



# BMW'S SENSORY DELIGHT

The world of luxury is full of experiences that captivate the senses. Richard Webb reports on the BMW South Africa Eurostyle Tour, and returns convinced that South Africans are adding to a new level of sensory indulgence.

WORDS RICHARD WEBB PHOTOGRAPHS SUPPLIED



Every year, the BMW South Africa Eurostyle Tour sets out to unearth the exceptional in modern and contemporary design as expressed through art, architecture and mobility. This year, I discovered artists, designers, inventors and visionaries in two of Europe's vibrant capital cities – Lisbon and London. In the process, I experienced some truly exceptional lifestyle entrepreneurs from around the globe, including some sterling achievements by South Africans living abroad.

Lisbon nestles on Portugal's west coast, alive to the tune of the Atlantic Ocean. Water is central to the city's rhythm and on this, my first visit, I am reminded of San Francisco with its steeply raked hills and cheerfully painted trams. The 17.2 km-long *Ponte Vasco da Gama* bridge, spanning the Tagus River, looks similar to the Golden Gate bridge and is built to withstand an

earthquake 4.5 times stronger than the quake that all but destroyed this hub of Portuguese design in 1755. For centuries, Lisbon has been a powerhouse, conquering remote parts of the world – from Mozambique to Brazil – benefiting from exotic influences in art and culture.

If, as Aristotle avers, the aim of art is to represent not the outward appearance of things, but their inward significance, then the fabulous MUDE Design and Fashion Museum in Lisbon is arguably its artistic capital. The pedestrianised *Rua Augusta* in Lisbon's Baixa district is home to a huge, raw space – a semi-derelict former bank headquarters – housing Francisco Capelo's fashion collection of more than 1 200 *haute couture* pieces by the likes of Jean Paul Gaultier, Balenciaga, Vivienne Westwood and Yves Saint Laurent. Mude means 'change' in Portuguese and this is what the project is all about.

**OPPOSITE** BMW i3  
**ABOVE LEFT** Penhaligon.  
**BELOW** BMW 4 Series  
Coupe 4

ADVERT



An early indication of how BMW's design simplicity made products easy to use is Count Rivolta's egg-shaped BMW Isetta exhibit. It caused a sensation in 1953, with its bubble-type windows and outward-hinged front end, and was lauded for its phenomenal 5.6 l/100 km fuel economy and 85 km/h top speed.

But fuel economy was not upper-most on my mind as I journeyed the 24 kilometres west, through *Avenue Brasília* and the A5, away from bustling Lisbon and into the parish of Cascais – and the ex-Formula One racetrack of Estoril – to drive the brand new BMW 4-Series coupé. The new sporty 248 km/h BMW 428i coupé sips fuel at a surprisingly frugal 6.6 l/100 km – a figure close to the tiny Isetta. But I drove the more powerful top of the range 435i coupé, which is the beefiest petrol version available until the M4 arrives in 2014.

The German marque has glorious heritage in luxurious two-door coupés, and this one slots neatly in under the 6-Series and the rumoured 2 series. The range topping 435i is powered by the Twin Power turbocharged in-line six-cylinder engine, bestowing the car with scalding acceleration from 0-100km/h in just 5.1seconds. My highly spirited laps in the 435i around the racetrack revealed how 400Nm of torque empowered the coupé with a tangible, emotive quality normally unavailable in this price range. Sweeping theatrically westward on public roads from Lisbon Portela Airport to Estoril demonstrated that the coupés' refinement hasn't been sacrificed to achieve that sporty drive either. The 428i and 435i are available from R517 000 and R694 100 respectively.

The Eurostyle Tour pointed northeast, to London and the Café Royal, where I met Christopher Jenner, the South African-born design renaissance entrepreneur. Jenner holds

court, his elegantly sweeping hands articulating his point of view, his eyes fixed on mine as if locking me into the theme. "London's a very tough place. It's incredibly competitive but you have to keep at it and keep focused, and the results speak for themselves," he says, adding, "South Africa has installed a determined work ethic in me which I find very valuable as one keeps pushing forward." His Capetonian flourishes now blurred by his constant, global travel, Jenner is not a 'head in the clouds' dreamer. His clients range from Eurostar, where he is the Creative Director, to Diptyque, the Parisian perfumier, where, with other major brands, he specialises in creating new global retail concepts. Among them, is Penhaligons, the mid-nineteenth century perfumery.

We trot the 60 seconds from Café Royal to the *Beaux Arts* influenced Regent Street shop-front of Penhaligons. Recently re-launched by Jenner, its English architectural heritage makes the point with eccentric effect. Interior space looks a lot bigger than it is and the sense of depth is reflected throughout the intricate and often kaleidoscopic nature of Jenner's interior design work. How did he achieve this effect? "It's the repetition of shape, form, detail, pattern, and texture – and how that affects the way we

**ABOVE LEFT** Christopher Jenner loves coming back home. "I can't think of a better place for me to spend my time. I normally come home in February when it's cold, dark and miserable in Europe. Each trip I try to take in another aspect of the country; last year it was the deep Karoo, which is always magical. I never skip the Cederberg, which is my favourite place on earth."

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**BELOW** BMW 4 Series Coupe 4





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**BELOW** BMW 4 Series Coupe 3

see things, making the space seem bigger,” he affirms. “You look at a brand’s heritage and product offering, and how that brand wants to position itself,” he says. A graduate from the Johannesburg School of Art and the Boston School of Design in Cape Town, he adds, “It’s all about the relationship between storytelling and design.”

The next artisan drew upon a storytelling medium that pre-dates the 300 BC Syrian invention of the blowpipe, which is an intrinsic part of modern glassblowing. Peter Layton and his London Glassblowing Studio is where the alchemy of modern design in glass unfolds. Established in 1976, it has a reputation as one of Europe’s premier glassmaking workshops, with a particular genius for the use of colour, form and texture. Each signed collector’s piece is free-blown, encouraging a greater degree of spontaneity. Under Layton’s indulgent gaze is Bruce Marks, the Durban born glass-master, as he blows a cane of molten glass into a creation of value and beauty. “I create blown sculptural glass which expresses a powerful African emergence,” he says, his Durban accent giving way to the

long, elided vowel sounds of South East London.

Whilst glass has a high resistance to electricity, the first-ever iBMW model certainly doesn’t. The all-electric i3 was revealed to the world media at the edge of the Thames at Old Billingsgate – with Tower Bridge providing a dramatic backdrop. Sienna Miller – wearing a floral print Dolce and Gabbana summer dress – flawlessly hosted the exclusive and historic event for this uncompromisingly sustainable vehicle. Designed for urban areas, it is BMW’s first zero-emissions mass-produced vehicle that we can buy in South Africa in 2014. iBMW is the first company to launch a volume production vehicle to feature carbon-fibre to reduce energy consumption. You can drive it between 130 to 200 km on plug-in electric power alone and an optional 647cc two-cylinder petrol engine range extender generates electricity to extend the range to about 240 to 300 km. I drove the BMW ActiveE, equipped with a similar drivetrain to the i3, through parts of the Garden Route and can confirm that it’s brisk, with binary-smooth acceleration.

The BMW South Africa EuroStyle Tour left me with the indelible view that the traditions and abilities of the entrepreneurial artisans I met combine to awaken our senses through their ability to understand the subtle cause and effect relationship behind their designs. These objects of desire create another dimension in a world craving a new level of sensory indulgence. It also re-affirmed my belief that South African designers are enriching the rest of the world with their unique perspective on life. ■

