



Private Reserve

Many Corvette fans fall in love at first sight. Others fall in love, and then build a shrine.
Jeff Glenn reports, photos courtesy of Michael Brown.

Michael Brown's passion for Corvettes was sparked when he caught his first glimpse of a 1963 split-window coupe when he was a junior in high school. "At that time," Brown recalls, "Hugo, Oklahoma was a little town with a population of about 5000. When the '63 drove through, I was really taken by that car, even though it was red, which is not my favorite color." Decades after his first Corvette sighting, Brown would become the proud curator of his own personal Chevrolet museum, which at one time housed at least one example of every Corvette generation—not a single one of which was painted red.

Growing up, Brown wasn't much of a hands-on guy when it came to cars. "My father had a salvage yard and was a mechanic his whole life," he explains. "I saw how hard he worked and how little money he made. I thought, 'I never want to do that.'" Brown's father did, however, plant the Chevrolet seed

long before Michael's first 1963 sighting. "My dad only bought one new car, a 1956 Chevy," Brown recalls. "I have a picture in my garage of that car. My dad and I are leaning against it. I'm 11 and he's 43." A few years later, Brown proudly drove home in his first car, a 1946 Chevrolet coupe that his father had taken in trade at the salvage yard. "It was not a chick magnet," Brown laughs. After the '46, he traded up to a presentable 1952 two-door sedan, which then gave way to a significantly sexier turquoise-over-white 1955 two-door hardtop. Shortly thereafter, Brown moved to his fourth Chevrolet, a silver '57 that would play a central role in establishing the color theme of Brown's collection.

Conspicuously absent from Brown's steady stream of Chevrolets was one wearing crossed flags—in fact, the transformation from Corvette admirer to collector would take several decades. In 1985, more than 20 years after his first Corvette exposure, Brown's first foray

into ownership came in the form of—what else—a 1963 split-window coupe. "In August of '85, I found a silver '63 listed in a Dallas paper," he recalls. "This was three months before my 40th birthday, and I started dropping hints to my wife. She said, 'Just go buy it, and get over your middle-age crazies!'"

Brown was happy to oblige, and for several years, the silver '63 was the only Corvette in his stable. That would ultimately change in a very significant way—currently, there are 11 Corvettes parked in Brown's customized garage, with each one finished in silver, black, or some combination of the two.

The first car to join his '63 was a 327/340-powered 1962 model that arrived in 2003. Also silver, the '62 included a four-speed manual transmission, power windows, and a Wonderbar radio. That same year, Brown added a new 2003 Z06 in black. "I liked the idea of owning both the 10th and 50th anniversary models," he remarks.



There are a lot of guys who like Corvettes and all things Texas, but there aren't many folks who have the option of cruising around on Corvette-badged Segway scooters. Brown's large but unassuming garage houses a museum-quality lineup, and though he enjoys sharing the collection with other enthusiasts, his demanding video-production schedule prevents him from opening the doors to the public as often as he'd like. Therefore, he turned to the internet, and hosts a virtual version of his garage online.



A few years after adding the '62 and '03 to his stable, Brown began regularly attending Corvettes at Carlisle, which only fueled his interest in the brand. He also increased his storage capacity by moving to increasingly larger lots. After making a stop at a 22-acre ranch in Fort Worth TX, Brown and his wife moved to their current home in Arlington. Behind the Arlington house was a lot of space—enough, Brown reckoned, to build a massive 3000 square-foot garage.

Even though the space for the garage was nestled well behind the property walls, Brown felt obligated to incorporate some of the design themes of his home into



the new structure. As the house-matching garage began to take shape, Brown started to get excited about the storage possibilities. From the outside, the garage looks like a divided five-stall unit, but opening the door reveals a cavernous room capable of swallowing at least a dozen machines.

As the finishing touches were being put on the garage, Brown was developing plans to expand his collection. "I thought it would be fun to have at least one Corvette from each of the six generations," he remarks. The pace of Brown's car shopping increased dramatically, and after purchasing three cars in 2006, his goal of owning at least one example of every Corvette had been realized. Since then, he's removed the C4 from his roster by selling a pair of 1984 Corvettes, which he felt weren't going to appreciate in value.

Traveling chronologically by model year, Brown's collection begins with a Black 1954 Roadster, which is one of only a handful produced in that color. This factory-correct example was originally delivered to White-Allen Chevrolet in Dayton OH, and has since covered 68,000 miles and five different owners. A second black C1, this time in the form of a fuel-injected 1957, is one of Brown's favorites:

"It's black, it's the first year for fuel injection, and it has a four-speed," he grins. The aforementioned silver '62 rounds out the solid-axle section of Brown's collection.

Since the time he spotted that '63 on the streets of Hugo, Oklahoma, Brown has had a soft spot for midyears. With his silver '63 representing the sentimental cornerstone of his collection, Brown felt compelled to collect an example of each model year of the second generation. His black-over-red 1964 Fuelie coupe is equipped with a four-speed gearbox, power brakes, knockoff wheels, leather seats, and a recent NCRS Top Flight certification.

One of Brown's most recent purchases is a triple-black 327/375 1965 convertible, which also received Top Flight recognition in 1998. Factory options on the '65 include knockoffs, teakwood steering wheel, four-speed transmission, and factory side exhausts.

A highly documented Tuxedo Black 1966 coupe is the next in line, and is one of the highlights of Brown's stable. Fitted with a 427/425 big-block, a four-speed, factory knockoff alloys, side exhausts, and a Positraction axle, the '66 is remarkably original with just under 17,000 miles on the clock. Though the '66 hasn't yet been certified by any of the Corvette historical societies, Brown feels he's obligated to get it judged, "simply because it's so special. I'm looking forward to going through the process—certainly, if I can accomplish that, it will enhance the car's value even further." Another big-block car, a 427/435 1967 convertible, rounds out Brown's midyear fleet.

The C3 era is represented by a 1978 Pace Car—Brown's is one of roughly 200 examples factory-equipped with a four-speed manual transmission. With a temporary absence of any C4 models, the next car in line is Brown's

THE GARAGE LOOKS LIKE A FIVE-STALL UNIT, BUT OPENING THE DOOR REVEALS A CAVERNOUS ROOM CAPABLE OF SWALLOWING A DOZEN CARS.



black 2003 Z06, which is followed in turn by a 2006 Z06. A 1957 Bel Air convertible rounds out the collection, and it's easy to spot since it is both red and not a Corvette. The Bel Air is another sentimental pick for Brown, and his current example is one of just 68 fuel-injected '57 convertibles.

Managing a small museum is no easy task, and Brown can only chuckle when describing some of the challenges. "There are five doors to the garage, but I've had seven cars in front of them, or even eight. I found these individual wheel jacks on rollers—you put them under each wheel, step on them a couple of times, and they lift the car up. To get some of the cars out, we have to back them out in front of the door, and then use the jacks on the adjacent car to move it over. The jacks turned out to be instrumental." Still, even with the departure of the '84 duo, Brown's five-car midyear collection and the addition of the Fuelie Bel Air has made things tighter than ever before. "There used to be 42 inches between the cars, and now there's 32," Brown laughs.

Each car in the collection is regularly exercised in order to keep the cars in working condition. "I drive the older ones maybe five or

Brown's Tuxedo Black 1966 big-block coupe is one of the highlights of his impressive Sting Ray lineup.

six times a year," Brown guesses. The newer ones are also regularly driven, but not particularly far—the longest jaunts are trips to Fort Worth for dinner, and that only happens if Brown is familiar with the parking accommodations. "I never really leave them out of my sight," he smiles. That careful approach, combined with Brown's busy video-production business and his wife's successful career as a novelist, has resulted in an 1100-mile odometer reading on the 2006 Z06.

With precious little time to relax at home, Brown has not joined any Corvette clubs and rarely attends a car show. "I've had some of the clubs come and tour my garage," he says, "and I love to talk Corvettes with other enthusiasts. But it's really hard to find the time."

With no plans to formally open his garage to the public, Brown decided to showcase his collection online. "It was obvious that a lot of people were interested in my cars," Brown relates. "Through the video business I have a really good graphics guy, and when things were slow at work I laid out my vision and had him put it together. It has been a lot of fun to be able to share it and put it out there."

On the web at www.hookedonvettes.com, Brown's site features his collection with specific notes on his individual cars and general facts about the models. Thanks to the internet, Brown has made friends across the country. "Out in Tennessee, there's a Jet Blue pilot who has a couple of Corvettes, and in Vacaville, California there's another guy with a few in his garage. We've become good friends even though we've never met in person." Sometimes, the internet connects Brown to enthusiasts closer to home. "I met a guy online who has 20 Corvettes only 25 miles away from my house! Some people don't want the public to know about their collections, or they simply don't have the time to get it out there."

Though Brown's path to being a serious Corvette collector started way back in a dusty Oklahoma town, he relishes the opportunity to spend time with his cars and share them—virtually or otherwise—with other enthusiasts. With his space already shrinking, he is happy with his current inventory, and doesn't foresee any major changes in the near future. Of course, if he ever developed a taste for red Corvettes, he'd have to build another garage. ○