



AUTOVAULT CANADA

STORY BY NIKA ROLCZEWSKI

In a nondescript plaza with hot pots and Asian fusion offered, lies a Mecca for a car lover.

Here tucked in 90,000 square feet of space hibernate more than 400 cars, all marquees imaginable – that would make even the most conscientious collector drool with envy. This is the home of Auto Vault Canada: the premier storage facility for cars and motorcycles in the country.

Don't think you can easily come for a visit to peruse the collection – security rivals that of Fort Knox. Gary Shapiro, owner and operator is extremely vigilant. "Our customers expect the utmost security and we provide it. We have cameras, video and human patrols to make sure our clients prized possessions are well taken care of". There are no signs and that is the way Shapiro wants it. "I'm not a snob – I just want to protect my client's investments. We vet each client and only after that, do we let them come to our compound".

Born and bred in Toronto, Shapiro, the youngest of three boys, has many memories of his father's 1959 Thunderbird. At family gatherings, his uncles would bring their "toys" – Chrysler Imperial Convertible, a Lincoln Continental Convertible with suicide doors and a couple of Cadillac's. "I will never forget that image and the thrill of having them all come over and park on our curved driveway."

"My father would take me to dealerships", Shapiro adds. "I loved going to new car reveals every September with him – back then all the dealers would have grand receptions and we collected more than a thousand brochures over a quarter of a century".

Spending the early part of his professional career in the fashion industry enabled Shapiro to pursue his passion of acquiring a few nice vehicles of his own. "My first Mercedes was a triple black 450 SL, which I fell in love with when I saw Richard Gere drive one down the Pacific Coast Highway in the movie 'American Gigolo' followed by a gorgeous black Jaguar XJS convertible". Occasionally notes were left on the Jaguar but Shapiro sheepishly refuses to divulge their details.

A lover of beautiful cars Shapiro felt a connection to them. "They helped push me to be successful and to be able to buy what I truly desired, I felt that an automobile helped to define who someone was and I have always been drawn to the ones that in my opinion had classic, clean lines".

After 23 years in the clothing business, Shapiro wanted a change. He knew that space was an issue in the ever-growing Greater Toronto Area and that



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finding high quality vehicle storage was something that had never really been addressed. "So I took a leap of faith, Shapiro chuckles, " I sat down with my lawyer and accountant and told them I wanted to create the largest, most sophisticated facility of its kind in Canada".

Creating Auto Vault Canada was not easy. Shapiro admits: "I was short a few hundred thousand dollars, especially after walking away from the only real business and income I knew -- but I was fortunate to have mentioned my idea to a dear friend and family member and he agreed to bankroll the project. I was very lucky that he believed in my idea, but most importantly, me". He is still a partner in Auto Vault Canada today.

After thirteen years in business, Auto Vault Canada is sold-out most of the season. Shapiro believes it is about trust and service. "I answer every call

from every client, after all, they're giving us their rolling pieces of art and they deserve to have someone take the best of care of their treasures.

Auto vault has different levels of service – GOLD is simple storage - a spot in their underground space is yours. GOLD PLUS offers a trickle charger to ensure that battery stays in tip top shape and finally the PLATINUM level of service that ensures the car is started and driven up to temperature on their indoor circuit, while keeping their battery systems charged.

Vehicles are either dropped off by the client or picked up on a flatbed that Shapiro will arrange. For a nominal charge, they can hand wash your car upon arrival or provide a very high-end detail service in the spring before it departs for the season. Dent removal and rim repairs are available. "My goal is to offer a one stop service so the client can have all these issues addressed while their car is in storage for the winter, that way, it's all done for them when they finally come to pick it up in the spring". If a client wants to switch and take the sports car for the weekend – there is no extra charge -- it takes a quick phone call Shapiro adds.

Customers vary from the average person that just has limited parking, to the collector, and corporate clients that need space for their priceless inventory.

"It is important to have a facility that I am proud of since I spend a lot of time here." says Shapiro. It is not just a garage, there are beautiful vintage coca-cola machines from the 1950's that are in perfect condition, vintage bikes, peddle cars and art work. In a kitschy way, Shapiro has achieved the ultimate man cave look. Even his female clientele (up to 15% from 3% a decade ago) find the space comfortable.

"Vehicles are expensive and complicated, and they need to be stored properly", Shapiro adds. Whether it is because of the lack of garage space or the "too many cars" for your driveway, Shapiro wants his customer service to be exceptional.

What is the next step for Shapiro and Auto Vault Canada? "I want to develop Car Condos; a space that will be owned by the client, where like minded 'car people' will own their private units. Each unit will be finished to their own specifications, with common areas for parties, car launches, and a lounge to watch Motorsports – I believe a city like Toronto would welcome such a project. Parking has become, and will continue to be, a major issue in our city".

Gary Shapiro can be reached at 416-346-0077 or view their website autovaultcanada.com - unless you are a client, please don't come knocking without an invite.

