THE SKY LINE

WHEELHOUSE

Herzog and de Meuron reinvent the parking garage.

BY PAUL GOLDBERGER

Cars are great for getting people to buildings, but a nuisance once you arrive. Maybe that's why architects put so much effort into making them disappear, stuffing them into parking garages that seem designed in the hope that they, too, might become invisible. But invisibility is not in the vocabulary of the Swiss architects Jacques Herzog and Pierre de Meuron, whose projects in the past decade have included the Bird's Nest Olympic stadium, in Beijing; the Tate Modern, in London; and the de Young Museum, in San Francisco. You wouldn't expect them to bother even returning a phone call about a parking garage, any more than Rem Koolhaas would stoop to designing a dentist's office. But Herzog and de Meuron have a history of rethinking conventional archetypes and of taking on unlikely projects just to see where they will lead, and 1111 Lincoln Road, the parking structure they have just built in Miami Beach, is one of the most compelling things they have done in years. Parking garages fill block after block of our cities, and Herzog and de Meuron clearly relished the challenge of showing that they don't have to be a blight.

It's a problem that only a few architects have grappled with, and still fewer successfully. At the dawn of the automobile age, Auguste Perret, the great French architect and pioneer of concrete construction, built a garage in Paris in which cars were placed around a three-story skylit atrium. Yet even Perret assumed that the cars themselves should be hidden. His garage, completed in 1905, was starkly modern, but its façade, which featured an elaborately patterned central window, like an angular update of a rose window, offered no hint of the building's purpose. In New York, meanwhile, most early garages were converted stables, which suggested that denial, or at least camouflage, was the only proper way to handle the new horseless carriages.

Garages that tried to celebrate the automobile or make a feature of it have had a way of not getting built. In 1925, the Russian Constructivist Konstantin Melnikov came up with a remarkable scheme to put a huge parking garage over the Seine; the same year Frank Lloyd Wright designed something he called the Gordon Strong Automobile Objective and Planetarium, a spiral structure intended to be an adventure in driving as well as a place to park. Both architects decided that ramps should be a central design element, and neither saw his idea realized—though Wright at least got to reuse his spiral-ramp idea when he came to build the Guggenheim. Oddly, it was carless Venice that constructed what was probably the first major parking garage that seemed proud of what it was: Eugenio Miozzi's enormous Autorimessa. Finished in 1934, this sprawling structure with huge helical ramps provided space to store twenty-five hundred cars on the outskirts of the city. Down the years, there have been a few comparable examples. Paul Rudolph's Temple Street Garage, in New Haven, finished in 1963, is a lyrical structure of rough concrete, whose curving columns and convex balustrades suggest a perfect balance of movement and stasis. And in Chicago the famous "corncob" towers of Bertrand Goldberg's Marina City feature seventeen stacked round floors, with no exterior walls, filled with thirteen hundred parked cars; instead of being hidden, the parking floors serve as the base of a sixty-story skyscraper. Still, buildings like this remained exceptions. Most garages are essentially concrete file cabinets, and they look it.

In Herzog and de Meuron's new building, cars are a centerpiece rather than a dirty secret: they sit on strikingly thin, elegant concrete slabs, like canapés on a stack of trays. The building's real achievement lies in being both bold and utterly refined. From a distance, it reads as massive and weighty, but, because its parking floors don't have any exterior walls, you can see right through it: the closer you get, the lighter it seems. (Such is the exploded look of the floor-throughs that it took many people in Miami Beach a while to realize that the building was finished.) There are sharply angled columns, which, together with the thin floor slabs, make the structure feel nimble despite its size, like a linebacker who can sprint. The six parking levels, which hold three hundred cars, are uneven in height, ranging from eight feet, which is fairly standard, to a monumental thirty-four feet, lending the building a sense of unpredictability and drama. And when you get really close, and start walking up the spectacular open concrete staircase that winds its way through the structure like a piece of sculpture, you see details totally unexpected in this context, as if the linebacker had suddenly begun to recite poetry. Most garages don't have indirect lighting, or hidden pipes and sprinkler systems, or railings made of steel cable so thin that it is practically invisible from a few feet away—an innovation that leaves the cars looking as if they were parked at the edge of a cliff. (There are discreet steel chocks in front of the railings to make sure that drivers don't crash through the nearly invisible barrier and drive off the edge.) Where the railings meet the building's concrete columns, each piece of thin steel cable runs directly into the concrete instead of being anchored to a metal plate. It's a tiny detail and might seem trivial, but when you walk up to it the sheer subtlety of execution creates a real sensual pleasure.

The project began in 2005, when a developer named Robert Wennett bought a nineteen-sixties bank building and an adjacent parking lot at the head of Lincoln Road, the spine of Miami Beach's shopping district, which was transformed into a pedestrian mall in 1960 by Morris Lapidus, the architect whose swooping hotel designs have become synonymous with the neighborhood. The bank is a heavy-handed, neo-Brutalist structure of precast concrete, the kind of bargain-basement

knockoff of Le Corbusier that everyone loves to hate but that has been gaining in popularity recently among people who pride themselves on having cutting-edge taste. After many years of decline, Lincoln Road was benefitting from the resurgence of South Beach and becoming a fashionable retail location again. Wennett figured he could make the old building the centerpiece of a larger project, filled with trendy stores and office space for creative businesses. There seemed to be plenty of room to expand onto the parking lot, and he envisioned putting an addition there that would work with the existing building while having a strong sculptural presence of its own. There was only one difficulty: the bank building was so overbearing that it would have swallowed most new buildings, a problem exacerbated by zoning restrictions that set a limit on how big the addition could be—just two-thirds of the hundred-and-fourteen-foot height of the existing building. But in Miami Beach, as in many cities, parking garages don't count toward the calculation of a building's size; weaving parking spaces through the addition helped bulk up the new structure to the point that it became not only as big as the older building but far more commanding.

The two structures are actually good neighbors, and the old one, next to its glamorous new spouse, looks stronger and more self-assured than it used to. The buildings are joined by bridges on the upper levels as well as by a unified storefront design at the ground level, where the developer has attracted tenants like Taschen books, a design store, and a Miami outpost of the ever-expanding Shake Shack. There is even something—in addition to the view—to entice people who aren't parking cars to head to the upper levels of the garage: a boutique designed by the architect Rene Gonzalez, which you can reach by stairs or by elevator—or, for that matter, by car. You could call this a mixed-use building that happens to have cars driving through it. But that would be suggesting a level of propriety or gentility that 1111 Lincoln Road doesn't try to have. It is a parking garage that has shops on the ground floor, spectacular views, a grand staircase, wildly flamboyant public spaces, a chic fashion shop in a glass box overlooking the city from the fifth floor, and a residential penthouse, which Wennett is going to live in himself. This is surely the first parking garage in history to be regularly rented out for parties.

At 1111 Lincoln Road, the absence of exterior walls makes cars look as if they were perched on a cliff edge. Photograph by Iwan Baan.

One architect at Herzog & de Meuron described the building to me as representing a merger of architecture and infrastructure, but this is no highway ramp pretending to be a building. It's a thoroughly exuberant piece of architecture that takes its inspiration from the idea that there is genuine worth in trying to invite cars into buildings instead of wishing them away. The Lincoln Road project takes sixties architecture and the automobile, unpleasant facts of life in so many places, and makes something new of them. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM/VIDEO
Paul Goldberger on 1111 Lincoln Road.