

BMW NA 50th Anniversary | 50 Stories for 50 Years

Chapter 46: “BMW of North America Headquarters: Dynamically Adjusting to the Market and Associate Work Models.”

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Since its founding in 1975, BMW of North America has occupied a number of buildings in northern New Jersey, which themselves offer a fascinating glimpse at the company's adaptations to increasing sales as well as new models of working in the post-pandemic era.



Upon its founding in 1975, BMW of North America inherited its headquarters building in Montvale from Hoffman Motors Corporation. Though it was strikingly designed by Rotwein + Blake, the building was intended to house a relatively small distributorship importing some 13,000 cars per year—not an important branch of a global automaker

with 370 employees and sales of 100,000 cars per year, as BMW NA had become a decade later.

An expansion was required, and in 1986 BMW of North America CEO Dr. Günther Kramer commissioned a 205,000 square foot corporate headquarters for the rapidly expanding sales subsidiary. Designed by Princeton architectural firm CUH2A, the ultra-modern headquarters building was completed in 1988. Located at 300 Chestnut Ridge Road in Woodcliff Lake, it was large enough to accommodate BMW NA's executive staff as well as those working for the motorcycle division, previously consigned to the old Butler & Smith offices in Norwood, New Jersey. It couldn't accommodate the Eastern Region, however, so that division moved from an auxiliary building into the main Hoffman Motors building in Montvale.

As spacious as it was, the building was outgrown within two decades. Over that period, BMW's U.S. sales had tripled to more than 300,000 cars per year, and its staff had grown accordingly. Once again, BMW of North America needed more office space.



Fortunately, Kramer had done more than simply commission a new headquarters in

1986. He'd also purchased a 40-acre plot of land, to which an additional 45 acres directly south of that parcel were added by then-CEO Tom Purves in 2004.

The latter plot included a 130,000-square foot office building at 200 Chestnut Ridge Road, which had been erected in 1971 as the headquarters of tool and equipment maker Ingersoll-Rand. Unlike BMW of North America, Ingersoll-Rand was contracting its New Jersey operations, and it no longer needed space for 700 employees in Woodcliff Lake. Following the sale, Ingersoll-Rand leased the building from BMW before relocating to a smaller building nearby.

In 2005, the Chairman and CEO of BMW (U.S.) Holding Company Tom Purves announced that BMW NA would be adding 220,000 square feet of new facilities on the site. As part of an overall reorganization of BMW NA's facilities, the Ingersoll-Rand building would be upgraded for improved energy efficiency, then used to house the Aftersales division and BMW Motorrad among other business units. The old Hoffman Motors building in Montvale would be sold.

The \$100 million facility announced by Purves would mainly be a Technical Training Center but would also house the Eastern Region offices. It was designed by New York architecture firm HOK, which had won an international competition with its proposal for an ultramodern glass-and steel structure. "We were seeking something that speaks to the BMW commitment to design elegance," Purves told The New York Times in 2005. "We also wanted a building that would reflect our commitment to the natural environment and energy consumption reduction."

HOK had employed innovative yet traditional methods to make the building more efficient. Windows and skylights would reduce the need for artificial light, wind would provide natural ventilation, and a set of exterior louvers would open and close automatically to regulate temperature. Radiant heat would be provided by hot water

running through pipes in the floor.

Equally important, the building was designed to blend into the landscape, even though its modern design would seem at odds with that goal. "We have selected glass and metal and crisp natural products to create a structure that will nestle into the elegant natural landscape and integrate itself into the surrounding orchards," HOK's Director of Design Kenneth H. Drucker told The New York Times. The building would be surrounded by bioswales, small wetlands that would treat runoff from the buildings and their parking lots in an environmentally-friendly manner.

Three years later, the building at 250 Chestnut Ridge Road was completed, along with new engineering workshops and vehicle storage facilities at 150 Chestnut Ridge Road. With the renovated Ingersoll-Rand headquarters, the three buildings constituted the newly-christened South Campus.

At the opening in 2008, Purves noted that the new buildings "represent BMW's long-term commitment to America, to New Jersey and the region from where we draw our talented work force. They are part of BMW's growing footprint in the U.S., a demonstration of our increasing commitment to and presence in this great country." Indeed, BMW NA now had enough space for 1,000 employees in Woodcliff Lake, more than double the number employed by the company 30 years earlier.

In the meantime, the closed-office arrangement within BMW NA's 1988



headquarters building (the 300 Building) had fallen out of fashion. In August 2011, the company announced that Jarmel Kizel Architects and Engineers had been hired to reconfigure the existing space with “open plan” architecture using a post-and-beam system rather than traditional wall panels. This would save space and allow the workspaces to be customized, should needs and uses change in the future.

Which they did, sparked by the work-from-home era that began in 2020 with the Covid pandemic. After an initial period during which all employees worked from home, BMW NA began requiring employees to return to the office for two days per week. The requirement has since increased to three days per week, but it still means that no more than 60 percent of employees are in the office at any given time.

At the same time that fewer associates were in the office at any one time, it was discovered that both the much-loved 300 building and its adjacent parking garage would need major structural repairs. This prompted management to rethink the BMW NA campus in its entirety.



The Ingersoll-Rand building would be renovated a second time to become the new BMW NA

headquarters while the 300 building and the land to the north end of the campus would be severed and sold to a developer. On December 13, 2024, associates vacated the building at 300 Chestnut Ridge Road that had served as the headquarters for BMW NA for over 36 years and moved into the new headquarters at 200 Chestnut Ridge Road—now designated as 200 BMW Drive.

For its part, the former Ingersoll-Rand building at number 200 has been remodeled to make the most of its 1970s Brutalist architecture. As a BMW of North America press release stated at the building's grand opening in April 2025, "The raw beauty of the exposed concrete structure is complemented by dynamic feature elements: energy-efficient angled LED lighting, saturated graphics, dimensional wood elements, and jewel-tone accents. The careful planning of both individual and collaborative workspaces allows daylight to flow across the floor. Higher ceilings and exposed structures successfully balance light. Collectively, these design decisions create a healthy and comfortable atmosphere that encourages focus, collaboration, and success."

The renovation also made room for more than 25 pieces of artworks, which are now on display throughout the building. The art, previously hidden in various conference rooms and storage spaces, includes works by notable artists including Guatemalan-born abstract painter Alfred Jensen—whose “grids of brightly geometric patterns and forms” are part of the permanent collections of the Museum of Modern Art and the Guggenheim—and American figurative artist Alex Katz.

Most notably, the building now greets employees and guests with a “two-story entry pavilion that provides a monumental sense of arrival through its dramatic structural-glazed façade that extends toward a welcoming and vibrant communal green.”

Beyond the lobby, the interior was reconfigured along the lines of a co-working space, with a “centralized circulation path known as ‘Main Street’ which encourages



employee interaction within the building and links directly to a modern full-service cafeteria and food service amenities." With few exceptions, individual offices were eliminated in favor of work stations and lockers, with abundant common areas for meetings and informal interaction. All of that was made possible by software like Microsoft Teams, which enable internet-based communication and facilitates collaboration not only with BMW NA employees working remotely but with BMW AG in Munich.

"An ideal on-site work environment enables intensive collaboration," said Ilka Horstmeier, BMW AG Member of the Board of Management, People and Places. "With the new BMW North America headquarters, we foster cohesion, innovation power, and ultimately growth and success. However, it's not just about where we work, but more importantly, how we work. It's about adopting more agile ways of working, using digital tools and methods, and thereby driving our performance."

Having reimagined its campus, BMW of North America's U.S. headquarters now consists of a central headquarters building housing the national sales company plus its associated functions including BMW Financial Services management, a second building housing the company's North American training facilities and Eastern Region, and the third building for engineering, vehicle administration services, two vehicles workshops and a test vehicle storage area.

The headquarters building commissioned by Dr. Gunther Kramer in 1988 will be sold, along with approximately 21 acres of BMW of North America's 85-acre parcel in Woodcliff Lake. Though the company itself continues to expand, its office-space contraction represents the new reality of work in the post-pandemic era, one in which offices themselves can be whatever we need, wherever we are, and whenever we need them.

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