

# Eyes On Design 2005

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# New Design Directions

By Gary Witzenburg

When and why does an automaker set off in a bold new design direction for a product line (Chrysler 300C), a critically important brand (Cadillac) or an entire portfolio (BMW and Nissan/Infiniti)? History abounds with examples of dramatic new designs that helped save a marque, or an entire company. And some that didn't.

One of our favorite pursuits through the years we've been in and around this business has been talking with designers about their work, especially those in the process of taking risks and leading such bold new directions. The following are excerpts from recent interviews for Automotive Industries and The Robb Report Collection:

## **BMW - Chris Bangle**

We're not doing this to freak anybody out. We're doing it because we believe these are the best solutions to fulfill these upcoming challenges. And we do our homework to make sure we can say, did we do the best job we could, did we leave no stone unturned, and are we really convinced through the whole process that we're doing the right thing? And if you've got that backing from the board behind you, then it makes taking the critical reviews a little easier, because you can take a long-view perspective of it.

## **Nissan - Tom Semple**

What we're doing is trying to sell emotion. There's a blank slate when you have a whole new organization, everything is brand new, and there's an opportunity for new product. We had no money, we were in debt, and we needed to come up with global products that were exciting -- provocative, audacious, bold and thoughtful cars that were our own statement. We could not afford to make bland cars. And if you're going to be bold, you're going to turn some people off.

## **Ferrari/Maserati - Frank Stephenson**

We have to be very careful that Ferrari and Maserati don't overlap. Both are high-image exotic cars, and both have to come across as Italianesque, which is very important. A Ferrari is quite a bit more exotic in terms of materials. A Maserati is more voluptuous, more elegant. Maserati uses natural woods and leathers, everything that can give it a feeling of luxury. The Ferrari customer wants the ultimate materials, a lot of alloys and carbon fiber for lightness.

## **General Motors - Wayne Cherry**

We looked at where Cadillac was at its height of popularity, what the competition was

then, how values and influences have changed over the years and how people perceive luxury vehicles today...and we settled on this 'Art and Science' term as an internal way to focus on the things we wanted to do. 'Art' means design, because Cadillacs at their height were always bold designs. 'Science' means applied technology, since they were also technology flagships.

### **DCX Chrysler Group - Trevor Creed**

We did a series of internal models using rear-drive architecture, then a concept called Chronos. It was an entirely new look, a very upmarket-looking car, and we said, if we could do a rear-drive car, that's the direction we would go. When the merger happened, and we began to share the vision that we would like to do rear-drive prestige vehicles, everything fell into place. Then we said, wouldn't it be great if we could do a Hemi engine and get back to the classic nature of the original 300-Series cars, when they were real American muscle cars and had this great image, and along with that goes rear-wheel drive.

### **General Motors – Ed Welburn**

A design really needs to be a strong statement...and that carries into interior designs, material selections, colors and trim. One good analogy might be learning to be a great painter. Artists have to start with the basics, learn the fundamentals and learn by doing some very straightforward still-life paintings before they can start getting more creative and experimental.

### **Audi - Achim D. Badstubner**

You have to have a strong vision, and that strong vision has to be carried through. A premium car is recognized by its face. This is about overtaking prestige on the autobahn. If you see this face in the mirror, you pull over quick. If you do something new, there's always risk that some won't like it. But we are very sure that most of our customers like a strong, self-confident face, and that is what we have now.

### **Mitsubishi – Dan Sims**

Our cars are engaging, not appliances. They don't isolate you from the road. So we want our designs to reflect that -- muscular, athletic, agile. We want to shrink-wrap the body as much as possible to enhance the wheels, which are shoved out to look very stable, nimble and driver oriented. That's going to be a character of our future designs – that look of stability.