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The Aston Martin Showroom in Troy, MI, served as the prototype for a total of 16 locations nationwide. Italian travertine adorns the exterior facade as well as creating interior walls and flooring. **Architect:** Cityscape Architects, Novi, MI

Photo by Laszlo Regos Photography/www.laszlofoto.com



Travertine adds to “James Bond” image

Italian travertine panels create a sophisticated yet neutral backdrop for Aston Martin luxury vehicles at 16 new showrooms throughout the U.S.

by Jennifer Adams



Aston Martin sought to create a strong statement that reflects a "James Bond" image with a simple palette of materials, which includes stone, glass and stainless steel.

Italian travertine set the tone for a sleek contemporary image that Aston Martin established for its lineup of luxury car showrooms in the U.S. The British-based automobile manufacturer of exclusive high-end cars worked with a design team from Cityscape Architects of Novi, MI, to create its first U.S. location in Troy, MI, which served as the prototype for a total of 16 stores throughout the U.S.

"We were hired by Ford Land, who had owned Aston Martin when we started on this program," explained Tony Dellicolli, R.A., President of Cityscape Architects. "At the time, Ford Land was working in conjunction with the Aston Martin headquarters in the U.K. They wanted to roll out a plan for Aston stores in the U.S. market. They planned to go into 20 major metro markets, including Europe. They wanted to create a brand for Aston Martin. They went into big cities like Miami, L.A., Dallas and Chicago. We were hired to work in conjunction with Ford Land to create this image.

"The gentleman running Aston Martin is Dr. Ulrich Bez," Dellicolli went on to say. "He was hired from Porsche. He was brought over as CEO. His idea was to try to roll out a stronger market image. Up until recently, three-fourths of their cars sold were bought from the factory. Princes and princesses would fly into the headquarters in the U.K., and then they were brought over to the factory. They could pick the finishes, whether they wanted the seats to be leather or suede, etc. It was literally a customized car. They can still do that, but Bez wanted to bring the brand representation to the U.S. and other parts of the world."

Creating a brand

Aston Martin sought to create a strong statement that reflects a "James Bond" image with a simple palette of materials. "We used stone, glass and stainless," said Dellicolli. "They wanted a very modern, contemporary, timeless look — one that if you visit the store 30 years from now, it will still look timeless."



In addition to the floor and walls, the Italian travertine adorns a bar, which further contributes to the posh feel of the 3,400-square-foot space.

From the onset, the design team knew they wanted a material with a honed finish for the 3,400-square-foot space. “We did not want a real high-polished look,” explained the architect. “We didn’t want the cars to scratch the floor, and more importantly, we didn’t want the floor to be shiny and compete with the cars. A jewelry store doesn’t put a diamond on a glass background; it puts it on velvet for high contrast.”

According to Dellicolli, representatives from Aston Martin hand selected the travertine themselves from a quarry in Italy. “They researched some stone products and then went to the quarry in Italy. The slabs that they selected were milled, cut and honed in Italy and then shipped to the States,” he said.

The 1- x 1-meter travertine panels were employed for the exterior fa-

cade as well as the interior floor and walls. “One of the tricky things we had to do because of the [tight] timeline was to mill the stone in Italy,” said the architect. “It was cut before we even poured the foundation on site. We had to make sure that when the foundation was poured, and the flat work was done, everything was perfectly square. The funny thing about the building is that the line drawing is so simple. It is almost deceiving because you don’t realize how hard it was to execute the construction.”

A precise installation

All of the joints between the travertine floor and wall panels had to be tight and precise. “It was like building a Swiss watch,” said Dellicolli. “We sat the contractor down to explain how finite all the dimensions were, and we were able to accomplish that.

Gregg Stouder, Vice President of Cityscape Architects, dedicated time on site to supervise the installation. “The biggest concern was that all the travertine panels were pre-fabricated to a finite size,” he said, adding that the joint size measures 2 mm wide. “They had to go together as a tight jigsaw puzzle.”

The architect explained that the building was not a simple shape. “It was complex because of the wall interfaces and components such as the glass wall,” he said. “We prepared a very detailed ‘control point’ plan — defined by about 20 points in the building. Every other building component was built to those points. Everything had to fit into modules. We set up a finite control point plan so that the contractor could build all the walls and shell perfectly.”

According to Stouder, the travertine floor panels are backed with a steel



Inside, a glass wall that can be opened and closed was installed to section off parts of the showroom on special occasions. "A glass sliding wall was hung on rollers," said Tony Dellicolli, RA, President of Cityscape Architects. "The idea is that if they are having an exclusive showing of a car or a private party, they can close off two-thirds of the showroom and have an open bar. You never have exposure to anyone else in the showroom. It plays off the exclusivity."



The travertine floor panels are backed with a steel plate so that they can sustain the load of the automobiles.



With the 1-x 1-meter travertine panels being pre-fabricated in Italy, it was imperative for installation to be precise. The joints measure 2 mm in width.

plate. "The travertine is very thin," he explained. "The whole panel is $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick. Because the floor gets walked on and has the automobile loads, it is backed with a steel plate for added strength. The wall panels don't need that capacity, so they have a fiberglass backing."

A VIP atmosphere

The sleek image of the Aston Martin brand was designed with its sophisticated customers in mind. The automobile manufacturer wants its clients to experience VIP treatment while visiting their showrooms. As a result, little touches — inside and out — go a long way in achieving a luxurious environment.

Outside the building, a monument sign was built of the same Italian travertine used throughout the dealership's design. Dellicolli explained that the Aston Martin name was laser cut into the stone, and Plexiglass was pushed through from

behind. "They incorporated that idea nationwide," he said. "They really fell in love with that detail."

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With this idea in mind, the showroom is complete with a permanent bar. The furnishing features a top and side panel made of travertine — further contributing to the posh feel of the space.

According to Dellicolli, it took three to five weeks for the design team to de-

velop the concept for the Aston Martin showrooms and six to eight months to build the store. "We only worked on three stores in Europe, but we designed 16 in the U.S.," he said, adding that executives from Aston Martin's U.K. headquarters flew over for the Grand Opening in Michigan. "They were very excited about it. They inherited the look globally."

The architect went on to say that Bez, the CEO, spoke at the store opening. "In the whole history of Aston Martin, only 85,000 cars were sold in 90 years," said Dellicolli. "The numbers were staggering. It shows the level of exclusivity we were dealing with. The store does 100 cars a year. They say they can do more, but it is a matter of getting the product.

"Getting this was very exciting for us," Dellicolli continued. "These are the kind of commissions architects dream about." ■