

GARAGE LIFE™

By: **AutoMotorPlex®**



WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS...

As told to
Bruno Silikowski
by Duane Saunders



Duane discovers there are 3 different sizes of wine corks.

Redefining how we use the garage!

There is a new trend sweeping the nation, from East to West coast to Minnesota to Florida, and beyond. Private garage condos. Our "Garage Life" column takes a direct look at some of the wonderful automotive collectibles - automobilia - found in many of these private car spaces. These Car Condo communities are much more than just a place to park your car; they're a lifestyle that is being embraced by car aficionados of sports, classic, racing, exotics, hot rods and well... collectible cars! Each unit is almost always a blank canvas when bought, to be decorated by their owners, and usually filled with automobilia. There are some real treasures to be found in many of these spaces. This column will feature an inside view to some of the fantastic "automobilia décor" held within these private Car Condo communities.

Below: Close-up of a few of the 3,660 trunk badges on Colonal Saunders garage condo wall.

Below Right:
The very impressive wall...

I've been car crazy (along with my friends) since I graduated from high school in 1957. Later, I entered the Army and was stationed in Fort Sill, Oklahoma. I bought my first car from another soldier who had recently returned from Germany. He had brought back a BMW Isetta he'd owned while stationed there. Interestingly enough, at that time he was able to bring the car back with him at no cost, as the military would do that in gratitude of the service performed. I was able to buy the Isetta for \$200, drove it for 5-6 years and was still able sell it for \$200. I had no idea at the time that the Isetta would evolve into what it did in my lifetime. I am not even sure why I liked it, but I remember, there was just something about it.

Like most men with a growing family, I found myself working 7 days a week to support them. I was a Clinical Physical Therapist, and was also captivated with doing research on new techniques and products. I accumulated 14 patents over the years of my work. As I approached the time to retire, my kids were dropping hints like, "given how much you like to work on things that fascinate you, what are going to do with your time?"

Well, as I look back, that was easy. I had restored at least 25 small cars and I needed a place to enjoy this passion... I purchased a 4,000 sq. ft. private garage at AutoMotorPlex which gave me a place for my collection of cars, and a huge wall to showcase art and collectibles on.

I asked my Daughter Jackie (a graphic artist) to design and make images I enjoyed from my car crazy past. I was thrilled with the result. I sent a picture of this display to an automotive dealership friend in Salina, Kansas and he said, "You might consider filling the rest of your wall with dealership trunk badges!"

Instead of throwing his dealership trunk badges away (this was back when the badges were made of metal) he had put them in a box and kept them. I thought that was a great idea! In addition, while traveling with my wife to various places, I would disappear for a few hours in the morning (while she was getting ready), to salvage yards... accumulating many more trunk badges. Word (somehow) got out about this, and before I knew it, I had 3,660 badges (no duplicates) on my wall surrounding the art work. I have 3,000-4,000 more in boxes which are duplicates! These are cataloged in spreadsheets, of course.

I have always been a supporter of Kansas State University (my alma mater), and used my passion for cars to help raise money for the university. I'm also a huge Elvis fan... and had an "Elvis" outfit tailor made just for these type of fundraising opportunities.





One of the two "wine corked" BMW Isettas which is known to appear at numerous charitable events.



With a little help from my friends:

For undetermined reasons, we've always kept the cork from any bottle of wine we were having... We accumulated hundreds of corks over the years... and I had another idea (possibly the wine at work?), and started making cork art. I created pieces such as the crest of my fraternity at Kansas State, and the military bird, (I was a Bird Colonel by the time I left the Army). Then, one day I was inspired by someone who did a cork car, but without much attention to the details... I thought I could do better!

So, I decided to cork one of my Isettas. Much more complicated than originally thought, as not every bottle of wine uses the same size cork (uh oh). In fact, there are 3 sizes, so I ended up making 3 jigs which could handle the differences. With a band saw, (and a little help from many friends who like to drink wine), roughly 5,000 corks were amassed, cut and utilized to cover the car. I ended up making two "cork car Isettas", one is on display at the Midwest Dream Car Collection Museum in Kansas, and the second is often loaned out for fundraisers and dealership showrooms. It takes about a year (and countless bottles of wine) to complete one car.

I bought several cars from the estate of a longtime car dealer, Woodhead Ford in Minneapolis. A big surprise to me when I got the cars, was that each car came with an original and beautiful painting from artist Wm. M. Schmidt! If you look closely at the paintings, you can see JWF in every one. Those initials stand for his dealership name: John Woodhead Ford. I am proud to keep his legacy alive in my private garage.

In recent years, my Grandson Henry J Saunders started showing interest in cars. What's a grandfather to do...? I thought it would be fun to own a 1954 Henry J together, which I could leave

to him as a legacy in honor of his name. The Henry J was only made from 1950-54 and built by the Kaiser-Frazer Corporation. The car was popular with guys who turned them into gasser race cars, so it was a bit of a struggle to find one in original condition, but we did. He and I started going to car shows in 2013 through 2017 to compete.

The most fun for me was when it came time to hand out the trophies; my grandson would go up to receive the award and almost always the organizers would ask, "is this really your car?" He would respond with a big smile, and say, "Yes, and someday I will get to drive it!" Thanks to my grandson and the Henry J, we now have 58 trophies in our automobilia collection!

It's called...

GARAGELIFE™



Above: Three paintings by Wm. M. Schmidt, inherited (when Duane purchased the cars painted in them) from the estate of Woodhead Ford dealership.

Below left: Case full of trophies won with the 1954 Henry J car by Duane and his grandson "Henry J" - pictured below right.

