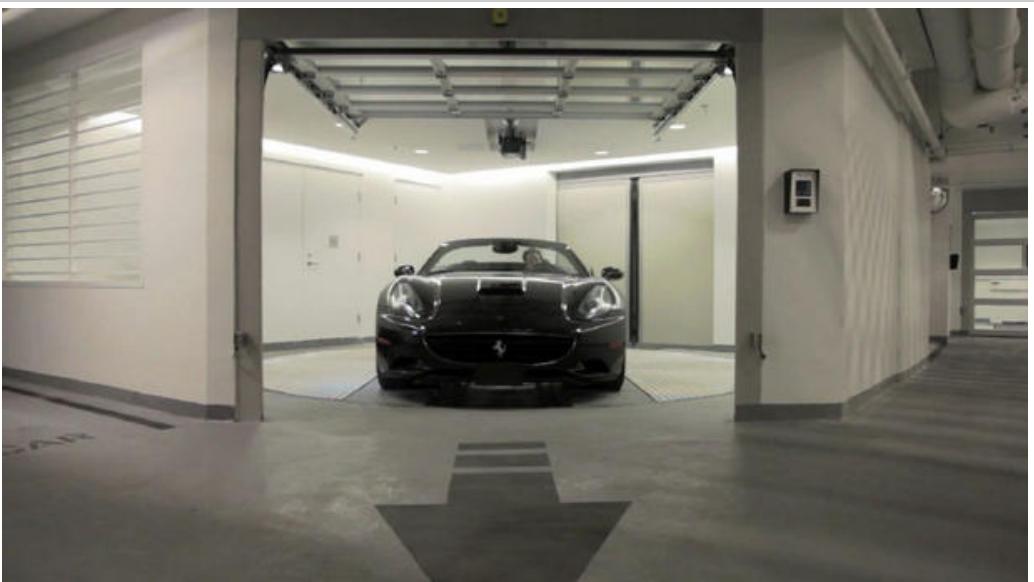
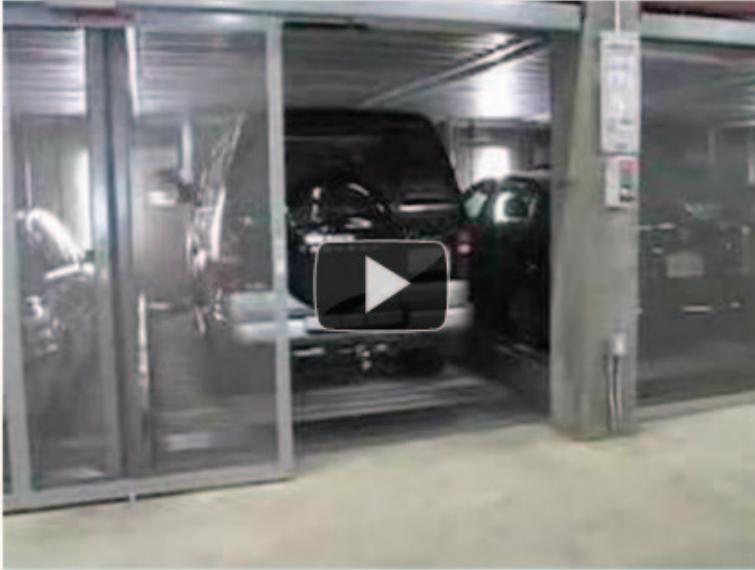


Automated valet eases condo parking problems

Article

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A number of Toronto developers are now looking at this costly, high-tech systems as a way to offset the problem of creating parking in downtown Toronto.



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The highlight of Mary Porohowski's day is parking her car.

She loves driving her Mercedes into one of three glass-enclosed bays at the Vancouver condo project where she works and watching the signs flash "good morning" and "drive forward."

After Porohowski climbs out and swipes a coded card, her car is transported into the bowels of the 36-storey, ultra-luxe Jameson House Vancouver.

"I was skeptical when I first saw these elevators," says the local realtor. "But it sure beats going home to my own condo garage or driving around and around down to P6."

Jameson House is the first condo project in Canada — and only the second in North America — to boast a Jetsons-like fully automated parking system that could soon be coming to a highrise condo near you.

A number of Toronto developers are now looking at the costly, high-tech systems as a way to offset an increasingly difficult downtown problem — digging deep enough to create parking on tight sites that are skyrocketing in price and shrinking in size.

“They are phenomenal systems,” says Bruno Giancola, vice president of construction management for Tridel Corp. which is considering automated parking for its 75-storey Ten York project, touted to be the tallest residential building in Canada.

“But you just hope your car comes back when you swipe that card — and if it’s a black Porsche instead, all the better,” quips Giancola.

The systems, widely in use throughout Europe and Asia, are ideally suited to tackle Toronto’s condo parking problems, says Jason Nanner, vice president for Canada of German-based KLAUS Multiparking which hopes to have a system in place here in the next two years.

The stacking systems reduce the need for ramps and driveways, can fit almost twice as many cars in a conventional space and are green: The car is shut off the minute you drive into the loading bay, which means you’re not using gas, and spewing emissions, driving around and around to your designated spot.

It’s like parking in a “vault,” adds Nanner, whose system is much like the Swiss-designed system in place in Vancouver. Only staff have access to the garage and cars.

It now costs anywhere from \$35,000 to more than \$50,000 to build each condo parking spot in downtown Toronto, and that cost climbs higher the deeper a developer is forced to dig.

That’s becoming a considerable distance down given the economics of the current condo craze: Projects are getting taller, decent-sized lots are getting hard to find and the City of Toronto requires roughly one car spot for every two condos.

“I’m a lot happier going down in the elevator and picking up my own car, or having the valet do it. It’s basically a last resort, but I do think you will see them,” says Barry Fenton, president of Lanterra Developments who has toured four of the parking systems in Italy but fears long lineups for the lifts or complete breakdowns.

Wait times average two to seven minutes at Jameson House (which has just 135 residents) and tenants were given cab slips on the couple of occasions the system shut down.

KLAUS has some semi-automated systems in place in Toronto that take a bit of a Rubik’s cube approach to parking — a car lift moves up and down and over a spot or two to make room for the next empty lift.

The fully-automated systems are more Bond-like. The car appears to drop into a black hole.

But if you’re looking for the height of luxury, look no further than Florida where a proposed \$560-million highrise condo project is promising to give new meaning to the notion of park and fly.

You can ride in your car — or cars, depending on whether you bought the \$2 million or \$9 million unit — up a glass-enclosed elevator to your parking spot in the sky.

Then you can marvel at the lights of Miami, and the gleam of your Mercedes, right from your living-room couch.