

Auto enthusiasts move to the next level to store their vehicles

By **Martin Zimmerman**

And now, for the car collector who has everything, including too many cars: the Taj Garage.

Obviously, a public parking structure or a dusty warehouse is the wrong place to store that 1956 Mercedes-Benz 300SL coupe you picked up for \$350,000 at the Pebble Beach auction.

The solution could be a car condo.

Imagine a garage with a bathroom, a wet bar, no oil stains on the floor and security guards 24/7. With a concierge who will arrange your next service appointment. With a private rooftop club where you can share a bottle of wine and talk cars with fellow collectors.

All for the cost of a modest single-family home.

As the market for human housing falters, developers around the country are pushing ahead with plans to build homes for four-wheeled investments. The projects are being marketed as part-garage, part-home away from home, part-clubhouse for car nuts.

"This isn't something for the Jay Lenos who have their own [car] hangars at the Burbank airport," said Greg Anderson, automotive editor of the Robb Report, which chronicles the high life of the upper classes. Nor for Shaquille O'Neal, who can squeeze his 30-vehicle garage onto the grounds of his home in Florida.

"But if you have a dozen cars, or even five — enough that you can't



Nicholas Patin, with his vintage 1956 Porsche Speedster, left, and his 2003 Porsche X50. He is in the parking lot of an old warehouse that he plans to convert to a storage facility for expensive exotic and vintage autos. Fancy car condos are becoming increasingly popular among wealthy vehicle collectors. — Karen Iapla-Andersen/Los Angeles Times

fit them into your garage — it can make sense."

It does to Alex Dastmalchi, a resort developer who lives in Newport Beach with a budding collection of classic and exotic cars that includes a 1971 Plymouth Barracuda 340 — complete with bumblebee stripes. He also has a \$240,000 Ferrari F 430 Spider and Rolls-Royce Phantom Drophead Coupe on order.

"I'm scattered all over the place," said Dastmalchi, 37. "I've got a couple in my garage. I've got some in my driveway. I'm paying storage fees at an underground parking garage."

So Dastmalchi put a \$50,000 deposit on two 650-square-foot car condos — which will ultimately set him back \$650,000 — at Luxury on Main, a three-story, 80-unit development planned for a two-acre site near John Wayne Airport in Irvine.

Nicholas Patin, owner of the \$30-million-plus project, envisions a high-end haven.

"We're designing a facility where collectors can congregate and store their special vehicles in a special place," said Patin, whose own collection includes a 1987 Ferrari Testarossa Gemballa and a 1956 Porsche Speedster.

"The genesis for this whole thing was that I found myself going to a parking garage on Saturdays and taking a tarp off my car and saying, 'This is not the way I want to manage my collection.'"

The standard unit at Luxury on Main will comfortably house four vehicles. Two to four more can be stacked vertically.

Those who want to go the extra mile — and spend the extra dollars — can customize their condos with decorating schemes offered by GarageMaha!, an Arizona company

that specializes in indulgent interior designs for garages.

Interior design packages at Luxury on Main start at \$60 a square foot and go up from there. Options range from Art Deco classic to gas station modern to just about anything you can imagine.

"If somebody wants a bat cave, I'll build 'em a bat cave," GarageMaha! owner Michael Rhodin said.

Luxury on Main is scheduled to open in the latter part of next year. Patin wouldn't disclose how many depositors had pointed up so far but said he was trolling for buyers at local spots where classic and exotic car owners congregate. His sales agent is John McMonigle, a real estate agent whose forte is marketing ultra-high-end residential properties.

Pretty soon, Patin could have competition.

Jack Griffin, the brains behind

Dream Garage USA, hasn't finished his first car condo project in Dallas and he's already scouting locations in Southern California.

Like Patin, Griffin foresees a string of car condo developments. Besides upscale storage and common areas, the Dream Garage strategy includes repair facilities and auto-focused retail.

"We're blowin' and goin,'" Griffin said from his Dallas office. "Our plan is to take this concept all over the country."

Meanwhile, in San Jose, the 120,000-square-foot Club Auto Sport is scheduled to open in the spring. Co-founder Ralph Borrelli thinks it's a no-brainer because people don't collect cars just to let them sit in the dark.

"If you have this collection at home, that's all well and good, but you're an island," he said. "Unless you invite people over to see it, you're all by yourself."

Does all this portend a car condo glut? No worries, say the car-condo developers, who point to recent successful classic and exotic car auctions as evidence that collecting is growing in popularity.

At the Barrett-Jackson auction in Scottsdale, Ariz., in January, 1,270 vehicles were sold for \$112 million. That compares with 878 vehicles and \$61 million just two years earlier.

And all those cars have to go somewhere.

— Los Angeles Times
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contributed to this report.