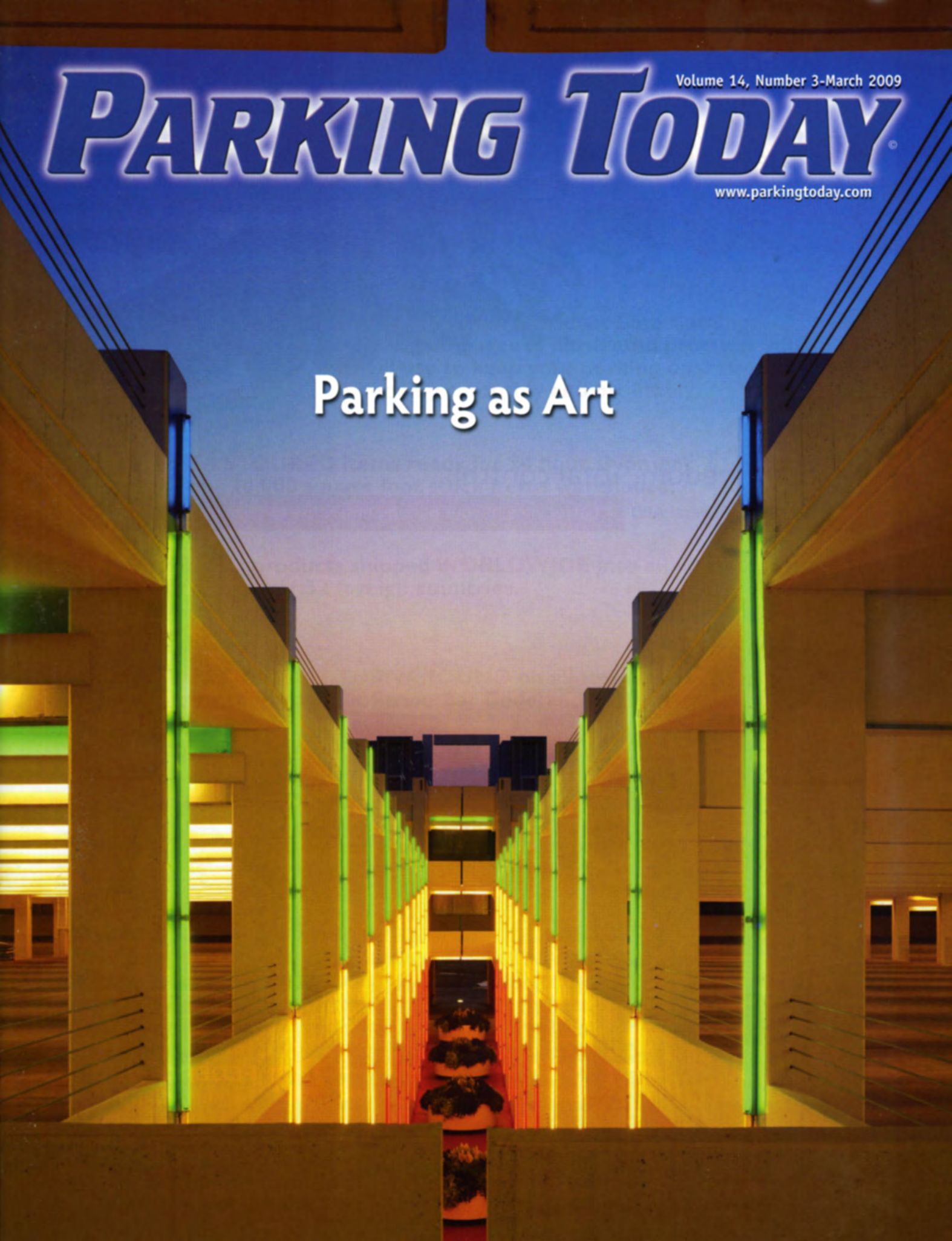


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Parking as Art





Mission: Parking as Art

BY RAND ELLIOT

PARKING GARAGES PROVIDE A perfunctory purpose in today's corporate environment. The requirement is simple. We have people, we have cars; and we need to put them away temporarily. End of story? Not exactly.

We all use parking garages and agree that most experiences are less than great. For many, garages have been dismissed as only necessary in our work-a-day world.

Elliott + Associates has set about to reinvent the parking garage experience. Happily, we had the perfect client in Chesapeake Energy and its CEO, Aubrey McClendon.

The reinvention began with renaming the place a "car park" and envisioning a place to store cars. The goal was simply to acknowledge the typical reaction to most parking garage experiences. Patrons generally describe them as dark, dirty, low, confusing and oil-spotted — a place no one really wants to be.

With a focus on functionality, safety and compatibility with the Oklahoma City campus, the new

Chesapeake Car Park makes a positive statement about the corporation itself and the value it places on the quality of the campus environment.

The building covers a city block and stores 791 vehicles.

With such a large scale, the architects skinned the structure in 3/8"-wide stainless steel mesh. The 25% open weave allows air movement as required by code and responds to the light in Oklahoma.

With 300 sun-days per year, the reflective quality of the mesh allows the surface to "dissolve" into the sky from reflections. The edges disappear and the surface provides a daily report on the ever-changing weather. At sunset, the western elevation captures the magic moment when the yellow becomes orange and finally becomes purple just before black.

A unique feature of the exterior is the aluminum outriggers on the east and south elevations. These 4' extensions create changing linear shadows that artistically hint of the contents. The linear shadow becomes the same line as the parking stripe hidden inside.

In an effort to "connect" the Car Park to the existing campus across the street, we incorporated masonry. However, we needed a



The center atrium at the Chesapeake Car Park allows sunlight to flood the interior of the garage and provides a colorful view for parkers.

“transparent” wall to fulfill the 25% open code criteria. We chose a clay-fired 8” x 8” x 8” solar block in a matching color to the campus king-size brick. The visual and material link is maintained between the modified Georgian campus architecture and the modern architecture across the street.

We all have been lost in an unfamiliar parking structure with a rental car that we cannot remember. Visual orientation and

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memorable visual queues are crucial to navigation within parking structures.

We purposely chose to place the elevator on the destination side – by the Chesapeake campus, in this case – with a window so that visitors could visually connect the garage and their destination. It also adds a bit of charm and fun to the experience. Stairs are adjacent to the elevator, if one prefers to walk.

Having said that, the stairs offer another opportunity to improve the experience while being useful as well. We elected to add the same colored fluorescent lighting in the stairwells to emphasize the color / level connection and a fun atmospheric journey.

In an effort to reinvent the parking garage, we considered hiding the cars from view to passersby. We incorporated a 48”-tall concrete bumper wall at the outer edge of each level to block the view of the vehicle from outside. Our belief is that we could change the preconceived image of a parking structure into a



Colored lighting instantly tells drivers the color code of the floor on which they parked.



The metal screen exterior with four foot outriggers that provide linear shadows hinting at the use of the facility.

handsome, artistic architecture that becomes an asset and a recruiting tool for new employees.

Landscaping is an important aspect of any project and especially parking structures. The scale required that the building be softened and humanized as it integrates into the campus environment. Everyone walks from building to building, so trees and seasonal color add to a positive experience.

Since this facility serves a corporate campus, visitors are here each day. We wanted to make the place an experience worth remembering. Greeted with “Welcome Back” or “Have a Great Day,” the experience begins immediately. All interior surfaces are painted white and the clear height is 10’ – 6”. Color-coded levels are defined with bold graphics, and colored fluorescent lighting visually reinforces the level.

Finally, the surprise is a full height 13’-wide lighted atrium that contributes to air circulation and contains a light sculpture using the four floor-level colors. It is hard to forget the floor you parked on.

Mission accomplished. Parking as art.

Rand Elliott is founder of Elliott and Associates. Contact him at relliott@e-a-a.com. The project team included Chesapeake Energy Corp.: Aubrey McClendon, Dan LeDonne; Rand Elliott, FAIA; Bill Yen, AIA; Miho Kollipoulos, AIA; John Creach, Assoc. AIA; and Walker Parking Consultants.

For more information, go to www.e-a-a.com; or for information on the steel mesh, go to www.wstyler.com.

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