

STORAGE CHORES

Real-life learnings help Ford interior designer improve storage in new 2017 Escape

Whenever Zulf Ali drove his wife's 2014 Ford Escape, he didn't have a place to put his cellphone. Or his wallet. Or his sunglasses.

Ali, a senior interior designer at Ford Motor Company, had plenty of opinions about his wife's vehicle, and he wasn't shy about letting them be known around the office. When the time came to redesign the popular Ford Escape for the 2017 model year, Doyle Letson, Ali's manager, said, "OK, Zulf, you're always talking about Escape. Here's your chance to improve it."

So off he went. Armed with a list of to-dos from his wife, Naz Ullah, Ali set out to determine how to best make use of what he calls "Manhattan real estate" – the small, valuable space that constitutes a vehicle's center console.

"In recent years, things have really changed in terms of what people carry with them," said Ali, a native of England who first joined the Ford design family in 2004. "Cellphones are so much more common now – more so even than just a few years ago. The challenge was to get creative, to make it work for today's customer."



Check your owner guide for recommendations for securely storing your phone.

Of course, it helped that today's customer was at the dinner table with him. Ali's first order of business in tackling the issues Naz Ullah raised was to replace the traditional parking brake handle with a new electronic one. Once he got that clearance, a multitude of possibilities arose:

- 1 With the gear shifter moved away from the center stack, an area was created for an easy-access media bin with lighted USB port and 12-volt power outlet
- 2 A new storage area was positioned next to the media bin
- 3 Cupholders were moved to the passenger side of the gear shifter – outfitted with adjustable fingers to accommodate a variety of bottle sizes
- 4 A second storage area was positioned behind the gear shifter – a place to set a wallet, keys or sunglasses
- 5 An available USB port was positioned inside the covered storage bin, allowing drivers to keep their phone secure while connected to the available SYNC® 3 driver-connectivity system
- 6 A netted storage area added to the passenger side of the console created a place to store power cords or papers

The interior redesign process was a long one, as each feature was implemented, tested and tweaked numerous times to make the most efficient use of the space.

"We utilized as much of the space as we possibly could without cramping it – everything has a very natural fit now," Ali said. "It was worth all of the revisions, as everything is so well balanced."

"My wife saw some pictures, she said it looks perfect," he said with a laugh. "And I think she was flattered to have her input heard."