which ones are old and quiet, which ones are active, and which ones mean you should stop watching and start calling.

Just as important, I will be honest about repair. The garage lintel attracts shortcut work like few other jobs in masonry. A tube of sealant, a coat of paint, a skim of mortar over a crack — all of it can make a failing opening look fine for a season, and none of it restores a single pound of carrying strength. Chapter 7 lays out the honest ladder of options, from cosmetic work that has a legitimate, limited place, through patch and partial repairs and their limits, to full replacement. Chapter 8 then walks through a permanent replacement step by step, in the order you should actually see it happen on your driveway, including the field-developed LintelLOCK system I use to lock a replacement lintel into a lasting, properly supported installation. If a crew's plan does not match that sequence, you will know which questions to ask before the first brick comes out, not after the last check clears.

Water runs through this book from beginning to end, because water runs through every lintel failure I have ever opened up. Steel does not rust in a dry wall. Chapter 5 traces how rain, roof runoff, failed flashing, and clogged weep holes deliver water to steel that was supposed to stay dry, and Chapter 12 turns that lesson into a simple maintenance plan that protects a new lintel — and every other lintel on the house — for decades.

A note on honesty and scope, because this series is built on both. I am a mason and a field practitioner. My authority in these pages is 50 years of hands-on field experience — inspecting walls, supporting them, replacing the steel above their openings, rebuilding the brick, and coming back years later to see what held. I am not a structural engineer, and this book does not do engineering work. Where a load needs to be calculated, where a wall has moved in ways that suggest more than lintel failure, or where a room addition above a garage has changed what the wall carries, the right move is a structural engineer for that house. Knowing that line, and respecting it, is part of the craft, and I will point to it plainly

wherever it appears.

Every specific scenario in this book is labeled for what it is. A hypothetical example is an invented teaching situation. A composite example combines details from several common patterns into one illustration. There are no named customers in this book and no stories presented as a specific client's job. The lessons are real. The privacy is also real.

By the end of this book you will be able to do four things well. First, inspect the brick above your garage in about fifteen minutes, twice a year, with a string line, a phone camera, and a short written log. Second, describe what you found in accurate words a contractor, an inspector, or a buyer can act on. Third, compare bids for lintel work line by line and spot the shortcut hiding inside a low number. Fourth, keep a repaired opening repaired — because a new lintel protected from water and watched on a schedule should not be a job you buy twice.

The garage is the widest opening in your house. Carry it well, and the wall above it will stop being the honest problem and go back to being what it was built to be: quiet, level, and easy to forget for all the right reasons.

Let us start by looking up.

Chapter 1: The Widest Hole in the Wall

The Opening Nobody Thinks About

Drive down any street in Texas and look at the houses as you pass. Not the paint colors. Not the landscaping. Look at the holes.

Every house is a wall with holes cut into it. A front door, three feet wide. Windows, two or three feet wide. A back door. Maybe a wide living room window if the builder was feeling generous. Each of those openings has something above it carrying the weight of everything stacked on top, and each of them asks a fairly modest job of the material that spans it.

Then there is the garage.

A single garage door is eight or nine feet wide. A double garage door — the one most Texas families use every single day — is sixteen feet wide. Sixteen feet. That is wider than most living rooms. It is five front doors side by side. It is the widest hole in the wall of your house by a very large margin,

and above that hole, in most brick homes, sits row after row of brick and mortar, sometimes a gable full of siding and framing, and sometimes an entire second story with a bedroom, a bathroom, furniture, and people living their lives in it.

Most homeowners never think about what is holding all of that up. That is understandable. When everything is working, the piece doing the work is mostly hidden. You see a thin line of steel tucked under the first course of brick if you crouch down and look closely, and that is about it. It does not look impressive. It does not look important. It looks like a detail.

It is not a detail. It is one of the hardest-working pieces of steel in your entire home, and in my fifty years of hands-on field experience working on Texas houses, I can tell you plainly: the garage opening is where I see failure first, most often, and most clearly. The cracks show up there before they show up anywhere else. The sag shows up there. The rust shows up there. If a house is going to tell you a story about stress, it usually starts telling it right above the garage door.

This book is about learning to read that story before a manageable repair turns into a major one.

Why Sixteen Feet Changes Everything

To understand why the garage is different, it helps to understand one simple truth about openings: the difficulty does not grow evenly with the width. It grows fast.

A lintel — that is the name for the horizontal support that spans the top of an opening and carries the load above it — over a three-foot window has a short, easy job. The weight above it is modest, the span is short, and the brickwork on either side is close enough to help share the work. Double that span to six feet and the job does not just double. The tendency of the middle to bend downward grows much faster than the width does. Double it again toward twelve or sixteen feet, and you are in a completely different world of stress.

Think of it like carrying a long board. A short board held at both ends barely flexes. A long board of the exact same thickness sags in the middle under its own weight before you ever set anything on it. Now imagine stacking weight along the top of that long board. The middle wants to dip. Everything about a wide span punishes weakness in the middle.

That is the garage door's problem. The steel angle that spans it — most garage lintels are a length of steel angle iron, shaped like an L in cross-section, with one leg tucked under the brick — has to stay nearly straight across sixteen feet

while carrying brick that does not bend at all. Brick and mortar are strong when you press straight down on them. They are remarkably unforgiving when the support beneath them moves even a little. A fraction of an inch of dip in the middle of that steel can be enough to open cracks in the brickwork above.

What Is Sitting Above That Door

Homeowners often look up at the brick above their garage and see a flat wall. It helps to see it instead as weight — real, countable weight.

A single brick weighs roughly four to five pounds. A square foot of brick wall, brick plus mortar, weighs in the neighborhood of forty pounds. Now do the rough math on a typical double garage. Sixteen feet wide, with say four feet of brick height above the door before the roofline or a change in material: that is sixty-four square feet of wall, weighing somewhere around two and a half thousand pounds. Add a tall gable above it and the number climbs. Add a second story — brick continuing up another eight or nine feet — and you may be looking at six, seven, or eight thousand pounds of masonry carried across that one opening.

And brick is only part of it. Depending on how the house was framed, that lintel and the structure around it may also be helping to support roof framing, ceiling joists, or floor framing for the room above. We will talk much more in the next chapter about exactly how the load travels and how much of it the lintel truly carries — the answer is more interesting, and more hopeful, than the full weight of the wall. But even the share that lands on the steel is a serious load, and it never takes a day off. It sits there in August heat and January cold, year after year, decade after decade.

Why Texas Makes It Tougher

Garage lintels work hard everywhere. In Texas, several local facts stack the deck further against them.

First, heat and sun. A west-facing garage front in Fort Worth or Dallas can bake all afternoon through a long summer. Steel expands as it heats and contracts as it cools, a tiny amount each day, and mortar joints and brick move at their own slightly different pace. None of that daily movement is dramatic on its own. Repeated tens of thousands of times over the life of a house, it works on joints, sealants, and connections the way bending a wire back and forth eventually works on the wire.

Second, our soils. Much of North and Central Texas sits on expansive clay — soil that swells when it takes on water and

shrinks when it dries out. A Texas house does not sit perfectly still through the seasons. It rises and settles in small amounts as the ground beneath it breathes with the weather. A stiff, wide opening like the garage is one of the places where that small ground movement becomes visible, because the wide span has no middle support to help it adjust. The corners of the garage opening become natural places for stress to concentrate, and stress in brick finds relief by cracking.

Third, water. Texas rain often arrives all at once. A hard storm drives water against the front of the house, and any water that finds its way behind the brick — through a failed sealant joint, a crack, or a poorly flashed detail — eventually finds the steel lintel sitting at the bottom of the wall. Steel plus water plus time means rust, and rust, as you will read in Chapter 3, is not just a stain. Rust takes up more space than the steel it came from, and it can literally push brickwork apart from inside the wall.

Fourth, the way many Texas homes were built during building booms. Fast growth also produced houses where the garage lintel was the minimum a builder could get away with — a thinner angle, a shorter bearing at the ends, sometimes steel never properly coated before the brick went up. A marginal lintel can look fine for fifteen years and then show its limits all at once.

Why the Garage Fails First

Put it all together and the answer to this chapter's question is straightforward.

The garage opening fails first because it asks the most. It is the widest span, so bending stress is highest there. It carries heavy, brittle material that cannot tolerate movement. Its corners concentrate the stress of a whole house shifting gently on Texas clay. Its steel sits at the exact low point where water in the wall collects. And in many homes, it was built with the least margin for error.

There is also a simple visibility factor. You stand in front of your garage every day. You look at that wall while the door rolls up, while you unload groceries, while you talk to a neighbor in the driveway. A stepped crack creeping up from the corner of the garage gets seen. A sagging row of brick over the garage door gets seen. In that sense the garage does homeowners a favor: it tends to show its problems out in the open, early, in a place where you can spot them on an ordinary Tuesday — if you know what you are looking at.

That is the purpose of the chapters ahead. Chapter 2 explains, in plain English, how a garage lintel actually carries its load — the quiet teamwork between steel and brick that keeps that

wall up, and the places where that teamwork breaks down. Chapter 3 teaches you to read the evidence: the rust, the sag, and the crack patterns that tell the truth about what is happening inside the wall, and how to tell the difference between a crack that is old, stable, and cosmetic and one that is active and asking for help now.

You do not need to become a mason to understand your own house. You just need someone to translate what the wall is already saying. That translation starts with respecting the widest hole in the wall — and the hardworking strip of steel that has been holding it up, silently, since the day your house was built.

Chapter 2: How a Garage Lintel Carries

A Strip of Steel and a Wall of Brick, Working Together

The most reassuring fact in this whole book is this: the steel lintel over your garage was never meant to carry the entire wall above it all by itself. It has a partner. The partner is the brickwork itself.

That surprises most homeowners. It is tempting to picture every brick above the garage door pressing straight down onto the steel, the way books press on a shelf. Real masonry does not behave that way. When mortar has cured and bonded the bricks into a single panel, the wall gains a kind of teamwork. Some load travels diagonally through the wall, out toward the solid sections on either side of the opening, the way load on an old stone bridge travels along the arch into the banks. Masons and builders call this arching action, and once you understand it, where cracks form — and where they do not — starts to make sense.

Picture the wall above your garage door. Now picture an invisible triangle drawn in that wall, with its base resting on the lintel and its point reaching up into the brickwork, roughly as high as half the width of the opening. The brick inside that triangle is the brick the lintel truly has to carry. The brick outside and above that triangle largely carries itself, passing its weight diagonally down and out to the solid wall on either side of the garage opening, and from there down to the foundation.

This is good news. On our sixteen-foot double garage with four feet of brick above it, the lintel is not holding up every pound of that wall. But here is the catch, and it is a big one:

arching action only works when everything in the system does its job. The mortar joints must be sound enough for the wall to act as one panel. The wall on either side of the opening must be solid and well supported, because that is where the diagonal load is headed. And the lintel itself must stay stiff and nearly straight. The moment the steel sags noticeably, the teamwork breaks down — the triangle cannot form properly over a support that is dipping in the middle — and more and more of the wall's weight comes crashing back onto the steel that is already struggling. Sag invites more load, and more load invites more sag. That is why a lintel problem, once it becomes visible, rarely stays the same size forever.

Bearing: Where the Ends Rest

Every lintel, no matter how strong, is only as good as where its ends land.

The ends of the steel angle rest on the brickwork at each side of the opening. That resting place is called the bearing, and the length of steel actually sitting on the wall at each end is the bearing length. It is not a glamorous detail, so it rarely gets attention — which is unfortunate, because it is one of the most common weak points I find in the field after fifty years of hands-on field experience.

Think about what the bearing has to do. All the load the lintel carries gets delivered to those two small patches of masonry, one at each end. That is a lot of weight arriving at a small address. If the bearing is too short — only a couple of inches of steel actually resting on the wall — the pressure on the brick and mortar below it is intense and concentrated. Over time the mortar can crush, the brick at the corner can crack or spall, and the end of the lintel can begin to settle downward into the wall.

And when one end settles, the whole span suffers. The lintel effectively becomes a little longer and a little less supported, the middle can dip further, and the cracks that result often start exactly where you would predict: at the corners of the opening, near the troubled bearing, stepping up through the mortar joints.

Good bearing is also why the solid wall beside your garage door matters so much. That pier of brick is not decoration. It is a load post made of masonry, receiving the lintel's burden and the arching wall's diagonal push and delivering both down to the slab. Anything that weakens that pier — a vehicle strike, deteriorated mortar, water damage — weakens the whole system, even if the steel is sound. An honest evaluation always includes the bearings. Reinforcing steel while ignoring a crushed bearing is like putting a new beam on a crumbling post.

Deflection: The Dip You Can Measure

Engineers and masons use the word deflection for something you already understand: the amount a horizontal support bends downward under load. Every lintel deflects a little. Steel is elastic; load it and it flexes, unload it and it springs back. A small amount of deflection is normal, expected, and harmless.

The problem is proportion. Brick is brittle. It has almost no ability to stretch or bend along with the steel beneath it. So the entire relationship between a lintel and its wall comes down to keeping deflection small enough that the brick never notices. On short spans, that is easy. On a sixteen-foot garage span, it is genuinely hard, for a reason worth understanding.

Deflection grows dramatically with length. All else being equal, if you double the span, the dip in the middle does not double — it multiplies many times over. This is the mathematical version of the long board from Chapter 1. It means a lintel section that performs beautifully over a six-foot window can be hopelessly flexible over a sixteen-foot garage, even carrying a similar weight per foot. Wide spans demand disproportionately stiffer steel: a deeper angle, a thicker angle, or a properly designed built-up support. When a builder installs over a double garage the same light angle that worked fine over the windows, the house may stand quietly for years — the brick's arching action covers a multitude of sins — but the margin is thin, and time, rust, and load changes spend that margin.

You can often see deflection once you know how to look. Crouch in the driveway and sight along the bottom of the first course of brick above the door. A healthy line runs straight. A deflecting lintel shows a shallow smile — ends high, middle low. The giveaway is often the row of bricks laid standing upright right above the lintel, called the soldier course. When the support beneath them dips, they fan or settle unevenly, joints open wider at the middle, and the once-crisp line develops a visible belly. That smile is your house speaking in a calm voice. Listen early, because deflection caught early is often correctable with reinforcement, while deflection ignored eventually delivers its load to the brick as cracks.

The Extra Load of a Room Above

Everything so far gets more serious when there is a second story over the garage — and in Texas suburbs, there very often is. The bonus room, the game room, the extra bedroom and bath: builders love putting living space over the garage because the footprint is already there.

That room changes the lintel's life in two ways. First, the

brick above the opening is usually taller — a full second story of masonry instead of a short band or a gable. More brick above the triangle means the arching action has to organize a heavier wall, and any brick within the load triangle weighs exactly what it weighs. A taller wall is also less forgiving of movement; a small rotation or settlement at the base of a tall panel produces a wider, more visible crack at the top.

Second, floor and roof loads enter the picture. Depending on how the house was framed, floor joists for the room above may bear on the wall over the garage, or roof structure may deliver its load down through that same wall. Add what homeowners do over the decades — a bathroom remodel with a heavy tub and tile, bookshelves, home gyms — and the wide opening below is carrying a life it may not have been sized for.

Hypothetical example: picture a home built in the late 1990s with a game room over the garage. Twenty years later the owners convert it into a primary suite, adding a tiled shower and a large soaking tub near the outer wall. Nothing about the garage front changes visibly at first. But the added dead weight — tile, fixtures, water — now travels down through the wall to the same lintel and the same two bearings, every hour of every day. A lintel that had spent twenty years just barely keeping up may begin, within a season or two, to show a fresh center crack and a measurable new dip. This example is hypothetical and labeled as such — no real customer is described — but the pattern it illustrates is one every experienced mason has seen versions of many times.

The lesson is that the room and the opening are one system. Any plan that adds significant weight above a wide span deserves a conversation first — with a qualified mason about the masonry and, where framing loads are in question, with a structural engineer you hire to evaluate the structure. Certainty before the fact is always cheaper than repairs after it.

The Teamwork, Summarized

A garage lintel carries its load as part of a team. The steel spans the gap and carries the triangle of brick directly above it. The wall arches much of the remaining weight out to the piers at the sides. The bearings deliver everything into those piers, and the piers deliver it to the ground. Keep the steel straight and sound, the mortar whole, the bearings solid, and water away from the steel — and the system can serve quietly for the life of the house. Break any one member and the others work harder, in ways that become visible. That evidence — rust, sag, and cracks — is the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Rust, Sag, and the Cracks That Tell the Truth

Rust Is Not a Stain — It Is a Force

Homeowners usually meet a failing garage lintel first as a color. A brown-orange blush bleeding down from the bottom course of brick. A streak on the steel where the door's top trim reveals it. Most people file it under cosmetics: the house is aging, steel gets rusty, paint it and move on.

I want to change how you see that color, because rust on a lintel is not an appearance problem. It is a mechanical force inside your wall.

Here is what rust actually is. When steel corrodes, the iron in it combines with oxygen and water to form iron oxide — rust — and that rust occupies significantly more space than the solid steel it came from. Depending on conditions, the corrosion product can swell to several times the volume of the metal consumed. On a fence or a patio chair, that swelling does not matter; the rust just flakes and falls. But a garage lintel is not out in the open. It is embedded in a wall, its horizontal leg sandwiched under the full weight of the brickwork, its vertical leg tight against the back of the first courses of brick.

When rust forms in a confined space like that, it pushes. It pushes up against the brick above it and out against the brick in front of it, with slow, patient, enormous force. Masons call the result rust jacking. Brick gets lifted a hair. Mortar joints get wedged open. A crack appears directly above the lintel, running horizontally along the bed joint, or the bottom course of brick begins to tilt and bulge outward at the face of the wall. I have seen lintels whose rust scale grew so thick that the steel angle effectively became a wedge, prying the wall apart from inside while the homeowner watched the crack widen and assumed the house was settling.

This is why the response to lintel rust is never just paint. Paint over active corrosion seals the evidence, not the problem, and the swelling continues unseen. The honest questions are: how much sound steel is left, how far along the span the corrosion runs, and whether expansion has already damaged the brick and bearings. Surface rust, caught early, may be cleanable and coatable by a professional as part of a proper repair. Deep, flaking, layered corrosion — rust coming off in scales, steel visibly thinner or pitted — means the member has lost strength where it can least afford to, and replacement enters the conversation. Do not attempt lintel replacement as a do-it-yourself project. The wall above that

steel is real weight, and supporting it safely requires temporary shoring, experience, and a plan. That is professional work, full stop.

The Sagging Soldier Course

After rust, the second witness is sag — and the clearest place to read it is the soldier course, the row of bricks often stood upright like little soldiers directly above the lintel.

Because those bricks stand tall on a narrow base, they register movement honestly. When the lintel beneath them deflects, the soldiers in the middle settle lower than those at the ends. From the driveway, sight along the top of the course: a healthy course tops out straight. A sagging one dips in the center. Look also at the joints between the soldiers. In a sound wall they are even and tight. Over a deflecting lintel, joints at mid-span often open at the top or the bricks lean outward, like books slumping on a shelf whose middle has given way.

Other sag evidence: the gap between the top of the garage door and the brick above it. If that gap is noticeably narrower in the middle than at the ends, something above the door has come down and deserves a professional look. A door that begins binding or sitting unevenly can sometimes be a clue, though doors have their own mechanical issues too, so treat it as a clue, not a verdict.

Measure, do not guess. Take straight-on photos of the garage front from the same spot, in similar light, two or three times a year, and compare the soldier course and crack pattern over time. Sag that is old and finished looks identical in every photo. Sag that is progressing changes — and change over time is the single most important distinction in this chapter.

Stepped Cracks From the Corners

Now the cracks — beginning with the most common garage pattern of all, the stepped crack that climbs from a top corner of the opening.

It is called stepped because it does not slice straight through bricks, at least at first. It follows the mortar joints, stepping up and over, up and over, like a staircase drawn on the wall, usually at roughly forty-five degrees from the corner of the opening into the field of the wall. Remember the load paths from Chapter 2: the corner of a wide opening is where arching loads arrive, where bearings deliver their weight, and where stress concentrates. A stepped crack at the garage corner is the wall relieving exactly that concentrated stress along its weakest path, which is the mortar.

A small, tight stepped crack unchanged for years is frequently old history — early settlement, early deflection that stabilized, a story that finished long ago. Many are honest candidates for proper mortar repair and monitoring rather than major work. The crack that should raise your heart rate is fresh, wide, or growing: mortar freshly fallen out, edges sharp, one side sitting proud of the other, or a matching crack inside the garage at the same location. A crack visible on both faces is telling you the movement goes through the wall, not just across its surface.

Composite example: consider a homeowner who notices a stepped crack above the left corner of the garage, wide enough to slip a credit card into, with fresh mortar crumbs on the driveway beneath it that keep reappearing after sweeping. The same crack shows inside the garage, and last year's listing photos show no crack at all. Every element — width, fresh debris, through-wall match, recent appearance — points the same direction: this crack is active and merits prompt professional evaluation. This is a composite example, drawn from patterns rather than any real customer, labeled as such so you can use the pattern without mistaking it for a testimonial.

The Center Crack and the Horizontal Crack

Two other patterns complete the garage lintel alphabet.

The vertical center crack appears in the brickwork near the middle of the span, often starting just above the lintel and climbing a few courses, sometimes longer. The middle of the span is where deflection is greatest, so a center crack is frequently the wall's direct report on a lintel that is bending: the brick above mid-span, unable to follow the steel's dip, splits at its weakest vertical path. A center crack paired with a visible smile in the soldier course is one of the most reliable two-clue combinations in residential masonry. Each confirms the other.

The horizontal crack runs along a mortar bed joint, most tellingly the joint right at or just above the lintel line. Horizontal cracks at the lintel line are the signature of rust jacking described earlier — the swelling steel wedging the joint open from within. Run your eye along that first joint above the door from end to end. A joint that is opening, bulging, or shedding its mortar unevenly, especially with rust staining nearby, is pointing down at the steel and saying: the problem is me, and I am still growing. Horizontal cracks higher in the wall above a second story deserve equal respect and a professional's eyes, since other forces can produce them, but at the lintel line the diagnosis is rarely a mystery.

Stable or Active: The Only Question That Matters

Every homeowner who finds a crack asks the same question: is this bad? The more useful question is: is this moving?

A stable crack is a finished event. The house moved once — during early settlement, during a drought year, during the lintel's first seasons of load — the mortar relieved the stress, and then everything stopped. Stable cracks tend to look old: edges weathered and dirty, paint bridging them unbroken if the wall has been painted since, spider webs undisturbed, width the same in summer photos and winter photos. Many stable cracks can simply be properly repointed — the damaged mortar removed and replaced by a mason so water stays out — and then watched.

An active crack is an unfinished event. The force behind it is still at work: rust still swelling, a lintel still deflecting, soil still cycling a corner of the house with the seasons. Active cracks look young: clean, sharp edges; fresh mortar dust; paint film split along the crack; width that changes between seasons — a classic Texas pattern is a crack that opens in the dry heat of late summer as clay soils shrink, and closes partway after rains return. Seasonal breathing is still activity, and valuable information, because it tells the person evaluating your house which force is likely driving the movement.

You can gather this evidence safely and for free. Date your photographs. For a crack you are watching, a pencil mark across the crack with the date beside it on painter's tape gives you a telltale: if the crack moves, the halves of your mark will misalign. Keep notes. A homeowner who can say "this crack appeared last spring, it has widened since August, and here are dated photos" gets a faster, more honest evaluation than one working from memory.

And a final word of proportion. Most garage lintel problems, caught at the stage this chapter describes, are repairable — reinforcement, rust treatment, bearing repair, repointing, or, where the steel is spent, a planned replacement done under proper shoring by people who do it for a living. The expensive outcomes belong to cracks that were painted over and ignored for a decade while water and rust worked unseen. Your garage front is talking. Now you know how to listen.

Chapter 4: The Garage Door Is Not Structure

The Most Common Misunderstanding at the

Garage

Stand in almost any Texas driveway and look at a garage, and the biggest, most obvious thing you see is the door. It is wide, it moves, it makes noise, and it is the part you use every single day. It is natural to assume that when something feels wrong at the garage opening — a door that sticks, a gap that was not there last spring, a frame that looks crooked — the door itself must be the problem, or the door must be holding something up.

It is not. In a typical brick-veneer home, the garage door is not structure. It does not carry the brick above it. It does not carry the roof. It does not hold the opening in shape. The door hangs in an opening, travels on tracks, and is balanced by springs and a motor, but the heavy work above the opening is done by a completely different piece of hardware that most homeowners never see clearly: the steel lintel.

With 50 years of hands-on field experience looking at garages across Texas, the pattern is consistent. The door is a moving panel in a frame. The lintel is a horizontal steel support set into the masonry above the opening. The brick rests on the lintel. The lintel rests at its ends on the masonry and framing at either side. When the lintel stays straight and sound, the brick course above the garage stays level and the door opening stays square. When the lintel bends, rusts, or loses support at an end, the opening stops being square — and the door, faithfully trying to travel in an opening that is no longer the shape it was built for, is often the first thing to complain.

What the Door, Frame, and Tracks Actually Do

A sectional garage door is a series of hinged panels. Rollers at the edges ride in vertical and horizontal tracks fastened to the wood framing inside the opening. Springs — either torsion springs on a shaft above the door or extension springs along the tracks — counterbalance the weight so the motor, or your arm, does not have to lift the full load. Weatherstripping and the wood or vinyl trim around the outside edge seal the gap against wind and pests, but that trim is cosmetic and sealing work, not load-carrying work.

The frame you see from the street deserves special attention because it misleads so many people. The painted wood jambs and the brick mold trim around a garage opening can warp, rot at the bottom, pull loose from their fasteners, or get knocked out of plumb by a bumper or a ladder. A racked frame — a frame where one side has leaned, twisted, or dropped so the opening is a parallelogram instead of a rectangle — will make a door look crooked and work crooked even when the masonry and lintel above are perfectly sound.

How Lintel Sag Makes a Door Bind

When a lintel sags, it usually sags most near the middle of the span. A garage opening is the widest opening in most brick homes — a double garage may span sixteen feet or more — which makes its lintel the longest and the hardest-working in the house. As the center drops, even by a small amount, several things happen at once.

First, the brick above follows it down. Mortar joints open in a stepped or horizontal pattern, and the course of brick directly over the opening develops a visible belly. Second, the head of the opening — the top edge where the door meets the frame — drops in the middle. The door's top panel now rubs, the weather seal compresses unevenly, tight in the center and loose at the corners, and daylight may show at the upper corners while the center scrapes. Third, the sides of the opening are pulled slightly inward or twisted as the load redistributes, which narrows clearances the rollers need.

The homeowner's experience of all this is simple and frustrating: the door binds. It shudders on the way up. It reverses halfway down for no apparent reason. It groans, pops, or needs a second press of the button. The opener strains and its safety sensors, sensing resistance, stop the travel the way they are designed to do when a child or a car is in the way. It is very easy to conclude the opener is failing. Sometimes it is. But when binding follows a slow, months-long progression, and especially when it arrives together with new cracks in the brick above the door, the door is often the messenger, not the culprit.

Composite example: A homeowner notices in March that the door needs a little help starting upward on cold mornings. By June the top panel is scraping paint off the header. By September there is a stepped crack running up from the upper right corner of the opening. Each symptom alone could be a door issue. Together, in that slow sequence, they describe an opening that is changing shape — and that points above the door, not at it.

How Door Hardware Problems Behave Differently

True door and hardware problems have their own signatures, and they are usually sharper, more sudden, and more mechanical than lintel trouble.

A broken or weakened spring makes the door suddenly heavy. It may slam down, refuse to stay up when lifted halfway by hand with the opener disconnected, or rise crooked because one side is doing more lifting than the other. A frayed or slipped cable can let one corner drop. A bent track, a worn

roller with a flat spot, or a roller that has popped out of its track produces a specific clunk or grind at the same point in every travel cycle — the same height, the same noise, every time. A failing opener may hum without moving, move in only one direction, lose its remote range, or stop at random points that change from cycle to cycle because the fault is electrical or in its limit settings.

Notice the difference in timing. Hardware tends to fail as an event: a spring snaps with a bang, a roller breaks, a track gets bent by an impact. Lintel and masonry movement tends to fail as a trend: a crack that lengthens a little each season, a gap that grows, a scrape that gets worse month by month. Asking yourself, "Did this start suddenly, or has it been creeping?" answers half the diagnostic question before you touch a tool.

Simple Checks That Separate the Two

You do not need special instruments for a first separation, and you should stay safely on the ground for all of it. Do not disconnect springs, do not loosen track hardware under tension, and do not attempt to lift a door that feels dead heavy — spring work is dangerous and belongs to door professionals.

Start by watching one full open-and-close cycle from inside the garage, standing clear of the travel path. Note exactly where any binding, scraping, or reversal happens. The same spot every time suggests a track, roller, or panel issue at that height. Binding concentrated at the very top, especially in the middle of the top panel, suggests the head of the opening has dropped.

Next, with the door closed, step outside and look at the reveal — the gap between the door and the frame — on both sides and across the top. A healthy opening shows a fairly even reveal all the way around. A reveal that is wide at one top corner and pinched at the other suggests a racked opening. A top reveal pinched in the center suggests sag.

Then lift your eyes past the door entirely. Sight along the first course of brick above the opening. Is it straight, or does it belly down in the middle? Look for stepped cracks at the corners, a horizontal crack in the mortar joint directly above the lintel line, and rust staining bleeding down the brick or the trim. Those are masonry and lintel signs, and no door adjustment fixes them.

Hypothetical example: Two neighbors both have doors that scrape. The first has a straight brick course above, no cracks, a shiny rub mark halfway up one track, and a roller that wobbles in your fingers. That is a door call. The second has a

bellying brick course, corner cracks, rust stains, and a top reveal pinched in the middle. That is a masonry call first — a door company can adjust the door afterward, once the opening is sound.

Getting the Right Help in the Right Order

When the signs point to the opening rather than the door, have the masonry and lintel evaluated before spending on a new door or opener. A new door installed into a sagging opening will bind just like the old one, and you will have paid for the lesson twice. When the signs point to hardware, a qualified door technician is the right and only call — and if that technician tells you the opening itself has moved, take that seriously; good door professionals see the difference daily and have no reason to invent it.

In the field, systems like LintelLOCK, his field-developed system for supporting and securing a failing garage lintel, exist precisely because the problem sits above the door, in the steel and masonry — not in the panels, tracks, or motor. Whatever repair path an evaluation recommends, the order of operations stays the same: structure and support first, door adjustment second, cosmetics last. A door that travels smoothly in a square, well-supported opening is the expected result of that order — and a door that still binds after the opening is made sound has told you, honestly, that now it really is a door problem.

Chapter 5: Water Above the Garage

The Enemy You Cannot See Working

Steel lintels rarely fail all at once, and they rarely fail dry. Ask what started the trouble on most sagging garage lintels and, traced back far enough, the answer is usually water — not a flood, not a burst pipe, but ordinary rain, handled slightly wrong, arriving in the wrong place a few hundred times. A single storm does the lintel no meaningful harm. Ten years of storms, each one leaving a little moisture sitting against bare or thinly painted steel hidden inside a brick wall, will rust that steel, swell it, crack the mortar around it, and bend it under a load it once carried easily.

The frustrating part is that almost all of this water arrives from above the garage, through details most homeowners never look at: the flashing over the lintel, the weep holes in the first course of brick, the gutter at the eave, and the slope of the roof and driveway. None of these parts is complicated. Each one either moves water safely out and away from the

wall, or it quietly delivers water into the wall, where the lintel lives. This chapter walks through each path in turn, so you can see your own garage the way water sees it.

Flashing: The Hidden Shelf That Sends Water Out

Brick veneer is not waterproof, and it was never meant to be. Rain strikes the wall, some of it soaks into the brick and mortar, and wind can drive it through hairline openings. Behind the brick there is a narrow air space, and at the bottom of that space — and above openings like the garage — there should be flashing: a sheet of metal, membrane, or durable material laid to catch water that got into the wall and direct it back outside.

Over a garage lintel, flashing matters enormously. Water running down inside the wall reaches the top of the opening, lands on the flashing, travels outward, and exits through the weep holes. Without sound flashing, or with flashing that is torn, lapped the wrong way, blocked by mortar droppings, or simply absent — a real finding in some homes — that same water lands directly on the top flange of the steel lintel and sits there. The lintel becomes a long, hidden trough holding moisture against itself after every rain.

Weep Holes: Small Openings Doing Essential Work

In the first course of brick above a lintel, and along the base of brick walls, you should find small vertical gaps in the mortar joints at regular intervals. These are weep holes, and they are the exit doors for the water the flashing collects. They also let the space behind the brick breathe and dry between rains.

Weep holes fail in humble ways. They get filled with caulk or mortar by a well-meaning painter who thought they were defects. They get blocked by mulch, soil, or a raised driveway pour at the base of a wall. Insects nest in them. Mortar droppings from construction partially choke them from behind. A weep hole that is plugged is worse than a cosmetic flaw — it converts the flashing system into a dam. Water that should have exited in an hour instead ponds inside the wall, exactly where the ends and top of the lintel sit.

Walk your garage front and actually count them. Note which weeps above the door are open — you should be able to see a clean, dark slot, sometimes with a wick or a screened insert — and which are smeared shut. Never seal a weep hole, and politely stop anyone who proposes to. Clearing a blocked weep from the outside, gently, without driving debris deeper,

is reasonable homeowner maintenance. Rebuilding a failed flashing system is not; that is masonry work, and it is one of the most valuable repairs a garage front can receive because it stops the rust cycle at its source.

Gutters, Roofs, and Runoff Over the Garage Face

Now look up. On many Texas homes the garage sits under a broad roof slope, a valley, or a second-story wall, and a surprising volume of roof water passes over or beside the garage face. Where that water goes is decided by gutters, downspouts, diverter flashing, and the shape of the roof itself — and small failures up there deliver large amounts of water down the brick over the garage.

A gutter that overflows in a hard rain sheets water directly down the wall. You can often read the evidence on a dry day: a vertical streak of darker brick, algae tinting, or washed-out mortar centered below a gutter joint, a valley outlet, or a spot where a downspout has come loose. A missing or undersized downspout concentrates a whole roof section's runoff at one corner of the garage — frequently the same corner where stepped cracks later appear, because that corner's lintel end and footing are being kept the wettest. Kick-out flashing, the small bent piece meant to throw water from a roof edge into the gutter instead of behind the wall, is another frequent absence where a roof dies into a wall above the garage.

Watch one hard rain, once, and observe: Where does water leave the roof? Does any of it run down the garage brick? Does the gutter spill? That single observation, written down, gives any professional you call a running start.

Sealant: Useful, Temporary, and Badly Overtrusted

Caulk and sealant have a legitimate job at a garage front: sealing the joint where trim meets brick, where the lintel's exposed edge meets masonry, and around penetrations. Flexible sealant accommodates small movement and sheds surface water at those joints. What sealant cannot do is substitute for flashing, replace weep holes, or stop water that is already inside a wall. Sealed from the outside, trapped water simply stays trapped longer — and a beautifully caulked garage front can hide an actively rusting lintel better than neglect does.

Sealant also has a service life. Texas sun and heat are hard on it. Within a handful of years most exterior sealant shrinks, hardens, splits, or pulls away from one side of the joint, and every one of those failures is an entry point located precisely

at the joint you were relying on. Treat sealant as a consumable, like paint: inspect it each season, renew it when it has split or detached, and cut out failed material rather than piling new beads over old. When you renew sealant at the lintel line, keep it to the joint itself, keep weep holes fully open, and use a quality exterior product suited to masonry and metal. And hold realistic expectations — fresh caulk on a wall with failed flashing buys appearance, not dryness.

Hypothetical example: A homeowner reseals every joint over the garage three years in a row, and each spring the paint on the lintel blisters again and a rust streak returns below the same joint. The sealant is not defective. It is being asked to hold back water arriving from inside the wall, which no surface bead can do. The fix lives behind the brick, not in another tube.

Driveway and Grade: Water at the Bottom of the Wall

Water also reaches the garage steel from below and from the sides, and the driveway controls much of it. A driveway that has settled toward the house, or was poured sloping toward the garage, sends every rain sheeting against the base of the wall and the door seal, where it splashes onto the lower brick, the jambs, and the lintel ends at the corners of the opening. Standing water against the garage after a rain — easy to spot and easy to photograph — is a grading failure worth correcting for the whole wall's sake, not just the lintel's.

The Rust Cycle, Step by Step

Put the paths together and the cycle explains itself. Water enters the wall through brick, mortar, failed sealant, or an overflowing gutter line. Flashing that is failed or weeps that are blocked let it rest against the lintel instead of leaving. The steel's paint or coating, thin at edges and scratched from installation, gives way at points. Rust forms — and rust occupies more volume than the steel it came from.

That swelling is the destructive step most people miss. Expanding rust inside a confined mortar joint acts like a slow wedge. It lifts the brick above, cracks the mortar, and opens new paths that admit more water in the next rain. The lintel, losing sound steel to corrosion and pushed by its own rust, begins to deflect under the brick load. Deflection opens the cracks further. More water enters. Each trip around the cycle is a little faster than the last, which is why lintel trouble so often seems to go from "minor crack I have watched for years" to "this got bad quickly." It was never standing still; it was compounding quietly, in the wet dark, where nobody looks.

Breaking the cycle means breaking it at the water step first or alongside any steel repair. Supporting or replacing steel while leaving the wall's water delivery untouched simply starts the clock again on new material. This is also why, when water signs are advanced, a professional evaluation may recommend opening a small section of the wall to see the steel and flashing directly, and why you may be advised to consult a structural engineer for questions about load and support beyond the masonry itself. Sound sequence, as with the door: stop the water, secure the support, then restore the surface. Do those in that order at the garage, and the repair has a reason to last.

Chapter 6: The Homeowner Inspection

A Small Habit That Catches Big Problems Early

You do not need to be a mason to watch a garage lintel well. You need a habit: a slow walk around the garage front twice a year, the same route, the same checks, with a few measurements and photographs taken the same way each time. Lintel trouble develops slowly enough that a homeowner paying attention will see it while it is still a modest repair, and the record kept — dated photos, a few numbers, a short log — turns the first conversation with any professional from guesswork into something precise.

In Texas, a good pairing is early spring, before the heaviest rains, and late fall, after summer heat has worked on sealant and paint. Add a look after a major storm, roof or gutter work, or a driveway pour. Bring the same kit each time: phone for dated photographs, tape measure, six-foot straightedge or taut string line with two equal blocks, flashlight, pencil and log, and a wooden craft stick for gently checking weep holes.

The Twice-a-Year Walkaround, Step by Step

Begin from across the street, far enough back to take in the whole garage front. This distant look is where sag is easiest to see, because your eye compares the brick course above the garage against the roof line and the courses on either side. Does the line over the door run straight, or does it belly? Does one corner look lower? Photograph this view first, straight on — it is the most useful photograph in the set.

Move to each corner in turn. At the upper corners of the opening, look for stepped cracks following the mortar joints up and away from the corner, horizontal cracks opening at the

lintel line, and diagonal cracking in the brick itself. At the lower corners and jamb bases, look for rot in the wood, rust at the lintel ends where they bear, staining running down from above, and any place where soil, mulch, or driveway concrete is covering the weep line or trapping water against the wall.

Walk the wall above the door at arm's length. Count and check the weep holes in the course above the lintel: open, or smeared shut? Run your eye along every sealant joint: intact and adhered, or split, shrunken, and pulling away? Look at the exposed edge of the lintel itself — the horizontal steel face you can see under the first course of brick. Sound paint, surface rust at a scratch, or blistering, flaking, and lamination that comes away in scales? With the flashlight at a low angle, look for rust staining on the brick or trim below that edge, and note damp staining that persists days after rain.

Measuring Sag With a String Line

A lintel either runs straight or it does not, and a string line turns that judgment from an impression into a number you can compare across years. The method is simple. You need a taut line — mason's line or any thin, non-stretch cord — long enough to span the garage opening, plus two small blocks of exactly equal thickness, such as two matching offcuts of wood.

Hold or tape one block at each end of the brick course directly above the lintel, at the same course, close to the corners of the opening, and stretch the line taut between the outer faces of the blocks so the line stands off the wall by the thickness of the blocks. The blocks create a known, even offset at the ends, where the lintel bears on sound support and deflection is least. Now, with the tape measure, measure the distance from the line to the face of the brick or to the lintel edge at several points across the span — at each quarter point and at the center. On a straight course, those measurements will match the block thickness closely all the way across. Where the wall has bellied or the lintel has sagged, the middle measurements will come in smaller, because the wall has moved out toward the line, or your sighted line along the lintel edge will show the gap pattern reversed depending on your setup — what matters is the change across the span and across time, measured and written the same way each inspection.

Record the actual numbers, not just "looked fine" — center measurement, quarter measurements, and the date. A center that reads a quarter inch differently from the ends deserves watching and a professional opinion if cracks accompany it. A center measurement that changes between inspections, even by a small amount, is movement in progress, and movement in progress outranks any single reading. A six-foot straightedge

held against the lintel edge and the course above serves the same purpose on a shorter garage or as a quick check between full string-line measurements: rock it gently, look for gaps under its middle or ends, and note the largest gap you can measure.

Photographs and Crack Monitoring That Actually Work

Photographs only help if they can be compared, so take them like records, not snapshots. Stand in the same two or three marked spots each time — a particular driveway seam or sidewalk joint makes a fine tripod marker. Take the straight-on full-front view, one angled view from each corner, and close views of the lintel edge, each corner, the weeps, and any crack. Keep the date accurate on your phone, and back the set up somewhere they will survive a phone change. In close views, lay a coin or the tape measure in the frame for scale.

For any crack worth watching, monitor it directly. Across the crack, make two small pencil or fine-marker reference marks — one on each side, aligned with each other — and date a small piece of painter's tape placed beside, not over, the crack. At each inspection, measure the distance between your marks with the tape, photograph the crack with scale in frame, and write the measurement down. If a crack is opening, the distance grows and the photograph shows the marks separating; if it is stable seasonal hairline movement, the numbers will wander very slightly and return. Do not fill a crack you are monitoring — filler destroys your evidence and, if the wall is moving, simply cracks again along the same line. Do not monitor a crack that is changing quickly, widening visibly between monthly checks, or accompanied by a door that has newly begun to bind hard: that combination has left monitoring territory and belongs in the red-flag list below.

Probing Safely — and Respecting the Limits

The limits matter more than the techniques. Work from the ground. If you use a ladder for a closer look at a gutter or the top trim, it must be a sound ladder on level ground, set at a proper angle, with three points of contact maintained — and if any of that cannot be managed easily, stay down; every essential lintel check in this chapter can be done from the ground, and the gutter question can wait for a professional visit. Never probe inside the wall cavity beyond the face of a weep hole. Never pry at brick or mortar. Never test the door by standing in its travel path, and never touch springs, cables, or track hardware under tension. Never get on the roof for this inspection. A homeowner inspection that ends with an injury has failed at its only job, which is keeping a small problem small.

Red Flags That Mean Call Now

Most findings from this walkaround earn a note in the log and a watch. The following earn a prompt call to a qualified masonry professional — not at the next season's inspection, but now:

A new stepped or diagonal crack at either upper corner of the garage opening that is visibly wider than a hairline, or any crack you can fit the edge of a credit card into. A horizontal crack opening along the mortar joint directly above the lintel. A brick course above the door that visibly bellies, or a string-line center measurement that has changed since your last inspection. Flaking, layered rust on the lintel edge, rust staining that returns quickly after cleaning, or a section of lintel edge that has visibly thinned or bent. A door that has newly begun to bind at the top center, scrape the header, or reverse in travel alongside any of the masonry signs above. Brick that sounds hollow, bulges outward, or has displaced — individual bricks pushed out of plane. Water actively entering the wall or garage in rain, a gutter discharging down the garage face, or standing water against the wall that grading has not corrected. Any rapid change: a crack lengthening between monthly checks, a gap growing, a new noise with a new crack together.

When you call, say what your log shows. If the question involves the load the lintel carries, you may be advised to consult a structural engineer — normal, prudent practice that pairs with the hands-on masonry evaluation. Drawing on 50 years of hands-on field experience, every serious failure spent a long season as a small, visible finding first.

A Simple Written Log, Described

Keep the log on paper in the house or in a single notes file on your phone — the format matters far less than keeping it every time. Head each entry with the date and a one-word weather note, such as "dry, three days after rain." Then record, in order: the straight-on observation from across the street; each corner, left and right, upper and lower; the weep holes as a count, open versus blocked; sealant condition in a few words; lintel edge condition; the string-line or straightedge measurements, as actual numbers with the center reading called out; door operation and reveal; gutter, roof edge, and driveway drainage notes; crack measurements for any crack under monitoring, with the distance between your reference marks; and finally a one-line verdict — "no change," "watch," or "call" — with any action you took, such as clearing a weep or renewing a sealant joint, noted beside it.

Chapter 7: The Honest Ladder of Repair Options

Every garage lintel problem sits somewhere on a ladder. At the bottom are the quick cosmetic touches. At the top is a full, permanent replacement. In between are patches and partial fixes that have their place — but only when they match the real condition of the steel underneath.

The trouble is not that the lower rungs exist. The trouble is when a homeowner is sold a bottom-rung fix for a top-rung problem, without being told the difference. This chapter walks the whole ladder, rung by rung, so you can tell what you are actually buying, what it will hide, what it will fix, and how long you should honestly expect it to last.

Rung One: Paint and Caulk — The Cosmetic Touch

The simplest treatment for a rusty, ugly lintel is to scrape off the loose rust, prime it, paint it to match the trim, and run a fresh bead of caulk along the joints. Done neatly, it can make a garage opening look clean and cared for again in a single afternoon.

There is nothing wrong with paint and caulk when the steel itself is still sound. A lintel that has surface rust only — no flaking, no swelling, no cracks in the brick above, no sag — is a good candidate. In that case, paint is maintenance, the same as painting a door frame. It slows the weather down and keeps a healthy piece of steel healthy longer.

But paint and caulk have a hard limit: they change how a lintel looks, not how it carries weight. Paint cannot restore steel that has already rusted away. Caulk cannot stop rust that is already growing underneath the surface. Sealed in under a fresh coat, active rust keeps expanding in the dark, and it often expands faster because moisture gets trapped behind the new seal.

Here is the warning sign to remember. If a lintel is already swelling, pushing the brick up, or cracking the mortar joints above the garage door, paint and caulk are not a repair at all. They are a cover. The cracks will come back, usually within a season or two, and when they do, the steel underneath will be worse than it was the day it was painted.

Ask one plain question of anyone who proposes this rung: "Is the steel still full thickness, or has it lost metal?" If they have not actually checked — sounded the steel, looked at the ends where rust starts, checked for swelling — they cannot honestly answer, and you should not accept the bid until

someone does.

Rung Two: Patch Repairs — Grinding, Plating, and Spot Work

The next rung up is the patch repair. This can mean grinding out rust and treating the steel, welding or bolting a patch plate over a damaged section, repointing a few cracked mortar joints, and replacing a handful of broken brick. It is real work, done with real tools, and it costs more than paint because it is more than paint.

A patch can be the right answer in a narrow set of cases. If the damage is truly local — one end of the lintel rusted where a downspout has poured on it for years, while the rest of the steel is clean and full — a well-done patch at that end, plus fixing the water source, can add useful years. If a single brick cracked from a bump or a freeze while everything around it is solid, replacing that brick and repointing the joint is honest, proportionate work.

The limits show up when the damage is not local. Rust on a garage lintel rarely stays in one polite spot. The same water, the same age, and the same lack of flashing that damaged one end usually worked on the whole length, even if only one end shows it yet. Patching the visible spot leaves the invisible spots to keep growing. A year or two later, a new crack opens six inches over, and the homeowner pays again — this time wondering why the "repair" did not hold.

Composite example: A homeowner has a patch plate welded over a rusted section at the left end of the lintel and the cracked joints above it repointed. The work looks solid. Eighteen months later, the right end — never opened up, never inspected — swells with rust and lifts the brick there. The second repair costs nearly as much as the first, and a full replacement, which would have cost less than the two patches combined, is still ahead of them.

Before you approve a patch, ask where else the steel was checked. A trustworthy answer names several points along the length. A worrying answer talks only about the spot you pointed at.

Rung Three: Partial Fixes — Supporting Without Replacing

Higher on the ladder are partial fixes that add support without removing the failed steel. This can include installing supplemental angle iron alongside or beneath the existing lintel, adding support brackets, or rebuilding a section of the brickwork above while leaving most of the original lintel in

place.

These approaches sound strong, and sometimes they are a reasonable middle path — for example, when an opening was built with a lintel that was simply too light for a wide double garage door, and the steel, while undersized, is not yet rusted through. Adding proper support can correct the original shortfall.

But a partial fix built around rusted steel carries the original problem inside it like a splinter. The old lintel is still in the wall, still rusting, still swelling. New support may carry the load better, yet the expanding rust can still push, crack, and stain the masonry around it. The homeowner has paid a substantial price — partial fixes are not cheap — and still owns the ticking part of the problem.

This is the rung where honest conversation matters most. A good contractor will tell you plainly: "This will support the brick, but the old steel stays, and here is what that means in five or ten years." A shortcut bid will call the same work "permanent" and change the subject when you ask about the steel left behind.

Rung Four: Full Lintel Replacement — The Top of the Ladder

Full replacement means the failed steel comes out and new steel goes in, with the brick above properly supported the whole time, correct bearing at each end, flashing and weep holes to manage water, and the masonry rebuilt above it. Chapter 8 walks through that sequence step by step.

Replacement is the honest answer when the lintel has lost significant metal, when it is swollen and lifting the wall, when cracks above the opening keep returning after repointing, when the ends have rusted where they sit on the brick at each side, or when the sag is visible to the eye. At that point, every lower rung is money spent delaying this one — and delay usually makes it bigger, because the brick damage grows while the steel fails.

Replacement is not the honest answer for every lintel, and be wary of anyone who says it is. A sound lintel with surface rust needs maintenance, not replacement. The ladder works both ways: it protects you from under-fixing a serious problem and from over-buying for a minor one. What you want is a contractor willing to show you which rung your lintel is actually on, and why.

Questions That Reveal a Shortcut Bid

You do not need 50 years of hands-on field experience to spot

a shortcut. You just need to ask questions a shortcut cannot comfortably answer.

"What did you find when you checked the ends of the lintel?" The ends, where the steel bears on the masonry, are where failure often starts and where it is hardest to see. A real inspection includes them. A guess does not.

"How much metal has the steel lost?" Vague answers like "it's pretty rusty" are a flag. You want plain talk about flaking, thinning, and swelling.

"What happens to the rust you are not removing?" If the plan leaves rusted steel in the wall, the bid should say so and say what that means for the future — in writing.

"How will the brick be supported while you work?" If the answer is a shrug, stop. Supporting the masonry is the heart of a proper job, as the next chapter shows.

"What keeps water off the new work?" Flashing and weeps are not decorations. A bid with no water plan is planning the next failure.

"What will this look like in ten years?" An honest contractor will answer for his own rung of the ladder — including when the honest answer is, "This patch buys you a few years, and then we talk again."

Climb the ladder with your eyes open, and the choice usually makes itself.

Chapter 8: A Permanent Replacement, Step by Step

A proper lintel replacement is not dramatic. It is methodical. Each step prepares for the next, and a homeowner standing in the driveway should be able to follow the logic of the work just by watching. This chapter gives you that sequence — the one you should expect to see on a permanent job — so you can recognize good work while it is happening and ask about a missing step before it gets covered up.

Step One: Protect, Measure, and Plan the Opening

The job starts before anything comes down. The crew protects the driveway, the garage door, and any landscaping in the fall zone. They measure the opening carefully — its width, the height of the masonry above it, and how far the lintel extends past the opening on each side. That last measurement is the

bearing length, and it matters enormously, as you will see below.

Expect photographs. A careful crew documents the existing cracks and condition before touching anything, both to plan the rebuild and so the finished work can be compared honestly with the starting point. If your garage door needs to stay usable during the work, this is when that gets planned, not discovered at quitting time.

Step Two: Shore and Support the Brick Above

This is the step that separates a professional replacement from a demolition gamble. The brick and mortar above your garage opening weigh a great deal, and the failing lintel — weak as it is — may be the only thing holding some of it up. Before that steel moves one inch, the load above it must be carried another way.

Professionals support the masonry with shoring: sturdy temporary supports, set on solid footing, that take the weight of the wall section in a controlled way. Depending on the wall, this can involve props and needles worked through the mortar joints, support frames built to the shape of the opening, or a combination. The details vary with the house, but the principle never does: at no point is the brick above left hanging on hope.

Watch for this step. It takes time, and it is supposed to. A crew that starts cutting and prying at a lintel with nothing supporting the wall above is not being efficient. They are being reckless with your home, and the cracks that result can run far beyond the garage opening.

Hypothetical example: Imagine two crews on the same street. The first spends the opening hour building and checking its supports. The second starts removal immediately and gets the old steel out fast — then spends the afternoon watching a section of brick slump, cracking joints well up the wall. The first crew's hour was not wasted time. It was the cheapest hour of the whole job.

Step Three: Remove the Failed Steel Safely

With the wall supported, the masonry directly around the lintel is opened up in a controlled way. Brick that must come out are removed as whole units where possible, working joint by joint rather than smashing through the face of the wall. Salvageable brick are set aside for the rebuild, especially if they are an older size or color that would be hard to match.

Then the old lintel itself comes out. Rusted steel can be

swollen tight into the wall, so removal is patient work: cutting the steel into manageable sections, easing it free, and keeping the supported masonry undisturbed. This is also the moment of truth for the wall's hidden condition. With the steel out, the bearing areas at each end can finally be seen clearly, and any damaged brick or mortar there can be repaired before the new lintel goes in — not buried under it.

The debris tells a story, too. Flakes and chunks of rust that pour out of the wall are confirmation the replacement was needed, and a good crew will show you what came out of your wall if you ask.

Step Four: Set the New Lintel With Proper Bearing

The new lintel goes in on sound, level bearing at each end. Bearing means the portion of the lintel that rests on the masonry at each side of the opening, and it is what transfers the entire weight of the wall above into the structure on either side. Too little bearing concentrates all that weight on too small an area, and the masonry under the end can crack or crush over time. This is one of the quiet, invisible details that decides whether a replacement lasts.

The new steel is set level, at the right height, and positioned so the brick above will sit on it correctly and the face of the wall will come back flush. It is checked before a single brick is relaid — because once the masonry is rebuilt, this is the one part of the job no one will ever see again. Everything in the next steps depends on this one being right.

The LintelLOCK Approach to a Lasting Set

Over 50 years of hands-on field experience, Travis Nech developed his own approach to the problem this book is about: replacements that failed early because the new lintel was simply laid in place and the wall rebuilt over it, with nothing ensuring the set stayed true and fully supported as the work was completed and cured.

The LintelLOCK system is Travis Nech's field-developed lintel replacement system for locking a replacement lintel into a lasting, properly supported installation. In plain terms, rather than relying on the new steel merely resting where it was placed, the system secures the lintel's position and support as the masonry is rebuilt above it, so the bearing, the level, and the support relationship between steel and brick are held — locked in — through the rebuild and the cure, not just on the morning the steel was set.

Why does that matter to a homeowner? Because the most common quiet failure of replacement work is movement

during the rebuild itself: a lintel nudged slightly off level as brick are laid, bearing that ends up uneven once mortar beds settle, small gaps that leave parts of the wall carrying weight they were not meant to carry. Locking the installation against those small movements is what turns a correct set at 9 a.m. into a correct installation for the life of the wall.

When you talk with any contractor about replacement, LintelLOCK or otherwise, ask the underlying question: "What holds the new lintel exactly where you set it while the wall goes back up and cures?" You should get a concrete, step-by-step answer — not a slogan.

Step Five: Flashing and Weeps — Managing the Water

Before the brick go back, the job addresses the reason the old lintel rusted: water. Flashing — a waterproof barrier layer installed above the new lintel — catches the moisture that naturally works its way through brick and mortar and directs it outward, away from the steel and the wall interior.

Weep holes are the small, deliberate openings left at intervals in the mortar joint just above the lintel. They are the exit doors for that redirected water. They should be open, evenly spaced, and clearly visible when the job is done — not smeared shut with mortar, which is one of the most common and most damaging shortcuts in masonry work. When a crew finishes, crouch down and look for them. If you cannot find the weeps, ask why.

Skipping flashing and blocking weeps does not save a job; it schedules the next one. New steel with no water management is old steel on a delay.

Step Six: Rebuild the Brick Above

With the lintel set, locked in, and flashed, the masonry above is rebuilt — the subject of the whole next chapter. In sequence, this is where the wall becomes a wall again: brick relaid to the original pattern, joints tooled to match, the soldier or rowlock course over the opening restored, and cracked units replaced rather than patched over.

The temporary shoring stays in place through this stage. It comes out only when the new mortar has gained enough strength to carry the wall on the new lintel — on the mortar's schedule, not the crew's.

Step Seven: Cure, Cleanup, and Walk-Through

Fresh mortar needs cure time. Your crew should tell you plainly what that means for using the garage door, washing the wall, or painting anything nearby, and for how long. The site should be left clean: debris hauled off, salvaged materials removed or stacked as agreed, driveway swept, and the door operating freely.

Finally, expect a walk-through. The contractor should point out the new weeps, the bearing work where it can still be described, the rebuilt courses, and the repointed joints — and revisit the "before" photographs so you can see the whole arc of the job. If any part of your home is unusual enough that load questions go beyond masonry experience, a good contractor will say so and may advise hiring a structural engineer for that separate question. That honesty is a strength, not a weakness.

That is the sequence: protect, shore, remove, set with bearing, lock it in, flash it, rebuild, cure, and walk through. If you see those steps, in that order, you are watching a permanent job.

Chapter 9: The Brick Above the Opening

Homeowners often think of lintel replacement as a steel job with a little brickwork around the edges. Experienced masons think of it the other way around: the steel is one component, and the masonry above the opening is the system it serves. The brick over your garage door are not a decorative lid. They are a working part of the wall, and how they are rebuilt decides whether the repair looks right, sheds water right, and lasts.

That is why the masonry rebuild is never an "extra" on a proper lintel job. It is the job, finished.

Why the Brick Above Carry More Than Their Weight

Brick veneer over a garage opening spans from one side to the other, resting on the lintel along its whole length. Laid well, the units and mortar also help each other: the pattern of overlapping brick, bonded into the wall at each side, distributes weight and resists the small movements that Texas heat, cold snaps, and seasonal soil shifts deliver year after year.

When a lintel rusts and sags, that system is disturbed. Joints crack in the familiar stepped pattern. Individual brick crack through their faces. The course directly over the opening —

often laid in a special pattern — may tilt or separate. Simply putting new steel under a disturbed wall and pointing a little mortar at the cracks does not restore the system. The rebuild does.

Soldier and Rowlock Courses: The Row You Notice Most

Look at the brick directly above your garage door. On many Texas homes, that first course over the opening is not laid flat like the rest of the wall. It may be a soldier course — brick standing upright, side by side like soldiers at attention — or a rowlock course, with brick set on their narrow edge, ends facing out. Builders use these patterns because they look finished and because, laid correctly on a sound lintel, they span an opening handsomely.

They are also the most honest course in the wall. A soldier course telegraphs a sagging or swelling lintel faster than any other: the upright units tilt, separate, or step out of line in a way the eye catches immediately. When neighbors say a garage "looks like it's frowning," it is usually this course they are seeing.

On a rebuild, that course comes down with the rest of the disturbed masonry and goes back up true: plumb, level, evenly spaced, and fully bedded on the new lintel. Rebuilding it is fussy, slow work compared with laying flat brick, and it is exactly where a rushed crew is tempted to reuse cracked units or fudge the spacing. Stand and sight along that course when the job is done. It should read as one straight, even line. Your eye is a good tool here — use it.

Repointing After Lintel Work: More Than Filling Cracks

Repointing means removing failed mortar from a joint and packing in fresh mortar, tooled to match the surrounding joints. After lintel work, repointing is needed well beyond the bricks that were actually removed, because the cracking caused by the failing lintel usually reaches higher and wider than the rebuild area itself.

Good repointing is a craft sequence, not a smear. The old, cracked mortar is cut or ground out to a proper depth — shallow surface smears peel off within a year or two. The joint is cleaned out, dampened so the dry old masonry does not suck the water out of the new mortar before it can cure, then filled in layers and tooled at the right moment, when the mortar has firmed enough to compress and seal under the tool.

Tooling matters more than most homeowners realize. The shape of a finished joint — concave, weather-struck, flush — is how the wall sheds water at every horizontal line. A joint tooled to match its neighbors sheds water the same way they do. A flat, sloppy smear holds water against the brick, and in a hard freeze, that held water is what splits brick faces off in thin flakes.

Expect the estimate for a real lintel job to name repointing as its own line of work, with an area described, not buried as "miscellaneous." It is skilled, time-consuming labor, and any bid that treats it as a ten-minute afterthought is telling you how it will be done.

Matching Mortar: Color and Type, Briefly

Two things have to match when new mortar meets old: how it looks, and how it behaves.

Color is the visible half. Mortar color comes from the sand, the cement, and any pigment, and it changes as it cures — fresh mortar almost always dries lighter than it looks wet. An experienced mason works from the existing wall: matching the sand's tone is the big lever, and a small test patch, allowed to dry, tells the truth before a whole wall gets pointed in the wrong shade. Perfect matches on a weathered older wall are not always possible, and an honest mason will show you the test patch and talk about it rather than promise perfection.

Type is the strength half, and it matters just as much. Mortar comes in different strengths, and older, softer brick need a mortar that is not harder than the brick themselves. If the mortar is too hard, the wall's natural small movements — and freezing water — will crack the brick instead of the joint. Mortar joints are meant to be the sacrificial part of the wall: they weather first, they can be repointed, and they protect the units. Hard modern mortar against soft older brick reverses that bargain, and the damage shows up in the brick, where it cannot be undone.

This is one place where brief really is enough for a homeowner: you do not need to specify the mix. You need a mason who talks about sand, test patches, and not going too hard for the brick — unprompted.

Replacing Cracked Brick, Not Burying Them

During a rebuild, every brick that came out cracked, and every cracked unit found in the disturbed area, should be replaced — not turned around to hide the crack, not mortared over, not slipped back in where "nobody will see it." A cracked brick in a wall is a water inlet and a weak point, and above a

garage opening it sits in the most expressive, hardest-working part of the wall.

Replacement units should match the existing brick in size first — older Texas homes often carry sizes that differ from today's standard stock — and then in color and texture. A good crew salvages every sound original brick during removal precisely because originals match perfectly, and uses new units, carefully chosen, only where originals were lost or damaged. Where a replacement does stand slightly proud in tone, placing it away from the center of the opening and blending the distribution is the craftsman's touch.

Hypothetical example: Picture a rebuild where six cracked brick are quietly reused in the soldier course to save a trip to the brickyard. The wall looks fine at the walk-through. The first winter, water in those cracks freezes, two faces spall off above the garage door, and the homeowner is paying for scaffolding and spot repairs on a job that was sold as permanent. Six brick cost very little. Putting them back cost a great deal.

Why the Rebuild Is Part of the Repair

Put the pieces together and the point of this chapter is simple. The lintel failed, and in failing, it damaged the masonry system above it: cracked joints in a stepped pattern up the wall, cracked units, a tilted decorative course, mortar that no longer sheds water. Replacing the steel treats the cause. Rebuilding the brick treats the damage. A job that does only the first leaves the second in place, visible every time you pull into your own driveway.

That is why, when you compare bids, the masonry scope is one of the clearest windows into a contractor's honesty. One bid will list the rebuild plainly: courses to be relaid, brick to be replaced, joints to be repointed, mortar to be matched. Another will say only "replace lintel" and price accordingly. Those are not two prices for the same job. They are two different jobs, and only one of them is finished when the crew leaves.

Your garage opening is the widest span in your home's brickwork and the first thing you see when you come home. Done right — new steel, properly supported and flashed, with the brick above rebuilt as the system they are — it should be the part of the house you never have to think about again. That is the standard to hold every bid to, and the standard this book has tried to put in your hands from the first chapter to this one. Take your time with it, walk the opening with fresh eyes, and let the wall itself tell you the truth.

Chapter 10: Costs, Bids, and Warranties

Every homeowner asks the same first question when a garage lintel sags, cracks the brick above it, or pulls away from the wall: what is this going to cost? It deserves a straight answer. The honest answer is that a garage lintel is not a one-price repair. A short single-car opening with nothing above it but a gable is a very different job from a wide two-car opening with a second story, a roof load, and a wall of brick that must come down and go back up. This chapter walks through what drives the price, how to read bids side by side, what a low bid often leaves out, and what a real warranty looks like in writing.

What Drives the Price

Start with span — the clear width the lintel must carry. The lintel is the horizontal steel angle over the opening that holds up the masonry above it. The wider the opening, the stronger that steel must be, and the more temporary support the wall needs while the old steel comes out and the new steel goes in. A nine- or ten-foot single door is manageable with standard shoring. A sixteen- to eighteen-foot double opening asks more of everything: more steel, more support, more hands, more care. What sits above matters just as much. Is there a second story over the garage — a bedroom, a bathroom, a bonus room? Does a steep roof land on that wall? Is the wall full brick, thin veneer, or stone, which adds weight and labor because each piece must come down in order and be reset in place? A good contractor looks in the attic when he can, looks inside the garage, and asks about rooms above before pricing. A bidder who prices from the driveway in five minutes, without looking up or in, has told you something about his bid.

Next, how much brick must be rebuilt? Sometimes the steel has failed but the brick above is still sound and only cracked along a few mortar joints. Then the work may be mostly support, removal, new steel, flashing, weep openings, and repointing. Other times the brick has rotated, bowed, or separated so far that saving it would leave a patched wall that still does not sit right. Then the honest scope is to take the affected brick down to sound material, reuse what can be reused, match new brick where pieces are broken, and lay the wall back plumb and level. Rebuilding costs more than repointing, so beware vague language like “repair brick as needed” — that can mean two hours of tuck-pointing or two days of relaying. Get the area described: how wide, how high, how many courses should come down, and what happens if more damage appears once the wall is open. Access drives price too. A steep or narrow driveway, fences, trees, landscaping in the way, or a garage packed to the door all add

time, and time is labor. Clearing the garage back several feet and moving vehicles before the start day helps keep a job on schedule. Finally, condition counts: surface rust is one thing; steel that has swelled, split brick, lost thickness, or bent is another. If the bearing ends where the lintel sits are cracked or soft, they must be rebuilt too, or new steel will rest on a weak base.

Comparing Bids Line by Line

Do not start with the total. Start with the scope, and make each bidder answer for the same list. Does the bid include temporary shoring? Removal and disposal of old steel and damaged material? What size and type of new steel, and how is it protected against rust before it goes in? Is flashing included above the lintel, and are weep openings included so water behind the brick can escape? Flashing and weeps are among the most skipped and most important items on the job — new steel with no way for water to escape is set up to rust again in the same place. Does the bid include taking brick down, and how much? Relaying it, matching mortar color as closely as materials allow, and tooling joints to match the house? Or repointing only, and where? Are the garage door, tracks, and opener protected, removed, or left to you? Is cleanup and haul-off included? Each question is a real cost somebody will pay, inside the bid or later as an extra.

Hypothetical example: Two bids arrive for the same sixteen-foot opening. Bid A is notably lower and says, in full, “Replace garage lintel and repair brick — one price.” Bid B is higher and lists shoring, removal, new coated steel, flashing, weep openings, relaying about four courses of brick, rebuilding both bearing ends, mortar matching, cleanup, and a written warranty. These are not two prices for one job. They are two different jobs sharing one sentence. Bid A may grow once the wall is open, or it may simply do less and leave the hidden parts undone. The cheapest bid is a bargain only if its scope matches the others item for item. So ask every bidder the same follow-ups, and write the answers on the bid: How long will the garage be out of use? What if worse damage is found? Who handles the door if it must come out? What is not included? A straight contractor answers without irritation. Also notice whether a bidder mentions water at all — a leaking gutter, a roof edge dumping on the brick, joints sealed shut, bare steel. A bidder who talks only about steel is fixing the symptom and leaving the cause.

Red-Flag Low Bids

A low bid is not automatically a bad bid; a small, efficient crew can honestly price below a larger company. The red flags are specific. No shoring mentioned. No flashing or weeps. No plan for the brick beyond “patch cracks.” No rust

protection on the new steel. A promise to finish a wide, two-story opening in a few hours. Most or all of the money demanded up front. No physical address, no written warranty, no proof of insurance when asked. Reusing failed steel is another flag — straightening a bent, rust-thinned lintel and painting it does not restore its strength. So is covering the problem: a decorative cover, thick sealant over moving cracks, or mortar smeared over a sagging line can look tidy for a season while the steel keeps moving underneath. A reasonable deposit tied to materials and scheduling is common. Full payment in cash before work begins, with no contract, is a warning. Keep your signed scope, payment schedule, and warranty together in one folder.

What a Real Warranty Covers — In Writing

A warranty is worth only what it says in writing, in words you can read after the truck leaves. It should name the company, state what is covered — typically the workmanship of the installation and the rebuilt masonry in the repaired area — state how long coverage lasts, and state what is not covered. Honest exclusions are normal: a new roof leak created by someone else, impact damage, foundation movement elsewhere, natural disasters, and alterations by others are not workmanship failures. What you want is a company standing behind its own work: if the brick it relaid cracks because of how it was installed, or the lintel it set fails at its bearing or protection, it will return and make it right under the stated terms. Ask how a claim is made, whether a phone number and address are on the document, and whether the warranty transfers when you sell — transferability matters in Texas transactions, and a clear answer now prevents a closing-table argument later. Ask what maintenance it expects from you; keeping weeps clear and exposed steel painted are fair duties, covered in Chapter 12. A company drawing on 50 years of hands-on field experience has learned the best warranty is the one rarely used, because the flashing was right, the steel was protected, the bearing was sound, and water had a way out. On unusually wide spans, a contractor may also suggest consulting a structural engineer for an independent opinion. Take that as care, not weakness.

Permits and inspections, in general terms, vary widely across Texas. Some cities require a permit for structural masonry and steel work over an opening; others treat like-for-like repair differently, and homeowner associations may add their own approval and color rules. This book cannot state the rule for your address. Ask the contractor whether he believes a permit is required for your scope, ask who obtains it, and check with your local building department yourself if you want certainty. If an inspection is part of the job, welcome it — a third set of eyes on shoring, steel, and bearing before the brick goes back is cheap peace of mind. Keep permit and

inspection records with your warranty papers. Price matters, and it should. But the true cost is the number on the bid plus whether the wall was supported safely, drained correctly, rebuilt honestly, and backed in writing. Buy the scope, not just the total, and you will usually buy the job only once.

Chapter 11: Buying, Selling, and the Home Inspector

A garage lintel rarely makes the listing photos. Nobody falls in love with a house because of the steel over the garage door. But let that steel sag, let the brick above it crack in a stair-step pattern, and the lintel will find its way into the negotiation anyway — usually after an offer, during an inspection, with a closing date circled on the calendar. This chapter serves both sides of that table. If you are selling, it will help you choose honestly between fixing the lintel before you list and offering a credit. If you are buying, it will help you read an inspector's note with calm eyes and tell a repairable masonry problem from a reason to walk away.

What Inspectors Flag — and Why

Home inspectors are generalists. They cannot open walls, they do not price repairs, and a good one will say so. What they do well is spot visible patterns and flag them for further evaluation. Over a garage, the patterns are consistent across Texas: a lintel visibly sagging or bowing in the middle; heavy, flaking, or swelling rust — rust takes more space than the steel it came from, so corroding steel can lift and crack the brick above it; diagonal or stair-step cracks running up from the corners of the opening; a gap between brick and steel, or brick rotating outward at the ends; missing or blocked weep openings; sealant smeared over cracks, suggesting a cosmetic patch; and a garage door that binds or no longer seals evenly, because moving brick changes the opening the door lives in. Any one of these earns a note. Several together earn a clear recommendation to get the opening evaluated before closing.

That report language is usually careful: “evidence of movement,” “recommend evaluation by a qualified masonry or foundation contractor,” or “recommend further evaluation by a structural engineer.” It does not mean the house is falling down. It means the inspector has reached the edge of his role and is handing the question to a specialist, as he should. Sellers sometimes read it as an accusation; buyers sometimes read it as a verdict. It is neither — it is a referral, and the right response is an evaluation at the house, with measurements, photos, and a written scope, not a price guessed from a PDF. It also helps to know what a lintel problem is not: by itself, it is not proof of foundation failure. Texas clay soils move slabs seasonally, and a foundation

deserves its own evaluation when signs appear across the whole house — sticking doors throughout, wide interior cracks, sloping floors. A single sagging lintel with local rust and corner cracks is very often a lintel story: water, unprotected steel, time, and a wide span. Keeping those questions separate saves both sides money and panic.

Disclosure Honesty for Sellers

Texas sellers complete a disclosure notice, and its spirit is simple: say what you know, plainly, when you know it. This book cannot give legal advice — your agent and, where needed, an attorney are the right voices for that — but the principle is not complicated. If you know the lintel has been evaluated, repaired, patched, or flagged, do not hide that history. If a repair was done, say when, by whom, and whether you hold the invoice and warranty. If an evaluation recommended work you chose not to do, that recommendation is part of what you know. Buyers forgive an old house with a disclosed, documented repair far more readily than a surprise, and surprises found after closing are where disputes are born. Honesty protects your price, too: a disclosed repair with scope, photos, and warranty reads as a maintained house, while fresh mortar smeared over a moving crack, found by an inspector's flashlight, reads as concealment even when it was meant as tidying. If you will not repair before listing, disclose, price with that knowledge, and have a real evaluation and bid ready for a buyer to rely on.

Composite example: A seller notices corner cracks above the garage two months before listing. Instead of sealing them the weekend before photos, she has the lintel evaluated, learns the steel is rust-thinned at both ends but the brick above can largely be saved, and gets a written bid. She chooses not to do the work because of timing, discloses the evaluation, attaches the bid to the file her agent keeps, and lists at a price that acknowledges it. The buyer's inspector flags the same cracks — no surprise — the bid becomes the basis for a modest, agreed credit, and the sale closes on schedule. Nothing in that story required a perfect house. It required a straight seller.

Pre-Listing Fix vs. Credit

Fixing before listing makes the most sense when damage is visible from the street, photographs badly, keeps the door from operating cleanly, or when buyers using loans may require structural items to be addressed. A completed repair removes an objection, widens the buyer pool, and turns warranty and paperwork into a selling point. It also keeps the work under your control — your contractor, your schedule, your standards. The costs are time and money up front, plus

the chance a buyer would have accepted a smaller credit. If you fix, follow Chapter 10: full scope, flashing and weeps, written warranty. A cheap pre-listing patch is the worst of both worlds — you paid, and the inspector may still flag it. A credit makes sense when your timeline is tight, the repair is well defined and documented, the house will sell readily anyway, or the buyer prefers his own contractor. Credits work best anchored to a real bid, not a round number invented at the table: “Seller offers a credit equal to the attached bid, warranty terms in the attached scope” closes arguments, while a vague allowance invites the buyer to imagine the worst number and negotiate to it. The middle path done badly — a cosmetic touch-up sold as a repair, or a credit offered while refusing a buyer's contractor access to evaluate — rarely works. If the buyer cannot measure the problem, he will price the uncertainty against you. Access and information are cheap. Grant both.

For Buyers: Reading the Finding With Calm Eyes

If the report flags the garage lintel, take a breath and get the specialist evaluation the inspector recommended. Seek answers to five questions. How much has it moved, and is the movement old and stable or recent and active? Is the steel showing surface rust, or real loss of thickness and bending? How much brick is affected, and can it be saved or must an area be relaid? Are flashing and weep openings present and working, or was water trapped? Is this localized to the opening, or part of a larger pattern across the house? With those answers and a written scope, a lintel finding becomes a known quantity — a defined repair, price, and timeline — and known quantities can be negotiated, scheduled, or accepted. Do not let the finding crowd out the rest of your due diligence, either. Roofs, drainage, grading, and gutters will decide how long any repair lasts, and a house that moves water away from its walls is a house whose masonry, steel, and foundation all live easier lives.

Negotiating the repair has a few sensible forms. The seller completes the work before closing, by an agreed contractor, to an agreed written scope, with invoice and warranty delivered at closing. The price or credit reflects the documented bid, and the buyer does the work after closing. Or the parties split the difference, recognizing the house is older and some wear belongs to ownership. Any of these can be fair. What matters is naming the scope, not just putting a dollar figure beside the words “lintel repair” — otherwise the cheapest patch satisfies the letter of the deal and leaves the buyer the real problem. If work is done before closing, keep a right to re-inspect the finished area, and have the warranty assigned or reissued in the buyer's name where the

contractor allows it.

Hypothetical example: A buyer falls for a 1990s brick home with a two-car garage. The inspector notes a sagging lintel, corner cracks, and heavy rust, and recommends further evaluation. The buyer's contractor finds the steel sound in the middle but badly thinned at the bearing ends, recommends replacement with proper flashing and weeps and relaying the lowest courses, and gives a written bid and a timeline of several days once scheduled. The parties agree the seller will credit that bid at closing, the buyer schedules the work for the week after move-in and parks outside for those days, and the warranty goes in a folder with the closing papers. A finding that alarmed everyone on page nine of a report became a repaired opening and a non-issue — because both sides traded paperwork instead of fears. That is the lesson of this chapter, for buyers and sellers alike. Disclose what you know. Evaluate what you do not. Put the scope in writing. Price the real work. Homes change hands every day in Texas with repaired lintels over their garages and long, uneventful years after, and that outcome belongs to anyone who treats the finding as information instead of ammunition.

Chapter 12: Keep It From Happening Again

The best garage lintel repair is the one you never repeat. Once new steel is in — protected, with flashing set above it, weep openings open, and brick relaid plumb and sound — the rest of its life is mostly in your hands. The good news is that the care it needs is neither expensive nor complicated. It is the steady, ordinary attention that keeps a roof, a fence, or a truck running well in Texas: keep water moving where it belongs, keep protective coatings intact, keep small openings clear, and look at the wall now and then with your eyes actually open. This chapter turns that into a simple plan you can keep on one page in the garage.

Protect the Exposed Steel

On most brick homes, the face of the lintel — the horizontal band of steel visible just above the garage door — lives outdoors its whole life. Sun, sprinkler spray, humidity, and time all work on its coating. Paint here is not decoration; it is the steel's first defense against rust, and rust is the slow engine behind most lintel failures. Swelling rust cracks brick. Thinning rust weakens steel. Both begin at the surface you can see. So look at that face twice a year, in spring and fall, in good light, for peeling or bubbling paint, orange staining, flaking, or bare metal showing through. Small failures caught early are a small job: let the steel dry fully, wire-brush away loose rust and failing paint, clean the surface, apply a

rust-inhibiting primer made for exterior steel, and finish with quality exterior paint matched to the existing color. Follow the product directions, and do not paint over the weep openings above the lintel or seal the joint in a way that traps water behind the steel. Heavy rust, deep pitting, swelling, or bending is beyond paint — have it evaluated. Paint maintains sound steel; it does not cure failing steel. Note the date and the work in your photo log, below, so the record shows maintenance instead of a hurried coat before a sale.

Keep the Weeps Clear, and Mind the Water Up Top

Weep openings are the small, deliberate gaps left in the mortar joint just above the flashing and lintel, spaced along the opening. Their job is humble and vital. Brick and mortar are not waterproof, wind-driven Texas rain gets behind the veneer, and that water needs a way out at the bottom before it sits on the steel and rusts it from the hidden side. Blocked weeps hold water exactly where it does the most harm. They get blocked in ordinary ways: mortar droppings from construction, dirt daubers and insects, mulch piled high against the wall, and sealant or paint bridging right over them. Once a year, walk the garage opening and the base of the brick walls around the house, find the weeps, and clear loose debris gently by hand or with a soft tool. Do not ram a screwdriver deep into the cavity, pack the opening with foam or caulk, or let a pressure washer blast them shut. If you cannot find weeps over a wide opening, or they were mortared over in a past repair, raise it at your next masonry evaluation. Open drainage is half the system.

More lintels are killed from above than from below. A gutter over the garage that overflows in every hard rain pours a curtain of water down the brick face and across the lintel, overwhelming joints and weeps alike. A damaged roof edge, a valley concentrating a roof slope onto one garage corner, or a downspout soaking a bearing end writes the same ending, slowly. Keep gutters near the garage clean, especially after leaf fall and spring storms. Check that they pitch toward downspouts, seams are sealed, and hangers hold the run up instead of letting it sag and pond. Downspouts should carry water several feet from the walls. Then stand outside in a real rain once in a while — the most informative inspection a homeowner can do, and it costs nothing. Does water sheet over the gutter, pour behind it against the brick, or run back toward the garage corners? Fix the water path first; masonry repairs below a chronic overflow are repairs bought twice. Check sprinklers too, and turn any head that sprays the brick and lintel face daily. Constant wetting defeats paint and feeds rust, and a small turn of a head may be the cheapest maintenance of your year.

Sealant Joints — Maintained, Not Smeared

Sealant has a real, specific job. The joints where different materials meet — brick to door frame, brick to trim, control joints in the wall — need flexible, properly installed sealant with the right backing, so the joint can move a little with heat and season without tearing open and admitting water. Sealant has a service life. In Texas sun, expect renewal on a cycle of years, not decades, and judge by its look: cracked, shrunken, pulling away from one side, or hardened brittle. Renewal means removing failed material, cleaning the joint, fitting proper backing where depth calls for it, and applying new sealant neatly to the joint itself — not smearing a wide band across the brick face, and never sealing the weep openings or drainage path shut. If you hire it out, ask the contractor to point out which joints he is renewing and which openings he is leaving open on purpose. That one question separates careful work from cosmetic work. Remember the limit, too: sealant manages water at joints. It does not hold up brick, stop a sagging lintel, or replace flashing. A crack that keeps reopening after honest resealing is the wall reporting movement underneath — have it looked at instead of reaching for a bigger tube.

A Yearly Photo Log — Ten Minutes That Pay

Once a year, on a date you will actually keep — New Year's week, the start of daylight saving time, the anniversary of your closing — take the same photos of your garage opening. From the same spot in the driveway, one straight-on shot of the whole opening. A closer shot of each end, where the lintel bears on the brick. One shot along the line of the lintel from an angle, which reveals a sag the eye misses head-on. Any cracks above the opening, with a coin or ruler in frame for scale. The gutters above and the weeps below. Save the set in a folder named by year, with a two-line note of what you painted, cleared, sealed, or noticed. The log catches slow change early, when fixes are small — a crack that grew two inches in a year is information, not trivia. It proves maintenance to a future buyer and inspector in pictures, gives any contractor a history instead of a guess, and settles arguments with your own memory about whether that crack was there three years ago. Ten minutes a year, and few habits in homeownership pay better.

Composite example: A homeowner keeps the log for six years after a lintel replacement. In year four, the angled photo shows paint bubbling at one end near a downspout, and watching the wall in the rain shows why — a gutter seam drips onto that exact end after every storm. He reseals the seam, cleans and re-primers the small rust spot, and notes both. In year six, the photos join a tidy maintenance file at resale. The wall never cracked again. Nothing dramatic

happened, and for a wide opening carrying brick over the cars you drive daily, nothing dramatic is exactly the outcome you want.

Plan for the Other Openings

Your house has other lintels, and these lessons travel. Over every window and exterior door, steel quietly carries the masonry above, and the same causes work on all of them: water from above, blocked drainage, failed coatings, and time. Window lintels are smaller, so they fail more slowly and show themselves politely at first — a stepped crack from a window corner, rust staining below an end, a joint that opens every summer and never quite closes. Walk the whole house on the same yearly round. Photograph windows and doors the same way, keep their weeps clear, manage the water above them, and paint exposed steel where they have it. Brick and stone accents over a front entry deserve a special look, because entries concentrate roof water and a failure there greets every guest. Think ahead practically, too: a house built in one year by one builder has lintels all the same age, aging on roughly the same clock. A garage lintel that failed at year twenty-five is a fair hint about the long window lintel on the back wall. Planning does not mean replacing sound steel on suspicion. It means getting suspect openings evaluated while a trusted crew is already at the house, asking for a simple written priority list, and doing work in a planned order as need and budget meet — always cheaper and calmer than an emergency after brick has fallen. Where a wider opening raises questions beyond masonry alone, a contractor may suggest input from a structural engineer; keep that opinion with your records. Travis Nech writes from 50 years of hands-on field experience with brick, stone, and the steel that carries them, and the thread through it is respect for small maintenance done on time. Where his field-developed system, LintelLOCK, is part of a repair, its long service still depends on these same basics: drainage open, steel protected, water managed up top. Keep yours dry, clear, coated, and photographed, and the widest opening in your house will do its quiet work for decades.

Conclusion: Carry the Wide Opening Well

A garage door is the widest, hardest-working opening in most Texas homes, and the wall above it asks a great deal of a single band of steel. Through this book we have followed that steel's whole story: what a lintel is and what it carries, how to read the cracks, sags, stains, and sticking doors that say it is in trouble, how water and rust do their slow work, what a real repair includes, what it fairly costs, how to compare bids and read a warranty, how the finding plays out when a house is

bought and sold, and how a little yearly care keeps the trouble from returning. If you take only a few sentences with you, take these. Water is the cause behind most failures, so manage it first and always. Flashing and open weeps are not extras — they are the drainage that lets a repair last. Steel that has lost its strength to rust is replaced, not painted over. Scope, price, and warranty belong in writing. And slow change, photographed once a year, almost never becomes an emergency.

There is a steadier way to see your house hidden in this subject, and it is worth saying plainly at the end. A home is not a finished product you buy once. It is a set of systems quietly carrying loads, shedding water, and aging at different speeds, and ownership is the habit of noticing — a gutter seam in the rain, a bubble in the paint, a crack that was not in last year's photo. That habit is not anxiety. Done in small, regular doses, it is the opposite: it is how a homeowner stays ahead of his house instead of being surprised by it, and how repair money gets spent calmly, on schedule, at fair prices, instead of urgently at whatever price the week demands. Most expensive stories in this trade did not begin with a dramatic failure. They began with a small, visible, fixable thing that nobody looked at for five years. You now know how to look, and looking is most of the job.

There is encouragement in that, especially if you are standing in the driveway right now looking at a crack and feeling behind. You are not behind. You are early in the only sense that matters, if the wall is still standing, the door still opens, and you are reading before you hire, before you patch, and before you ignore it for another season. Houses forgive a great deal when their owners start paying attention, and they usually repay that attention quietly, year after year, in problems that never happen. Start where you are, with photos, a clear look in the rain, and one honest evaluation.

If your garage lintel needs help now, you are ready. Get the evaluation. Ask the line-by-line questions from Chapter 10. Choose the scope that includes the drainage, keep the paperwork together, and start your photo log the week the work is finished. Write the warranty contact's name and number on the folder where the warranty lives. If yours is sound, you are ready in a different way: protect the steel, clear the weeps, mind the gutters, renew the joints when they ask for it, and let your yearly ten minutes buy you years of quiet. Neither path asks for expertise you do not have. Both ask only for attention, paid in small amounts, on purpose — the same attention that built every good wall in the first place.

It is also worth remembering the people side of this work. The contractor who shores your wall, the inspector who flags what

he sees, the buyer who will one day stand in your driveway with a flashlight and a report — each does better work when met with clear questions, honest disclosure, and paperwork in order. A house cared for openly tends to be sold honestly, bought confidently, and repaired well. That is not a small thing in a market that runs on trust between strangers. Your garage opening, of all places, is a fine place to practice it. Either way, the wide opening over the place you come home to every night deserves to be carried well, and now you know, in plain terms, exactly what carrying it well looks like: steel that is protected, brick that sits plumb and sound, water that is shown the way out, and an owner who walks his own walls once a year and writes down what he sees. From our family trade to your driveway — take care of the wall, and the wall will take care of the home beneath it, for a long Texas while to come. Thank you for reading, and for caring for your home the way it deserves to be cared for.

Resources & Next Steps

Travis Nech has spent 50 years in brick, masonry, and foundation work across Texas. He owns and operates Champion Brick Repair, Metro Foundation Repair, LintelLOCK, MortarMagic, and WhiteStone Construction.

- **Champion Brick Repair** — brick & masonry repair, Dallas-Fort Worth — championbrickrepair.com — (817) 900-6324
- **Metro Foundation Repair** — pressed concrete pile foundation repair — metrofoundationrepair.com — (817) 523-1540
- **LintelLOCK** — the field-developed lintel replacement system — lintlerepair.com — (469) 730-0650
- **MortarMagic** — mortar color matching & the Mortar Bucket — mortarmagic.netlify.app
- **WhiteStone Construction** — stone, ranch & property work, Hamilton TX country — (254) 723-5040

If the brick above your garage is sagging, cracked, or showing rust at the steel, start with an inspection. Use the twice-a-year walkaround in Chapter 6, take dated photographs, and write down what you measure. If you find a red-flag condition — active cracking, visible sag, flaking steel at the bearing ends, or a door frame racking out of square — have an experienced masonry contractor evaluate the opening in person, and bring in a structural engineer where loads or movement are uncertain. A proper repair supports the wall first, replaces failed steel with sound steel on sound bearing, restores flashing and weep holes, and rebuilds the brick above. Anything less should be priced and understood as temporary.

About the Author

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Travis writes the books in this series the way he works a wall: start with what the building is actually doing, explain it in plain English, separate a lasting repair from a cosmetic one, and leave the reader with an inspection habit that prevents the next failure. His other homeowner guides cover brick repair, mortar matching and repointing, foundation repair with pressed concrete piles, and reading cracks and wall movement across a Texas house.