



Frank Floor Talk

Frank Floor Talk: Parking paradise

Buddy Frank, CDC Gaming Reports · June 23, 2021 at 8:00 am

Folk singer Joni Mitchell first decried that “They paved paradise and put up a parking lot.” But some would say that a good casino parking spot is “paradise.” One believer is Mike Meczka of MM/R/C Inc. He and his research firm have been surveying casino guests and their preferences for more than 30 years. And the results of his queries on parking are often surprising.

It was about two dozen years ago when he first told me, “Your best players don’t necessarily like valet parking.” I’m not sure why, but I (and most of our casino management team) were fairly certain that all “high rollers” required premium valet service. When we read Meczka’s reports, it turned out that:

- *Not everyone likes their radio stations reset to gangster rap*
- *Some drivers don’t want others to see the mess inside their car (or their rental)*
- *Often those “messes” consisted of things that were valuable, illegal and/or embarrassing*
- *For some, their glove box is as private as their wallet or purse*
- *Many players simply don’t like anyone else driving their personal vehicles*

His advice was golden, and we quickly realized that while some players liked valet, most just wanted a good parking spot close to the casino. In those early days, the prevailing wisdom was also that the gold standard of parking was a large surface lot. You only built a garage if you didn’t have room for a large lot.

But that’s all changed. Meczka says, “*With today’s older demographics and their reduced mobility, most players prefer a well-designed garage.*”

If you want to see an example of a near-perfect garage design, look at the “Garage Mahal” at the recently opened Circa Resort & Casino in downtown Las Vegas.



Circa’s website is not above bragging: it is the *“most high-tech transportation hub in Las Vegas. Garage Mahal easily accommodates ride sharing, valet, self-parking and long-term parking for loyal Circa guests. More than just the cleanest, safest parking garage in Las Vegas, Garage Mahal is a literal work of art. Take in art installations by featured artist on our two corner video walls as you take your car in and out.”*

Owner Derek Stevens probably didn’t have an option to build a massive surface lot in the confines of downtown Vegas; but even if he did, this garage is a better solution. It features 1,000 spaces on eight stories. Each floor is color-coded to help find your car, there’s WiFi throughout (also important for those apps that help you find your lost car) and there’s a climate-controlled bridge that connects guests directly to Circa without having to go outside.

Meczka’s latest research indicates that guests have no problem using elevators and don’t mind parking on upper levels. But, he says, *“They want to have direct access to the casino and must have a short walk from their car to an elevator.”*

McCarthy Building Companies, Inc. were the contractors on this garage, and their director of design integration, Mark Mohning adds, *“Many times the first impression for your guests starts in the garage, so walking distance to elevators plays a critical role. In addition to overall distance, once a guest arrives at the elevators, the speed and quantity of elevators plays just as an important role shaping that first impression.”*



Remarkably, some older garages seemingly were never designed for actual cars and drivers. Spaces are often narrow and ramps are difficult to navigate. My first casino job was at the former Fitzgeralds Casino & Hotel in Reno, NV. I don't think we ever went more than two week days without a valet parker or a guest sideswiping a car against a wall or the pillars of our poorly-designed garage.

Mohning agrees, *“How many times have you been in an older garage that seems way too small, with low ceilings, and nearly impossible turning radiuses? There are many design features like higher ceilings, wider structural spans and column spacing, speed ramps, angled parking, wider end aisles, and natural lighting and ventilation that help to improve the experience for the end user through the architecture of the space.”*



If the photos make it appear that this new garage is well lit, it is. Mohning says, *“A bright environment is not only safer for pedestrians walking through the garage, but it’s also safer for drivers being able to more clearly identify hazards like cars backing out of blind spaces or pedestrians. In addition to the LED lighting...a well-designed garage can introduce as much natural daylighting as possible. Many times, a well-designed garage with plenty of natural light can allow the interior lighting to be placed on a photocell that de-energizes them during the day, therefore further saving energy and reducing cost to the owner.”*

In defense of older structures, many of the elements featured in Garage Mahal didn’t exist a few years back. “Ride Sharing” is a relatively new concept but is now critical in a casino environment. How many times have you encountered a Lyft/Uber drop-off/pick-up zone that looks more like the freight dock than a quality guest area?

Likewise, hunting for a garage parking space used to be challenging. Today, it is simplified with red/green LED indicators based on sensors that allow you to easily spot “green” vacancies.

Another overlooked feature is “sound.” Again, from Mohning, *“I think it depends on the user group, but in hospitality it’s a necessity. From the second a guest gets out of their car or ride share, you want their exceptional experience to be molded. This often begins with the music in the garage. The walk from their car, across the garage, into the elevator, and eventually into the property can be made to feel seamless with continuous, uninterrupted songs playing along each step of the way.”*

While it can be difficult to upgrade the ceiling or ramps on an older casino garage, sound, LEDs with sensors, lighting, video walls and WiFi can all be retrofitted with minimal expense. Hopefully, with 2021 volumes returning, many will consider making these enhancements to make parking more enjoyable.

In the meantime, SciFi legend Isaac Asimov has this reassuring quote, *“[Life is a journey, but don’t worry, you’ll find a parking spot at the end.](#)”*

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