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Architects design parking projects to fit in smaller spaces

East Bay Business Times - by [Mike White](#) East Bay Business Times

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It may sound oxymoronic, but parking is going green.

As sales of fuel-efficient cars have skyrocketed, the architecture industry responsible for creating parking spots for these and other automobiles is going through a quiet revolution of its own, becoming an integral part of the larger green building movement.

Being more environmentally sensitive manifests itself in a variety of ways in the parking industry, including solar panels on top of parking structures and using "green" building materials.

"People are making buildings in a more-efficient manner, with parking structures as an integral component," said Raju Nandwana, vice president of International Parking Design Inc., which is based in Sherman Oaks and has offices in Alameda, Sacramento and Irvine. "Bringing people back to city centers is a primary thrust of the architectural industry, including parking."

Parking is a \$26 billion industry

Nandwana, who is in charge of the company's Alameda office, has watched for the past 12 years as the industry has gone from building large open lots to providing substantially more parking places in a smaller space. In other words, the industry has gone "vertical instead of horizontal," Nandwana said.

Parking may not be the most glamorous part of the architectural industry, but it is integral to almost anything built. The International Parking Institute estimates that there are more than 105 million spaces in the U.S. Parking is a \$26 billion industry, of which more than \$13 billion is directly attributable to public-sector parking operations, such as those run by cities, colleges and airports.

As the housing market has declined, the thrust of the industry has shifted more to the public sector, which is keenly interested in environmentally sensitive projects.

"Most of our clients in California are approaching us from a point of view that sustainability is a good thing," said Michelle Wendler, a principal with Watry Design Inc. in Redwood City. "If you have to provide parking, structure parking is better than covering a large area with asphalt. It's a better use and conserves green space."



Stephanie Secret | East Bay Business Times

Raju Nandwana of International Parking Design

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It also is much more expensive. The International Parking Institute estimates that it costs about \$7,000 to build a space in a multilevel garage compared to \$1,500 per space for a surface facility.

But going green does not always cost more money. Some alternative construction materials, such as fly ash, which can replace a portion of the cement used in a construction project, costs the same or less, said Wendler, who has worked on more than 250 parking projects during the past 19 years, including downtown parking structures in Walnut Creek and the Ikea parking structure in Emeryville.

Her company was involved in a 407-space structure in Mountain View that opened in 2007 with retail shops on the ground floor and four levels of parking above. A rooftop photovoltaic system powers the building's lights and elevators.

There's a push to bring more technology to parking structures, including signs that show where to find a vacant space. For buildings with tight parking considerations, more-cutting-edge technology is available: Stacked parking, more commonly seen in parts of Europe and Asia, is making an appearance in the East Bay.

Bright future for stacked parking

Systems differ, but advanced versions use hydraulic lifts to stack cars on top of one another. Lafayette-based Klaus Parking Systems has installed several of these stacked systems in Berkeley, including one for Panoramic Interests that allows 39 cars to park in the space of 13.

Klaus installed the first triple-stack parking system of its type in North America in 2006 in conjunction with Arbor Building Group Inc. The project at the Jade condominiums in downtown Oakland allows 78 cars to fit into 12,000 square feet of space and cut construction time by two months, because less excavation was required.

At Arbor, executives believe stacked parking has a bright future. Parking systems will continue to play a role in projects where densities are important, said Mark Ebner of Arbor. While some of the technology in the parking industry is cutting-edge, the profession of parking architecture is not always embraced by those in the outside world, including people who view the idea of building more parking lots as outdated.

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Nandwana hears from people on occasion who associate the parking structure as a symbol of all that's evil in development in this country. He asks these people if they drive a car. If they do, he tells them they are a client.

"It is a necessary evil in our society," he said. "When people are complaining about traffic, the majority of these people are not driving through the city; they are searching for a place to park. The more open places you have to park your vehicle, the less congestion you will have."

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