

# Citroen C\_42 and the power of 'brand experience centres'

Mercedes-Benz World and Citroen C\_42 are two different but equally powerful ways for the respective car makers to reinforce their values



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Citroen C\_42 is on the Champs-Elysees



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I've long been a fan of [Mercedes-Benz World](#), the giant showroom/museum/test track that pays homage to the history of Daimler cars from yesteryear through to the latest range of cars that you can inspect, spec, purchase and collect on the premises.

In my view, its biggest success is offering up enough to keep anyone of any age interested, be it by ogling at tyre-smoking demo runs, marvelling at the art installation of a dissected Formula 1 car or simply drinking a large cup of posh coffee while admiring a [Smart Forfour](#).

However, it's a fact that – in the UK at least – Mercedes-Benz World is a unique asset, and I've no doubt that is because it was both monumentally expensive to build and remains so now to maintain. Where Mercedes sees a value, I guess others don't, which is a real shame because whatever you do, touch, see or smell at the place is acutely on-brand. People who go in curious tend to come out as converts, and that must pay dividends for Mercedes sales in the long-term.

The Citroen C\_42 building is – surprise, surprise – at number 42, Champs-Elysees, a prime piece of real estate that presumably means the bean-counters keep a very close eye on ensuring it pays its way. In a very different, but just as appealing way, it is as expertly judged at delivering on Citroen's emerging brand values as Mercedes-Benz World does for Mercedes, although its scope is necessarily more limited by the amount of space available.

In fact, the width of the C\_42 building is seriously restricted, but famed French architect **Manuelle Gautrand** got round that by stretching it 30m up, over five or six levels, and then putting a twisting metal tube in that runs from the top floor to the basement, and which you can slide down at quite an impressive speed in exchange for a euro.

On each floor, there's a plinth carrying cars from Citroen's past, present and future, including production vehicles, race cars and concept cars. Even alone, these plinths are beguiling pieces of engineering, as they can be cranked up and down so that new cars can be driven on and off. Fully expanded across the height of the building, they set an amazing and frequently changing tone as you climb or descend the stairs to take it all in.

There's a little bit of history and quite a bit of insight into the stories behind some of the cars on show, but the overwhelming emphasis is on fun, something enhanced by the use of bright colours and the sunlight pouring through the glass frontage. It's airy, calming and entertaining – all the things Citroen wants to be, particularly since its rebirth with the launch of the C4 Cactus.

There are, for instance, photo booths that (for 50 cents) take pictures of you against a quirky background as you bounce on a trampoline, set next to brief but informative insights into the original **Citroen Cactus** concept. In other words, it's immersive education at its finest.

Sure, Citroen C\_42 is not worth a trip to Paris in itself, but it is worth a few hours and a few euros of your time and effort if you happen to be there. Almost without you realising it, it takes you into the mindset of a modern-day Citroen that isn't afraid to reference its past, and which has the self-confidence to set an agenda without feeling the need to ram it down your throat. Now let's hope that more manufacturers (**Jaguar**, anyone?) are brave enough to follow suit.