

THE NEW TOBIN CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS opened in 2014 and revolutionized the arts scene in downtown San Antonio, Texas, bringing an influx of people to an area of town that already had limited parking. As a result, just a short walk away from its namesake, the Tobin Center Parking Garage was designed to provide event and additional daily parking and be a complementary artistic element to the award-winning Tobin Center and the unique surrounding community.

Marmon Mok, a local architecture firm, was commissioned to design the new Tobin Garage. The firm, in association with LMN Architects, provided the architectural services for the renovation and expansion of the Tobin Center. Marmon Mok also designed the adjoining Will Naylor Smith Plaza, an urban park that links the nationally known San Antonio Riverwalk with the Tobin Center. With Marmon Mok's extensive experience with both projects and the firm's thorough understanding of the clients, Marmon Mok was able to craft a beautiful and functional space to support the community.

The Partnership and Goals

The Tobin Garage was developed as a public/private partnership between the Tobin Center for the Performing Arts, First Baptist Church, city of San Antonio,

and Bexar County. With several stakeholders involved, the space needed to function as an efficient, multipurpose facility. The parking goals were threefold:

- To relieve the parking congestion from the revived Tobin Center.
- To serve the parking needs of the First Baptist Church.
- To provide public parking for downtown destinations, maximizing use through the varying schedules.

Challenges

The Tobin Garage is a great project to examine because it had several unique challenges outside the realm of most traditional parking structures. The design challenges were fivefold:

- Making sure the unique objectives of each stakeholder were met.



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San Antonio's new Tobin Center Garage serves many purposes with style.

By Jenny Puls

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REVOLUTION

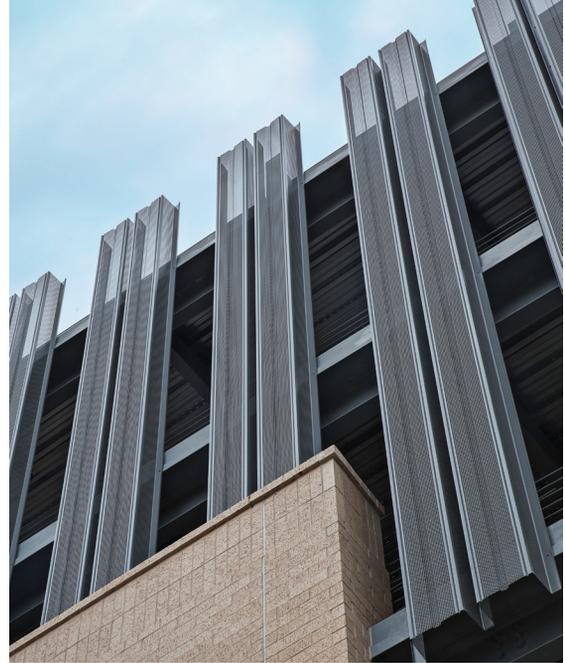
- Creating a functional building on an unusual, one-acre triangular site.
- Appropriately recognizing the historic influence of the surrounding community.
- Optimizing efficiency for parking and commercial lease space along the two intersecting public streets.
- Creating a reference to the architecture of the recently renovated Tobin Center and the First Baptist Church.

The Site

The first and most obvious obstacle to tackle was the unusual triangular site. “Though it was a challenge, it was extremely rewarding to step beyond the literal box of parking garages,” says Marmon Mok Partner-in-Charge Steve Souter. “We wanted to design for the space, not because of the space, so the resulting design was a triangular, six-level, 520-car garage.” But the shape and capacity were only the beginning.

The site has a highly unique location, nestled within two city districts. First, it needed to integrate into the Auditorium Circle Historic District. Because of San Antonio’s rich cultural history that dates back to 1700, historic designations address archaeological, architectural, and cultural merits of the area. As such, excavation, demolition, design, and construction have restrictions and requirements to maintain the integrity of the district.

In addition to being a new amenity on Auditorium Circle, the Tobin Garage was also built within a River Improvement Overlay (RIO) District. The



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San Antonio River is the lifeline of the city, and RIO Districts are subject to regulations designed to protect, preserve, and enhance the river and adjacent improvements by establishing design standards and guidelines for properties located nearby. Because both districts have their own unique requirements, the Tobin Garage was thoughtfully designed and carefully crafted. The goal was not just to meet the high standards of the surrounding tenants and interested officials, but to exceed them and create a structure that would be a source of pride for the community.

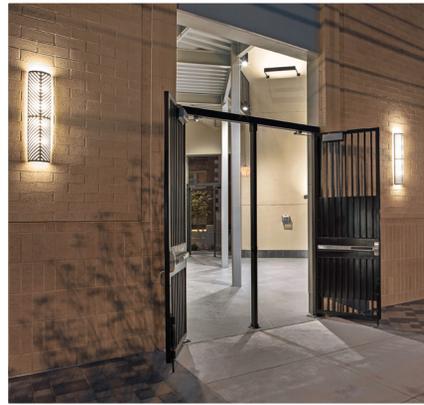
Additional Features

While parking is the primary function of the Tobin Garage, it also boasts 14,000 square feet of lease space and was designed with flexibility and options to have outdoor dining or seating at the corner of the site. This provided additional opportunities to revitalize the surrounding downtown and Auditorium Circle district, giving more options for small business owners

to have downtown space and creating the opportunity for more jobs in a bustling San Antonio city center.

The Structure

As much as the Tobin Garage is a highly functional and efficient use of space, it is also a beautiful structure. The building respects the massing and materials of the surrounding historic buildings but has its own unique flair and modern design. Similarly to its surroundings, the Tobin Garage uses masonry at the pedestrian level with inlaid decorative cement tiles that scale the side.





The paneling is a nod to the First Baptist Church tower that rises along its northwestern side, just across the street. As you view the two together, you can see they are intertwined, as the same decorative pattern draws viewers' eyes upward on both buildings. The replicated panels also further solidify the funding partnership of the First Baptist Church.

Another nod to the church and other adjacent historic buildings is a prominent masonry tower at the intersection of Fourth and Taylor streets. It clearly announces the pedestrian entrance and elevators/stairs and features the same Tobin Center "T" logo that serves as a wayfinding feature for Tobin Center guests. The tower also provides balconies at upper-floor levels that allow visitors to overlook the surrounding downtown neighborhoods and the Tobin Center to the west.

The Tobin Garage features a metal screen enclosure of the parking floors that emulates the metal veil of the Tobin Center expansion. "It was very important that the two structures were in sync," says Angel Garcia, project designer. "The screen is illuminated with programmable LED lighting, allowing the Tobin Center

and the Tobin Garage to coordinate lighting design for shows or events. The lighting was essential to help define the Tobin Garage's presence on Auditorium Circle but also to make the garage a modern, artistic element that can utilize technology and respect the surrounding historic district."

While the structure was commissioned to increase parking and event accessibility, it has become a significant architectural addition to the surrounding community. It provides ample parking and serves as a unifying structure for its surrounding neighbors by providing lease space and artistic design. It is the hope of the Marmon Mok architects that it serves the downtown community and San Antonio's visitors for many years to come. 



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