

# BEEN THERE **HAVEN'T** DONE THAT

By Prof. Barry Goldsmith

## Miami's Beached Cars

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**W**e've traveled the world together—everywhere but the United States. Let's visit our own backyard, or at least our garage. *BEEN THERE, HAVEN'T DONE THAT* has already covered places where horses are covered (February, 2011), showing that many stables are worthwhile historic and artistic sites in their own right. Let's visit the stables of the 20th and 21st centuries—I mean parking garages.

Why would anyone spend money to make beautiful garages? Why would anyone disguise stables as palaces? To protect and treasure something very dear to them—transportation.

In ancient Rome, Caligula appointed his horse a senator. In 20th-century Rome, did Mussolini ever appoint his car a Senator? However, since the car is worshiped in many cultures, beautiful parking garages should reflect the car's exalted place. Three hundred horsepower should be as luxuriously housed as one horse.

You can tell a city by its sidewalks and also by where it puts its cars that are not parked next to a sidewalk. The exception might be Rome, where cars are parked on the sidewalk.

It seems as if every Spanish city hides its cars in underground parking garages under parks. Spain puts the "park" in "parking." From Bilbao to Burgos to Barcelona, scratch the surface of a park or plaza and you'll find a parking garage. It's expensive, but it preserves the urban fabric—and nature.

Atlanta buries parking garages under office buildings or builds separate parking garages that look like—parking garages. The horse-and-buggy equivalent would be building wooden barns alongside magnificent stone palaces. It's a hideous solution that says, "Cars first, people second."

I recently visited South Beach and was really impressed by its Art Deco architecture. I've studied Art Deco and taught Art Deco, so I knew what to expect: dozens of small imaginatively decorated and excellently restored Art Deco hotels.

South Beach is pedestrian friendly. Major sites are within walking distance. Age is flaunted, be it in the older hotels or older cars that parade in a line, every night, in front of Ocean Drive's neon-highlighted Art Deco gems. As in Santa Monica, CA, if you don't feel like driving on a vacation, you won't feel stranded.

South Beach has the most stylish parking garages I have ever seen. And they overcome problems beneath the surface that you would not find in New York, LA or Atlanta. South Beach parking garages must be built above ground because of the high water table in South Florida. South Beach did not invent the beautiful parking garage. Believe it or not, it was the Soviet Union. After the fall of the Russian autocracy, a spurt of architectural creativity stunned the artistic world—a clean break with the past (until Stalin put an end to it). This strikingly prophetic, proto-21st-century architecture—Soviet Constructivism (1918-1933)—is contemporaneous with Germany's much more famous Bauhaus, but Soviet Constructivism is much less angular and much more flamboyant.

In South Beach, the only cars you're almost guaranteed to see parked on the street are cars from the 1950s and 60s – almost permanently anchored in front of hotels, whose two-tone colors the cars seem to have inspired. Which came first, the turquoise and white 1955 Buick convertible or that turquoise and white Art



Deco hotel proudly standing in the background?

Something is wrong with this picture: Hotels from the 1930s and early 1940s should have cars from the 1930s and early 1940s parked in front. And the hotels' colors should match the more muted tones of these cars from this Depression era. Art Deco generally did not use bright startling colors like turquoise and hot pinks. 1950's car colors are from the period when these Art Deco hotels were already in decline. In its prime, Art Deco used more subtle, neutral and muted tones. While South Beach's collectors' cars are displayed in front of Art Deco hotels, regular cars are parked in Neo Art Deco buildings – South Beach's magnificent parking garages—many built to imitate the surrounding Art Deco hotels. A prime example is the Neo Art Deco 13th Street Garage complete with porthole windows and bright salmon and beige tones.

Another garage in Neo Art Deco camouflage is at 1041 Collins Avenue. This garage looks more like an Art Deco office building than some Art Deco office buildings. Then there's the Anchor Garage, which doesn't just blend in with old Art Deco, it actually towers above and envelopes two smaller real Art Deco buildings, which the garage's builders restored. One building was the old Anchor Hotel, hence the name "Anchor Garage."

Architecture in the 21st century extols the virtues of "Green" design. South Beach has the ultimate in green design in (of all places) a parking garage, by cutting-edge Miami architects Arquitectonica. What's greener than a building with a green-planted wall? A building with several green-planted walls. This green Ballet Valet Parking Garage (yes, that's its name) at 630 Collins Avenue doesn't even look like a garage. All its cars are hidden by greenery. In fact, it looks like the hanging-garden parking garage of Babylon—vines, bushes and trees crawling out from every crevice. I call it the "Chia Pet parking garage."

Because of a 2003 South Beach planning ordinance requiring all free-standing parking garages to have retail at the street level, they nicely blend into this pedestrian-friendly part of Miami.

As in Moscow, South Beach's parking garages are becoming tourist sites unto themselves. South Beach's garages have become so prominent that "Starchitects" are now designing them. Frank Gehry's New World Center Garage, with its corner spiral tower, just opened in January.

And Herzog de Meuron's sculptural Garage at 1111 Lincoln Road is even floodlit at night like other world-class landmarks visit. I like this garage so much, I took a folding chair and parked myself on the top level to absorb the total experience.

By the way, I even found an artistic parking lot in Miami. It's the parking lot of the Gary Nader Fine Art Gallery, which doubles as a sculpture garden. His Botero sculptures could not fit into a parking space—they were too fat.