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**Reduce Footprint with Robotic Parking**

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The automobile is like a member of the family. It needs a space of its own so that residents and property owners alike are happy. Luckily there are some nifty technological solutions that, if budget allows or local ordinances require, are likely to maintain that happiness quotient while solving a number of challenges.



Photo Courtesy of Robotic Parking Systems

"When designing residential solutions, the biggest issue isn't figuring how to design this many one- or two-bedroom units," says Chris Texter, principal with architectural and planning firm KTGy Group, in Irvine, CA. "The hard part is figuring out where to put the cars without swallowing up your land."

Moreover, today's urban residential developments often include retail and office space in a mixed-use environment. Parking here is even more essential, but often less available.

Thus, some of the more compelling parking technologies are most closely identified with saving space. They involve a wide variety of mechanical lifts, turntables and fully robotic parking systems that can be suitable in urban environments where a project's footprint is small.

Texter, for example, has designed a project in Berkeley, CA, that featured out of necessity a subterranean garage with auto lifts from Klaus Car Parking Systems, in Lafayette, CA, lifting one level of cars overhead to make room for more underneath. Here the system has managed to fit 98 vehicles into an area fit for only 35 normal parking spaces.

A leader in installing these types of systems is American Custom Lifts, based in San Diego, CA. There's the usual array of lifts that hoist up one car to make room for another underneath, but for high-end applications the company also markets a system called PhantomPark, which (as its name implies) can be virtually hidden from view until operated. A car can drive onto the surface-level platform, and then be lowered to below-grade to make room for a second car on the surface. With enough overhead room, the whole contraption can be raised to retrieve the bottom car without disturbing the top one.

The company's president, Brad Davies, notes that high-end condos in urban environments are more appropriate for the PhantomPark, first because of the space savings, and secondly because the lifting mechanism is virtually invisible. Then there's the cost; a simple two-car lift system can cost about \$5,000, with the two-space PhantomPark system going for a cool \$50,000.

**A hands-off system**

Perhaps the most technologically advanced of parking systems is epitomized by Robotic Parking Systems, of Clearwater, FL. A driver pulls into an entry bay, and the car is whisked away via a robotic-type mechanism into a storage stacking system. Upon return, the driver activates the retrieval system, and the car is delivered to the exit station.

"We're currently in the process of installing the system in a mixed-use residential-office building in Dubai with a 1,250-space garage, and a hotel-condo in Florida with 300 spaces," says Mary Lou DeWyngaert, chief administrative officer with Robotic Parking. "You can reduce the amount of parking space by 30 to 50 percent."

Besides the no-muss-no-fuss convenience of a robotic system, DeWyngaert says the security aspect can be attractive.

"You don't have people wandering around internal portions of a garage, where crime statistics may be high," she says.

While these systems can be pricey, they do feature some financial spill-over for the property.

"Since parking in these situations is at a premium, property owners can be in a position to sell or rent the dramatically increased number of parking spaces," notes Texter. "And if you free up space in the garage, you can create added storage space which also can be a rental item. So you've got two benefits."

DeWyngaert adds that the freed-up space also can be used to add more residential units or retail space.

"Mechanical parking requires less land and less capital cost, and far less management and onsite labor," says James Rappoport,

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vice president of Daroff Design Inc.+DDI Architects, in Philadelphia. He adds that such systems also require less light and lower insurance premiums, "and thus there is the potential for more net income."

There's even a green element. With a fully automated robotic system there are no emissions in the garage, eliminating the need for open-air venting.

Carrying the green element further, Texter sees the time coming when multi-family properties will be installing electric-vehicle chargers in their parking garages. Electric vehicles are sure to become more numerous; charging systems can add a competitive, green cachet to a property, he notes, with the potential for a nifty income stream as well.

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