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A parking system the Jetsons would love at 1706 Rittenhouse

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Four years ago, developers [Tom Scannapieco](#) and [Joe Zuritsky](#) described a cutting edge automated parking system that would be installed in 1706 Rittenhouse Square, a new 31-story, luxury condominium tower just off Rittenhouse Square in Center City.

When I wrote about it then, I said it sounded like something the Jetsons would be proud of. I took a ride on it late last week, and George, Judy, Elroy and Jane, his wife, would definitely be impressed.

The high-tech parking system is the latest model by Wöhr, a German company, and only the fourth to be installed in the world. While the technology is becoming more common throughout Europe and the Far East, its prevalence isn't widespread in the United States. New York City has two and Washington, D.C., boasts one. Quality Elevator Inc. of Pennsauken, N.J., installed the system at 1706 Rittenhouse.

The parking system borrows from a warehousing storing process where items are housed in cavernous warehouses on shelves connected to conveyers. In this case, pallets that carry the vehicles are moved on tracks that lift and lower the car as well as spin it around and park it.

The subterranean parking garage sits nearly five stories below grade and is four to five feet below the watertable. The condo tower sits above it.

"The hole is very expensive," Zuritsky said.

It has backup generators and redundancies to ensure a vehicle can always be retrieved. The building's trash container is also stored in the underground space — keeping it out-of-sight for tenants, some of whom plunked down \$12 million for a unit.

The expense of the parking system, which cost more than an estimated \$8 million, was worth it, according to both developers.

"It's a great solution for the building," Scannapieco said.

By hiding the garage and not making it a bulky above ground structure, it helped keep the building's interior and exterior design tidy and flowing without interruption, especially from a pedestrian's perspective. The garage has room for 64 vehicles and, though there's a waiting list, a space can be bought for \$140,000.

Using the system is easy.

A vehicle is equipped with a transponder, which is just like the E-ZPass system that lets cars move through toll booths without stopping. The transponder sends a signal to open up the doors so motorists can pull their vehicle into a two-story covered courtyard. The vehicle is then driven on top of what is essentially a large elevator where a pallet is waiting for them.

A digital sign tells the driver the vehicle has properly been placed on the pallet and advises the driver to exit. A sensor then looks for any signs of life — dog, baby — that may have accidentally been left in the car. The driver then swipes a programmed card much in the same way a hotel room card key is used, and that signals the system whose car it is parking.

The vehicle is then lowered and spun into the underground parking area. Instead of traditional parking spots, the vehicle, which remains on the pallet, is stacked and stored in rows on a steel racking system connected to the conveyer.

When the driver wants the car returned all it takes is one swipe of the programmed card, which can be done in the elevator on their way down from the condo. The system locates the correct vehicle. The car then rises from underground, is spun around into an exit position and is ready to be driven off within a minute of the initial card swipe.