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LATE CITY FINAL

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A POST PLUS SECTION

Home electronics for the absolutely fabulous

By VERONIQUE VIENNE

TODAY, buying a television can be as posh an experience as buying a couture dress. And why not — a drop-dead Sony KV32XBR100, accessorized with a must-have pair of SAVA55 speakers (including two stylish subwoofers for stunning low-frequency impact) costs about as much as a dreamy made-to-measure designer silk taffeta “haute” evening gown.

At long last, the world of high-tech and the world of high-touch have come together — at 550 Madison Ave., just around the corner from Chanel, Hermes and Bergdorf. There, downstairs from its new electronics store, Sony just opened its first “salon.”

The glamorous Sony Plaza home theater showroom is reminiscent of a deco Hollywood lounge, complete with romantic lighting, mohair limousine wall covering, black and white photographs of stars from the Columbia Archives and comfortable, chic Donghia seating arrangements.

James Mansour, who also designed the Henri Bendel and Warner Bros. stores, created this first-ever female-friendly electronics retail concept. “We wanted women to buy video and audio systems the way they buy clothes,” he says. “We’ve cre-



Shoppers Margaret Kittinger (l.) and Susan Loren (r.) sip their cappuccinos on plush couches at the downstairs lounge of Sony's new store on Madison Avenue. Susan May Tell

ated the feel of a collection. Instead of showing parts, we show entire outfits.”

TV sets, speakers and audio components are hooked together and displayed on elegant trolley-like wood units that can be wheeled in front of customers. You test the equipment as if you were at home (with the rich and famous — that is), relaxing on stylish ergonomically-correct couches, sipping foaming cappuccinos and nibbling on delicious pastries.

Today, as proven by the latest VH1 Fashion and Music Awards, television and high style are merging into one and the same thing. Pop stars and couture celebs are seen mingling together at glitzy social events — for the benefit of both.

The Sony home entertainment store is no exception. Donna Karan wardrobe the lounge staff with smart unisex pantsuits. Ralph Lauren decorated the screening room, a state-of-the-art audio theater where customers can retire to fully experience the various sound systems. Soon, Sony will link up the lounge by satellite to the Paris or Milan collections. “High technology can be sensual,” says Mansour. “Design, fashion, entertainment, electronics, music, romance — here, it’s a seamless experience.”