



RE-CYCLED: 1924 R-32 model motorcycle (foreground) and current BMW product are displayed against backdrop of photo art from the same periods.

BMW: showing in style

By ANNE L. ADAMS

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BMW, those folks who gave America the ultimate yuppie driving machine, have hit upon the ultimate in showroom chic.

On Park Ave. just off 51st St., the German auto maker opened a "gallery" where BMW products and the fine arts co-mingle in 7,000 square feet of high-tech, high-luxe space.

The idea is to use the arts — fine or performing — to underscore the oh-so-upscale image of excellence and exclusivity BMW has spent a bundle cultivating.

"I think it's appealing very much to our customers," Gunter Kramer, chairman of BMW of North America Inc., said of the \$3.5 million investment. That customer tends to be college-educated and comfortably ensconced in an upper income bracket.

Arts complement cars

"The art was meant to augment the spirit of (the company) and the exhibit of the cars," explained Mary

Lanier, a corporate art consultant working with BMW. She quickly added that, for the concept to come off just right, the integrity of the arts has to be maintained, they can't become just a BMW adjunct.

While the arts get only the rear 3,000 square feet of the showroom, BMW is banking on their cache to create a no-pressure, come-on-in and browse atmosphere.

The showroom does two things, said BMW executive vice president Michael B. Jackling.

"For the people who've already purchased BMWs, it reinforces the depth of commitment to supporting the product in the U.S.," Jackling said. "To people who haven't yet made up their minds, we hope the rather passive environment will encourage them to stay around and talk about it."

Not a selling floor

This is not a sales outlet, BMW execs emphasize. All you can get here is an eyeful of art and cars and an earful of info.

Chairman Kramer insists that BMW wants its gallery taken seriously by the New York art community. Every three months, BMW will change its product display and present a new, presumably related art show.

It was an auspicious beginning. The kickoff exhibit — photographs by masters such as Irving Penn, George Hurrell, Andre Kertesz and Horst — was world-class.

Indeed, Tacki Wise, of the Staley/Wise gallery in SoHo, which assembled the show, said, "We really thought the response among artists would be negative. But because it is a gallery, people were keen to lend us things."

Still, guests at an elegant champagne, foie gras and caviar launch party were dubious.

"The connection between art and cars? It's very nice," said Steve Frank, a 28-year-old municipal bond salesman. "But it was the cars that brought me in. I want to buy a 635, blue. If the cars weren't here, I wouldn't be here. If it sells cars, fine. If it doesn't, it's bull----."