

# Revamp the Ramp

Designers dream up new ways to improve your lot

by Karen Olson



It may look like funky warehouse offices, but it's actually the nation's only robotic parking garage in Hoboken, New Jersey.

The Mall of America in suburban Minneapolis is encircled by parking lots: layer upon layer of ramps on the east and west, surface lots on north and south. To help visitors navigate, the lots are sectioned and labeled. I like to park in "Hawaii." When I was a kid, "Giraffe" was my favorite lot at another mall. Mnemonic devices, yes, but there's something else going on here: distraction. Something to keep our minds off the fact that in a sea of cars, we're the outsiders.

If you've ever felt anxious or frustrated trying to find your car in a vast parking lot, it's not surprising. In his classic design manifesto, *A Pattern Language* (Oxford, 1977), Christopher Alexander calculates that when any more than 9 percent of a place is devoted to parking, we feel we don't