

GRAYS OF WESTMINSTER: A 'THEATRE' OF NIKON

Innovative in both shop concept and service, Pimlico-based Grays of Westminster is both well known and well regarded in the trade. Having just received **an outstanding service award from Nikon**, owner **Gray Levett** shares his ideas on how staying niche and extending 'old fashioned' courtesy has made for a successful store...

Grays of Westminster has sometimes been described as an elegant piece of retail theatre. This may well be true, as I have always maintained that running a shop like Grays of Westminster Exclusively...Nikon is not so very different from putting on a theatre production.

People from all walks of life and all nationalities have made their way through our doors and the job of buying, stocking, displaying and selling Nikon to suit their requirements is a very demanding one. No one can let up while the curtain is up and the production is in full swing.

With oak panelled walls, a restored Victorian fireplace, rich wool carpeting and leather-topped desks instead of counters, it has often been commented that Grays of Westminster invented a new type of retail photographic environment for a new type of customer.

Perhaps our most recognisable trait is profound product knowledge rendered with pleasing courtesy and this is, I think, our key and distinguishing feature. I have always been aware that we are pursuing a niche strategy by being exclusively tied to one brand, Nikon. However, it was what made us stand out from other camera shops originally all those years ago and continues to do so today.

A visit to the shop has become, for some, an essential part of the Nikon



experience. We continue to offer what I hope is still an elegant oasis of old-fashioned service. Moreover, it is our unstinting determination to relate to our customers with the spirit, courtesy and enthusiasm now so often lost to the modern retail world, to attend to detail because it practically matters, to inform and advise because we can, and to afford to each and every one of our customers the same grace, willingness and good manners that we believe everyone is due.

Our customers have told us that the delight of walking into Grays of

Oak panelled walls, a restored Victorian fireplace, rich wool carpeting, leather-topped desks and a sense of 'theatre' greet visitors to Grays Of Westminster's Pimlico location

Westminster is as potent and timeless as ever. 'Aladdin's Cave' is a term often used by visitors to describe our shop. Certainly the range and diversity of new, second-hand and vintage Nikon is probably the widest in the world and is enough to bring a smile to even the most careworn of Nikon users.

In 2002 we launched *Nikon Owner*, a beautifully designed glossy magazine featuring some of the world's greatest photographers and benchmark reviews of Nikon equipment. It is within these pages over the years that the universe of Nikon has been travelled, examined, discussed, pictured and written about, reviewed, analysed and then sent forth to subscribers in the four corners of the globe.

We have devoted ourselves to the singular policy that there is no item too small, nor any destination too far. So, if a customer makes a personal visit to the shop or contacts us by phone or email, whether they are from a nearby shire or a client living halfway around the globe, Grays of Westminster will always do its utmost to service that demand.

The motto on our Coat of Arms reads 'Lead in Order to Serve'. It reminds us daily that we stand ready to serve and help any photographer with their Nikon needs.

www.grayswestminster.co.uk

Grays honoured by Nikon

Last month Gray Levett, the founder of Grays of Westminster, was presented with a Swarovski crystal recreation of the Nikon Model I, released to mark the corporation's 100th anniversary, by President of Nikon Europe Mr. Toru Iwaoka. Described by the latter as "a token of our appreciation for your years of outstanding service to Nikon," Mr Iwaoka added: "Grays of Westminster represents a unique part of Nikon's heritage and we are deeply grateful to you for all you have done over the years."

As those in the photo trade will be aware, the Nikon Model I was the



Gray Levett is presented with a Nikon 100th Anniversary crystal recreation of the Nikon Model I (its very first camera) by the President of Nikon Europe, Mr. Toru Iwaoka, in return for what's described as 'outstanding service'

very first Nikon camera, developed in 1948. The 100th Anniversary crystal recreation of the Nikon Model I brings this iconic camera back to life.

"This beautiful and unique gift came as a complete surprise to me," says Gray Levett. "I am deeply moved by the generosity and thoughtfulness of this magnificent gift from Mr. Iwaoka and the Nikon Corporation. There has always been a passion and commitment to excellence and innovation within Nikon itself, passed on through the years as part of the corporation's DNA. I am proud and honoured to have been a small part of this illustrious company."

To experience Grays of Westminster's retail theatre for yourself, pay a visit to 40 Churton Street, Pimlico, London SW1V 2LP