

Show room or show flat?

A car showroom furnished with designer furniture could pass off as a luxe living room

tay suan chiang
design correspondent

Gleaning automobiles are usually the star attractions in car showrooms. But what about a showroom that quietly threatens to upstage its hot wheels?

At parallel importer Vincar's Alexandra Road mutedly chic showroom, the wares sometimes seem to take second place. Instead, clients are taking an interest in its luxe lounge area, done up in a neutral palette of brown and camel to look like a living room.

The lounge area takes up a quarter of the newly renovated 5,000 sq ft showroom, designed by interior architect Terence Chan of Terre and completed early this year. Designer furniture pieces sit alongside Vincar's stable of Porsche, BMW and Mercedes-Benz cars on display.

"The furniture selection is a mix of iconic pieces and contemporary ones," says Mr Chan, 40, who hand-picked them together with Vincar's co-owner, Ms Marisa Tan.

About \$50,000 was spent on the furniture, which includes classic pieces such as Danish designer Arne Jacobsen's Swan chair, a B&B Italia sofa, Dutch designer Marcel Wanders' cocoon-like Zeppelin pendant lamp, and United States design firm Knoll's coffee table and side tables. The pieces were bought from upmarket furniture stores Space and Dream.

Ms Tan, 38, says she wanted an area that would make "clients feel as if they're at home".

"Some clients now linger longer at the showroom, sometimes up to two hours," she says.

There are also clients who have already collected their cars but still return to the showroom - to relax on the sofa and enjoy a complimentary cup of Nespresso coffee or TWG tea.

"I like the coffee and the soothing ambience here. It feels like home, rather than a car showroom," says Mr Chow Kum Seng, 58, managing



Designed like a living room, the Vincar showroom (above and below) is a place where customers can relax in while looking for a car. ST PHOTOS: CAROLINE CHIA

director of a food production company who bought a Porsche 911 last year. He still enjoys popping into the Vincar showroom.

Ms Tan does not mind that clients return to enjoy the complimentary coffee. She says: "Maintaining a relationship with clients is more important." Car prices here start from \$200,000.

A stickler for details, she pays special attention to the cups and coasters used, and even the brand of fresh milk. Clients are also given cold towels to refresh themselves.

"I like receiving good service when I'm out, so I want my clients to experience the same service, too," says Ms Tan, who hired a full-time staff member specially to serve clients at the lounge.

The showroom used to have just a small bar area and the new lounge, she feels, makes the company stand out from its competitors.

Parallel importers usually do not have swanky showrooms, unlike car dealers which also have lounge areas. Even rarer is a dealership lounge with Vincar's luxurious, designer touch.

Mr Rick Lye, 39, who was shopping for a car over the weekend, was impressed by the showroom.

"The feel here is different, more like a furniture showroom than a car showroom," says Mr Lye, who works in the aviation industry.

He left without buying a car but says: "I'll definitely take friends here to check it out."

✉ taysc@sph.com.sg

