

ET TU, VERTU?

Why pay \$300 for a handphone when you can pay \$37,000? Tracy Lee finds that Vertu — the world's most costly mobile — tips consumer logic on its head.

Whoever coined the term "talk is cheap" might have to eat his words now that Vertu, "the world's most exclusive personal communication instrument", is available in Singapore. While open since June, Singapore's Vertu Store at The Paragon in Orchard Road (by appointment only, please) holds its official launch party this month. The art-gallery-like white-on-white Vertu Store carries five different models of the brand's first phone, the MMII — in stainless steel, stainless steel with yellow gold accents, yellow gold, white gold, or platinum. The accompanying accessories are just as eye-popping, such as the white or yellow gold bracelet-like accoutrements that you can hang your phone off, like some exquisite Judith Leiber embellished purse. It's a rather sensible idea too, considering that not chaining the phone to yourself is tantamount to walking around with an unclasped diamond-studded Rolex or not locking your front door when you have a 36-inch plasma TV in your living room. The other option for your phone: black leather "wallets" with enough room for your Vertu phone and your five C's (car keys, cash, credit cards, country club membership card, condo keys). These are from London leather specialists, Conolly, the same people that make Rolls Royce car seats. Let's look at prices: they start from \$9,000 for a stainless steel model, and up to a devastating \$37,000 for the platinum version; and this is without all the fancy technical accompaniments such as MP3 player, built-in digicam, or MMS (multimedia messaging) features that the average top-of-the-line mobile carries.

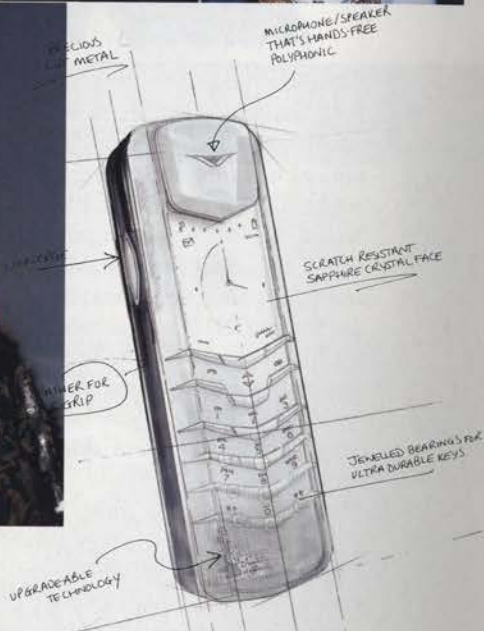
We got Frank Nuovo, Vertu's creative director and designer (who's also been Nokia's head of design) to try to convince us that the Vertu is worth its weight in gold.



Gwyneth Paltrow with Frank Nuovo at the Vertu launch in Paris



Tina Tan-Leo with her latest accessory



ELLE: Who'll pay these prices?

FN: "Today, the mobile phone has evolved from an instrument of utility to become a lifestyle accessory like a watch or a pen. Like all products which have a personal association, there is a natural evolution that certain discerning individuals will desire a personal expression of excellence and style which is unique and exclusive."

ELLE: The Vertu phone is quite

a clunker at 200g. Others are much lighter, at about a third of the weight. Why?

FN: "Our extensive research has shown that there's a demand for the use of precious and luxury materials coupled with a substantial feel. The Vertu is to mobile phones what a Patek Philippe is to watches, or what a Rolls Royce is to cars. It's not about being heavy or light — it's about a totally new category in the communications industry: Luxury."

ELLE: What if my friend's \$100 Nokia can do more fancy tricks than my Vertu?

FN: "Vertu is not about being first with new technology, it's about being the very best in performance and quality. We have something called Evolutionary Technology: the instrument's technology can be upgraded as certain select new technologies which have become available are tested and found to be reliable."