

DESIGN IN FOCUS

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TOP GEAR

Project particulars

| | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|
| Client: | Mercedes-Benz China Ltd |
| Design consultant: | M Moser Associates |
| Fit-out contractor: | M Moser Associates |

photography: Vitus Lau

Top of the range doesn't get more fully loaded than Daimler Chrysler, the conglomerate that steers the power behind the wheels of Mercedes-Benz and Maybach, as well as the revolutionary Smart car. So when M Moser Associates won the commission to renovate and expand the Mercedes-Benz executive offices at Central Plaza, the biggest dilemma was how to combine the corporate image of the company with the dynamic sense of motoring that's associated with the brand.

The new offices collectively span 18,000sq ft and the fit-out had to be phased so that operations could continue undisturbed. To ensure that the intrinsic quality of the brand was cohesively communicated through every layer of the design process, the project team, led by Cecilia Wang, drew up a dictionary of key governing words, such as craftsmanship, comfort, precision engineering... "The client's desire was for a space that's very minimal, almost an art gallery setting with plain white walls and metal," recalls concept and project designer Dmytriy Perekhita. This was tempered by an ambition to use materials of an industrial origin, though applying these with the utmost elegance and refinement.

Functionally, the key driver was the requirement for a statement-making client space that could be used for sizable presentations. This represented a major shift - previously, it was common practice for the company to hire out hotel function rooms or convention suites for events such as regional meetings and preview launches. The presentation room is located in one of the three corners of the distinctive footprint. It is the final destination in a sequence of public spaces that begins with the reception and lounge tied to adjacent meeting rooms, before extending into an art corridor highlighting the history of the brand. A custom-designed horseshoe table is further articulated by a glowing halo of indirect and spot lighting overhead and encircled by the familiar Eames classic leather-upholstered, chrome-framed chairs. "The ceiling gives you that sense of movement and speed as you take the corner," said Perekhita. Cable management is solved by incising a continuous groove round the inner perimeter of the table.

The opposite corner is occupied by the president's office, adjoining meeting space and staff pantry, forming a secondary hub or node



around the key circulation path. In the general office, a minimal palette maintains the same air of clean consistency. "We kept the environment sharp and uncluttered, allowing people to focus and get on with their work," says Perekhita. Clear glass surrounds the enclosed offices, the opacity cutting right round the corners to increase visibility. Like in the public areas, planar components are treated as separate entities, such as the partition screening that stops well short of the ceiling.

The designers worked with the concept of each material owning its own space or autonomy to express itself fully. Conversely, for the sake of drama and intrigue, they also needed to create ambiguity and illusion as evidenced by the multiple reflections of light and transparency together with the blurring of elements. A malleable knitted steel curtain screens the waiting area, softly shimmering like a piece of fabric rather than a stiff sheet of metal. Perekhita admits that the design team hit on the museum-like mood without much difficulty, however simultaneously capturing the absolute spirit of the car was a less tangible feat. "Everything became this refined exercise in expression of detail," he explained. Edges are exploded to reveal how different planes are connected, whether through extruded bolts, post-tensioned wires or the application of the Louis Poulsen ceiling light fittings. Reflective black stainless steel from Japan introduces depth and fluidity. From a distance, a glimpse of an element such as the reception desk appears abstract, yet close up there is a very clear definition of how it's articulated.

An obvious counterpoint to the highly polished, more "mechanistic" overtones of the interior is the dried foliage wall sculpture that the client suggested hanging behind the reception desk. "This is a client that aspires to great design," enthuses Perekhita. M Moser Associates certainly think themselves fortunate; this is a situation that many Hong Kong-based designers can only dream about. The result says it all and pays heed to a design process that was highly collaborative in the most positive sense. Probably the best praise the design team received, was that the interior feels like the car without looking like it.

