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Yikes! It's a Garage

By **FRED A. BERNSTEIN**

RESIDENTS of East 94th Street, between Lexington and Third Avenues, never expected to see a private driveway among the row of tidy brownstones on the north side of their block. But earlier this year, they discovered that the owners of No. 161, Andreas Gruson and Maria Negrete-Gruson, had built a nine-foot-wide driveway leading to their new one-car garage.

What would be commonplace almost anywhere else set off shock waves in Manhattan.

The Grusons' driveway was legal — they had sued the city for the right to build it, and won. But the decision in their case could have led to copycat driveways throughout Manhattan, if other homeowners got wind of the legal window opened by the judge's ruling. As a result, said Richard S. Lobel, the Grusons' lawyer, "the city acted so quickly, it was blinding."

In April, the City Council passed regulations meant to tighten restrictions on curb cuts. Meanwhile, the Planning Department has undertaken a revision of the city's zoning resolution to solve interpretation problems — possibly thousands of them — created by the Gruson case. It hopes to present the revision for public review this fall.

That so much havoc was caused by one driveway should not be surprising in a city where, according to Donald Albrecht, a curator of "Cars, Culture and the City," an exhibition this summer at the Museum of the City of New York, more than 1.5 million cars compete for scarce street parking and a tiny number of private garages.

At 200 11th Avenue, a new building in west Chelsea, apartments with private "sky garages" reached by car elevator are nearly sold out, at prices ranging from \$5 million to more than \$17 million, said Leonard Steinberg, a broker who represents the building.

Uptown, Madonna paid \$32 million for a house with an almost-unheard-of (for Manhattan) two-car garage. And even a one-car garage, like the Grusons', could add more than \$500,000 to the value of a house, said Dexter Guerrieri, the president of Vandenberg, the Townhouse Experts, a Manhattan brokerage.