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FT

GLOBAL PROPERTY INSIGHT

Indian summer

Investors are looking to move into the south Asian markets as Bangalore booms

Brand building

A company headquarters is much more than just an office block for many occupiers

Foreign mission

Embassies are being transformed into housing and mixed-use developments





1. and 2.

Wheels of fortune

The space chosen for Aston Martin's showroom matches the brand, being close to the Presidente Masaryk boulevard, Mexico City's Rodeo Drive

3.

The high life

The mixed-used Paseo Castelar development contains 17 apartments, ranging from 250 sq m up to 300 sq m in size

If James Bond lived in Mexico City, where would he

call home? Finding a suitably suave address – a place at once impeccably classy yet effortlessly discreet – was the mission for the Mexican entrepreneurs who last month opened a dealership for Aston Martin, maker of the spy's favourite cars. Its sheer size means Mexico City has no shortage of property options, but finding the right place to showcase half a dozen luxury British sportscars was tricky.

Though many multinationals plump for the gleamingly modern Santa Fe, a sea of skyscrapers on the western fringes of the city, the area is bedevilled by nightmarish traffic and is more a work destination than a chic place to see and be seen. Meanwhile, some banks, lawyers and the like see the city centre as de rigeur: they prefer the elegant towers along the Paseo de la Reforma boulevard, such as the Torre Diana, which, when it is finished in 2015, will be the capital's tallest building.

In the end, the lure of Mexico City's equivalent of Rodeo Drive won out, and the Aston Martin team zeroed in on the Presidente Masaryk boulevard in the neighbourhood of Polanco, close to the centre and the western residential neighbourhoods. The street is one big shop window for global luxury brands in a district that is a social and business destination for the wealthy customers most likely to splurge on a handmade car they can not only customise

at will but, as Martin Josephi, the dealer principal, says, can even carry their wife and children to church.

The neighbourhood had the cachet Aston Martin was seeking, but finding the right spot in an area where prices are rocketing and space is shrinking proved a considerable challenge. Here the principals involved in the move – and the building itself – give their thoughts about how it went.

Martin Josephi, Aston Martin Mexico dealer principal:

We didn't want to be somewhere where our customers would have to drive specially to get to our showroom. We wanted it to be somewhere they already went to. We found a space that matches the brand very well. I can't speak about specific numbers, but the rent is considerable, especially given the large space – the showroom is 4,500 sq ft (418 sq m). The obvious advantage is that it's so close to Masaryk, so you have to pay for that. The contractors we hired to fit out the showroom were very serious about delivery dates and costs and since Aston Martin required us to import everything and to stick to an agreed design as part of their corporate identity, we had a clear idea of costs.

Manuel Sainz, Aston Martin Mexico sales director:

I don't think we could have found a better place. When I saw it, my eyes lit up. Lots of the big fish in Mexico City

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Status symbols

The developer was keen to welcome an exclusive brand to give the building cachet

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Efficient design

The building provides very useable business spaces free of obstructing walls or columns

3.

The plots thicken

Scarcity of space in the Polanco district is driving property prices up rapidly

frequent Polanco, but we realised we didn't need to be on Masaryk and to be seen by everyone. Lots of people enter Masaryk via Goldsmith because it's more private and safer. It is an area where there are a lot of pedestrians, and that can be good. But that could also attract a lot of people who just want to come in and look but are never going to buy. That invades the privacy of customers who do want to buy and just wastes the staff's time. So there are pros and cons.

Iván Chávez, Aston Martin Mexico marketing manager:

We thought initially of Palmas and Lomas – two upscale neighbourhoods – and even entertained the idea of Santa Fe or Interlomas to the west, which have seen vast growth. They are very nice, but we also run the Lamborghini dealership, which is on a main avenue towards the south of the city and we realised it would take us all day to go from one to the other, so we chose Polanco.

We were looking for space, but there wasn't much available. Martin [Joseph], Manuel [Sainz] and I would go out at weekends and just drive around. We wanted that [Presidente Masaryk] zone because it is a luxury cluster. We saw a lot of places; some were too big, and in others we would have had to rip everything out and start again, so that would have been a huge investment.

When we found this space, on Goldsmith, half a block from Masaryk, we were worried it wasn't on Masaryk itself where all the big names are. But that would have meant compromising too much on space, and this is more private anyway. It was a toss-up between having a very nice showroom 15m from Masaryk or one on Masaryk that was big enough to fit two cars. And we still have Berger, Jaeger-LeCoultre, Louis Vuitton and Cartier nearby.

Isaac Hans, architect and developer: We have done lots of projects in different parts of the city, but Polanco is special for me personally. In the case of the Paseo Castelar development, where Aston Martin is located, I lived my first years of married life in a little house on that property; now

**'Polanco is the navel of this city.
It's practically what the Zócalo [main square] used to be to the city'**

my office is there. Back then, Polanco was much calmer and less cosmopolitan than it is now. But now, I don't want to leave - Polanco is the navel of this city. It's practically what the Zócalo [main square] used to be to the city.

In Paseo Castelar, we wanted to do a mixed, high-end project. We have 14 apartments, ranging from 250 sq m to 300 sq m in size, a gym and all other amenities, plus offices that are very efficient spaces with no walls or columns getting in the way. There are four shops: Aston Martin, a bike shop, a flooring shop and a cookery shop.

Josephi: Everything is top notch - the travertine is from Italy, the cabinets from Germany, the lighting from the UK. We have the Barcelona chair by Mies van der Rohe. In the past, we have had the dealerships for Ferrari, Maserati and Alfa Romeo, and now Lamborghini, so we are experts in importing cars, but not all these other things. We had some delays. Take the toilets from the UK: every toilet brought into the country has to be approved by the Mexican authorities. You need to give them five samples of the toilet and they test and then destroy them. We didn't make big structural changes - we just added offices, a toilet, a storage space, a kitchenette and stairs to the mezzanine. We had to change the glass front into doors to get cars inside. We will be able to fit six cars inside and one in the courtyard.

Hans: Polanco prices are very hot right now, because there just aren't enough plots of land available. I'm not sure now how much I paid for the land for Paseo Castelar, but now people can be paying \$5,000-\$6,000 per sq m for lots. What we don't know yet is whether these prices are the ceiling or whether they will rise to \$10,000.

Josephi: Renting the building was nerve-racking. There is a lengthy tender process to be selected as an Aston Martin dealer - it took about a year in all. We had to make a down payment to ensure the site would be reserved for us. But we had the good fortune that the landlord wanted us there.

Sáinz: It is a great location. We just have to hope it doesn't fill up with traffic. It is an area where a lot of women go shopping - and women's influence on their husbands is very important in sales like this.

Chávez: There are disadvantages to Polanco: the traffic can be crazy, but then there is no part of town that would be commercially viable that doesn't have traffic. We will expand our existing Lamborghini workshop to house the Aston Martin one, and we can pick up clients' cars for free when they need servicing or repairs, and deliver them back, saving the owners the hassle.

Hans: I wanted an exclusive brand in the building. Aston Martin gives the building cachet and brings the building the status it deserves. It is magnificent for both sides. ●



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