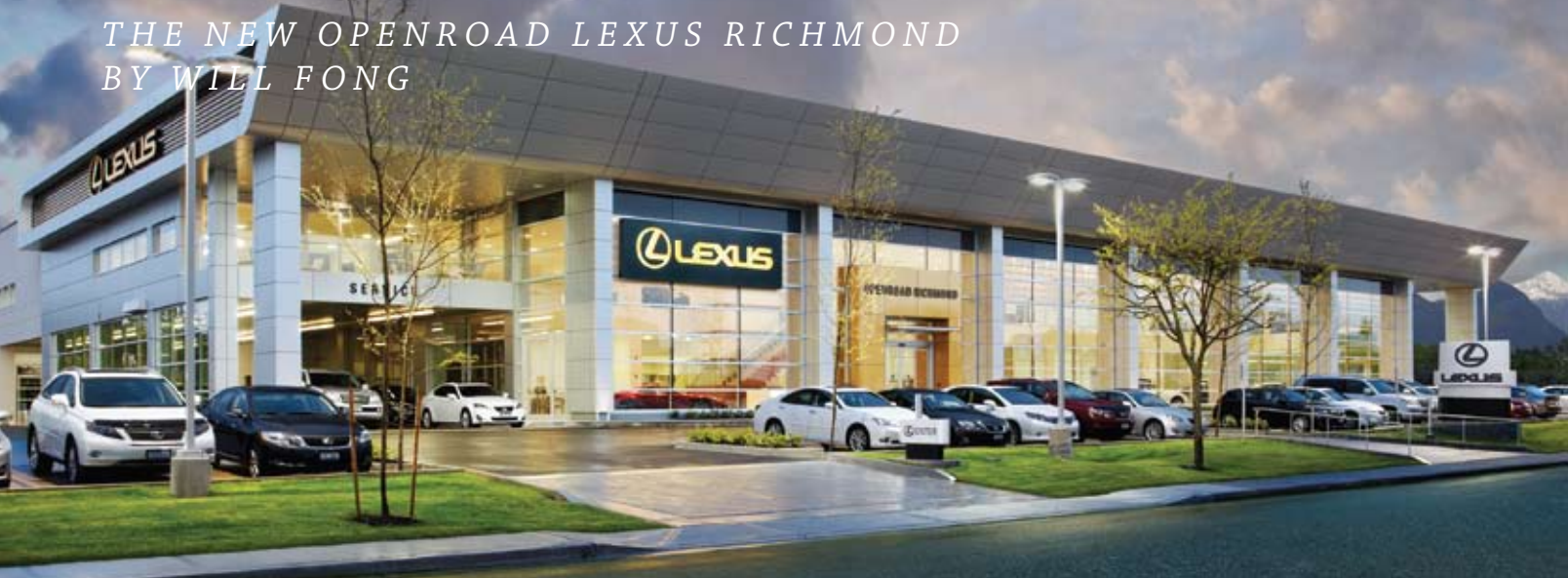




EXTRAS

A Pursuit of Perfection

THE NEW OPENROAD LEXUS RICHMOND
BY WILL FONG



“It’s like a jewel box.”

Sales manager Chris Mah describes the building perfectly as we circle around the glittering exterior of the brand new OpenRoad Lexus store in the Richmond Auto Mall. I am visiting the newest and now largest Lexus dealership in the country, and what I see could very well be the crown jewel of luxury automotive retailers in Canada. The high-end finishings are dazzling during my tour of

the facility, but I soon discover that it’s the unexpected that truly elevates this store.

OpenRoad Auto Group president, Christian Chia, describes his vision, “I wanted to build the flagship store for Lexus in Canada. I had three things in mind. Lexus vehicles are incredibly beautiful and well-crafted, so I wanted to reflect that in the building. I also wanted to add amenities that were new

to automotive retail in Canada, and bring in ideas from the best high-end retailers from other industries around the world. And I wanted a building that would be sustainable to align with our company’s green commitment.” He adds with a smile, “This was our take on pursuing perfection and I hope we’ve done it!”

It took twenty months and 400,000 construction-hours to deliver the vision. The result is spectacular – a testament



to luxury that will surely set a higher benchmark in the automotive retail industry. The sheer size of the facility is impressive, at 69,000 square feet, and there is exceptional detail and craftsmanship at every turn inside.

As we enter the building the main reception area is open and stunning, with a backdrop that is both functional and sculptural. The entrance features a floating stairwell of cherry wood fins that scissor up to a second floor. The backdrop is a soaring 24-foot tower of translucent white glass panels bordered by angular pieces of matching warm cherry. It's easy to see why this stairwell is in contention for a 2012 award from the Architectural Woodwork Manufacturers Association of Canada.

The building is awash in sunlight streaming in through the all-glass exterior, smartly filtered by automatic louvers to reduce glare and heat. We're now standing in the main showroom, looking up at two clear storeys of open space and a beautiful mezzanine that overlooks the main floor. The vista is lofty and grand.

Fifteen perfectly detailed new vehicles are on the showroom floor, displayed at their best on the polished Savoia Deluxe Botticino tiles in cream – the all-new CT 200h hybrid, best-selling RX 350 SUV, and the IS and ES sedan lines are all resplendent in multiple colours. The showroom features airy neutral colours, Keilhauer Branden glass tables, plus

dramatic punctuations of Lexus black seen in the modern Barcelona lounge chairs and black galaxy car pads. The overall feel of the showroom is grand, sleek, inviting and ultra-contemporary.

On our way to one of the two sales manager offices, we walk by twelve separate sales offices and I can't help but notice the glass walls that give all the offices a very transparent and open feel. Once there, the impressive 9-foot high glass doors are an architectural marvel in the main sales offices.

We round the corner and stop by a beautiful 254-gallon freshwater aquarium. This is the focal point of one of the building's three guest lounges, where I'm greeted eagerly by red parrot cichlids, sarasa comets and tin foil bars that dart back and forth in a graceful display of colour.

Leaving the Zen-like serenity, we head towards the restrooms where I'm in for a few surprises. This is where the trend towards touch-free is taken to a whole new level. Just a quick wave of the hand and the motion sensor opens the door automatically for us. No need to turn a knob or touch a door handle. Once inside, technology meets elegance. I admire the Toto hand dryers, the dispensers, faucets, flush mechanisms – all touchless – and I'm equally impressed by the gorgeous finishing details. The cream Deluxe Botticino is carried into all the washrooms as a wall-to-wall and floor-to-ceiling field tile. The counters are

a sophisticated Atlas Stone granite in absolute black, accentuated by highlight walls that are a gorgeous black-and-iridescent glass mosaic laid in a vertical strip pattern. The tiles are called Icestix Crevice, and they virtually shimmer like the Northern Lights at night.

Upstairs, rumour has it the second-floor showroom will soon become Canada's first hybrid-only specialty showroom. Overlooking the main floor, this additional eight-vehicle showroom is accessible by elevator or floating staircase. The main design feature is a long white accent wall of stepped blocks and rectangles for texture and drama, particularly effective in displaying a gorgeous obsidian LS 600h executive hybrid sedan, a smoky granite RX 450h hybrid crossover and a tungsten pearl HS 250h hybrid sedan.

We enter the VIP guest lounge on the second floor, and here we see the pinnacle of elegance. This lounge has everything you could ever want – it's a high-end home and office away from home. There are two complimentary massage chairs to soothe your aches and pains. Plus, two 60-inch high-definition televisions, crisp white leather lounge furniture, a fresh-air patio with LivingSpace outdoor furniture, office workstations with complimentary Wifi, and an assortment of complimentary beverages. I highly recommend the specialty mochaccino, Finca San Ramon Estate coffee or the Bigelow Lemon Lift tea. It's pure bliss here.

Photos courtesy of Ventana Construction



We make our way to the open-air rooftop where more of the unexpected awaits us. The rooftop offers a magnificent 360-degree panorama of the North Shore mountains and views all the way to Mt. Baker. At any given time, two separate car elevators deliver 113 units of new inventory to the rooftop where a product specialist can escort you to select your very own new vehicle.

We decide to move our tour over to the fixed operations side to gain the full experience of OpenRoad Lexus Richmond. Here, the south driveway leads directly into the large covered service breezeway that can hold eight vehicles simultaneously. Pulling up, we're greeted in person by a concierge who directs us to the five service desk advisors and twelve technicians inside, including master and hybrid technicians. It's all so effortless. The service team takes care of our appointment while we watch the progress of our vehicle maintenance on the real-time status boards.

A background tour of the service area is truly impressive. Most guests may

not go behind the scenes, but here we really see OpenRoad's commitment to doing things differently. Even the garage doors are an unexpected feature. They are pneumatic and whisper-quiet when raised, disappearing into the ceiling to make sure the beautiful sight lines of the building are maintained throughout.

The service area is completely finished with wall-to-wall tile and a true ceiling, unlike most service centres. This is a laboratory setting. Every technician receives a proprietary computer and a series of matching Rousseau cabinetry to store tools overnight. This keeps the area pristine. They even have their own "Zamboni" to wash the floors every night. This service area offers the most in-store service bays in Canada. All twenty bays are plumbed with in-ground hoists, which is a very unusual feature due to the soil and water table in Richmond. With four delivery bays, six Lexus Reflections detail bays, four staging bays and a dedicated Lexus Reflections car wash, every possible luxury has been included for guests, including a 24-vehicle service loaner fleet and valet service as scheduled.

Over at parts, we're tempted by the Lexus Lifestyle Collection inside the jewelry cases and the F-Sport Performance Accessories display. There is an astonishing amount of parts storage behind the scenes, with 54 shelving units that hold up to 432 parts bins depending on the configuration. But storage may not be necessary, as parts orders are filled the next day or on the very same day if an order is placed before 10:30 am.

We've now come full circle back to the main entrance. After bidding farewell to my tour leader, I decide to spend the next few hours wandering through the building again at my leisure, just so I can take everything in one more time. This building has that effect on you.

Final thoughts? It's exceedingly rare when innovation, architecture, technology and craftsmanship all come together in one building at such an exceptional level. Perfection may never really be attainable, but OpenRoad Lexus Richmond is certainly the result of perfectionists who have delivered on their quest for an extraordinary facility. Let's just call this... automotive utopia.

MARK WORBECK

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e caught up with the general manager of OpenRoad Lexus Richmond, Mark Worbeck, in between his recent trips to Toronto. He is proud of the new facility and even prouder of his dealership team.

Tell me what's different about this new store.

Space! Space to work, space to breathe, just *space!* After working for what seems like an eternity in a dealership we had outgrown years ago, we're now able to function in a way we only dreamed about. We're now able to really grow the business and work toward fulfilling our goal to provide the best customer service experience we possibly can.

And how about the customer experience that OpenRoad Lexus Richmond clients can expect?

Our guests can now book service appointments based on their schedules instead of being restricted by our previous limitations of staff and space and loaner vehicles. And those who acquired their vehicles from us will now be able to enjoy

access to the exclusive VIP Lounge which includes massage chairs, 60-inch TVs, computer work stations, complimentary beverages and a relaxing outdoor patio. To satisfy any cravings for food or premium coffee, we also have an on-site café serving nutritious snacks and meals along with unbelievable cappuccinos and lattes – to die for! In addition, shoppers will be able to view up to 23 new Lexus models in our two-level showroom, plus select their vehicle from over 110 vehicles parked on the roof.

Your staff associates have earned numerous awards. As the leader of this team, how would you describe your people?

Simply, we have the best team in the business. The key word in that statement is team and that includes everyone here at OpenRoad Lexus Richmond.

Where do you see Lexus and OpenRoad Lexus going from here? What's coming up?

Recently, Lexus has encountered a few speed bumps in its path. However, they are navigating through them with confidence and will accelerate back to full speed in the months ahead. And as we fine tune our operations in this new facility, we see a very bright future in the months and years to come.

GREEN AND SUSTAINABLE

OpenRoad Lexus Richmond shows its commitment to sustainability and green practices:

- LEED® silver target facility
- 50% diversion of construction waste
- lights turn off automatically after you leave any room
- 50% water consumption reduction and low-flush toilets
- reuse of construction resource materials
- use of recycled content
- largest hybrid loaner vehicle fleet in Canada
- bicycle racks
- bioswales and French drains for storm water management
- CFC reduction in heating and ventilation
- optimal energy performance initiatives
- interior carbon dioxide monitoring
- use of low-emission materials
- thermal comfort initiatives

OPENROAD LEXUS RICHMOND TRIVIA

- Non-combustible building construction
- Over 400,000 man-hours of construction
- September 1, 2009 to May 2, 2011 – 20-month construction
- 36-foot diameter (11-metre) Lexus logo painted on the rooftop with 10-foot (3-metre) lettering to catch the flight path
- 176,575 cubic feet of poured concrete (5,000 cubic metres)
- 50,000 pounds of steel (22,700 kg)
- 49,000 sq.ft. of finished tile area (4,550 sq.m.)
- 18,800 pavers
- Over 50 sub-trade companies

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Esther Chan

Professional Banking Specialist
604-340-9817

Louis Tang

Professional Banking Specialist
778-389-0300



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