



**interior** motives  
design **conference** 2006

# Change from within

London's Docklands was the setting for the Interior Motives Design Conference 2006 – a historic backdrop undergoing radical transformation and one fitting for discussions about why and how the automotive design industry needs to change for the future. **Euan Sey** reports



**T**he second Interior Motives Design Conference held at the Museum in Docklands, London, played host to a multitude of influential designers, consultants and heated debates. But on one point, it seems, the entire design community is united.

Communicating the needs and importance of design was one of the main themes of last year's conference. This year, the emphasis was more on encouraging design directors themselves to learn how to speak the language of marketing.

Frans Joziassse of PARK Advanced Design Management, who runs a design management Masters in Rotterdam, was also keen to point out the advantages of a shift towards human-centred design. "Consumers are sharing their experiences with each other, criticising products over the internet. They're very well informed."

Han Hendriks, Vice President for Industrial Design at Johnson Controls, agreed that it is the consumers themselves that are changing the car market, and that the design community needs to work harder to adapt – particularly to the needs of young, first-time buyers. "This is the first generation that can't imagine life without the internet, mobile phones and iPods. You can't sell a CD player to people that carry around nomadic products like these." He also pointed out that they've been driving cars in the virtual world (via games like Gran Turismo), and are used to customising them from both a functional and aesthetic perspective.



**Top, from left: Martin Smith, Executive Design Director, Ford of Europe; Han Hendriks, Vice President for Industrial Design, Marketing, Communications and Advanced Sales, Johnson Controls talks to Phillippe Aumont, Vice President: Product Planning, Faurecia Services Group; Adriana Monk, Chief Interior Designer, Jaguar and Land Rover Advanced Design; David Wilkie, Design Director, Stile Bertone**

**Above: Designer briefs . . . the Museum in Docklands was the venue for this year's conference**



Top, from left: David Godber, Director, Nissan Design Europe, who gave the opening address at the conference; Geoff Wardle, Associate Chair – Transportation Design, Art Centre College of Design; Robin Page, Head of Interior Design, Bentley; Frans Joziassse, Director, PARK Advance Design Management; Han Hendriks, Vice President for Industrial Design, Marketing, Communications and Advanced Sales, Johnson Controls

Right: Sheila Clark, Materials Specialist, Vehicle Design Research – Royal College of Art and Simon Timm, Chairman of Ultima Media chat to Andreas Wlasak (second from right), Industrial Design VP, Faurecia and Tony Hunter, Chief Creative, Land Rover (far right) during the cocktail reception



This, says Joziassse, can be harnessed to bridge the gap between products and the expectations of the people that buy them. “Consumers want to be designers. Kids especially, who play computer games, are used to creating their own world.” He pointed to the success of companies such as Lego, which encourages co-design by inviting its customers to design their own products. This may be too far for some, he admits, but we should look to Japanese companies who “put an emphasis on exploring consumers’ desires and needs, into forecasting and observation.” Ditch the car clinics, he said, it’s far too late in the design process to have a positive effect.

### A polar shift

Technology, said Hendriks, is “turning interior design upside down.” Toyota’s plan to introduce a fully automated highway in Japan by 2018 is just the start of a process of change that could see a polar shift in how cars are used and viewed by society as a whole. “In the future, when driving to work the consumer probably won’t even want to drive at all, but at the weekend they might want an interior that provides an experience comparable to riding a motorcycle. The challenge is how to create a different mood for different moments in time.”

Joziassse is an equally keen exponent of the need to create a

more experience-based service for consumers. This is something that Joe Ferry, Head of Design at Virgin Atlantic Airways, put to dramatic effect during his revitalisation of the transatlantic carrier. Customers are exposed to cutting-edge service, interior design and brand projection from the moment they check in for a flight to the moment they step out of the airport at the other end. His success in establishing brand differentiation provides a model that car manufacturers would do very well to adopt.

### A framework for products

Cars, of course, are more complex than virtually any other product on the market. Increasingly, they are becoming a framework or portal for high-tech gadgets and features to integrate with each other rather than straightforward forms of transportation. The trick for a supplier like Johnson Controls, said Hendriks, is “to understand where modularity is effective and where flexibility is needed.”

Robin Page, Head of Interior Design at Bentley, agreed: “Customers are looking for flexibility. They want to be able to treat the interior like a living room, to redecorate the walls with leather, cloth and wallpaper. More choice is what’s needed.”

Martin Smith, Executive Design Director of Ford of Europe, was also quick to highlight the need for a more bespoke approach to



Top, from left to right: Andreas Wlasak, Industrial Design VP, Faurecia; David Wilkie, Design Director, Stile Bertone; Anthony Lo, Advanced Design Director, GM Europe; Martin Smith, Executive Design Director, Ford of Europe; Terry Spall, President, MIRA Shanghai

Right: Adriana Monk from Jaguar and Land Rover Advanced Design is interviewed by German TV station DW-TV



interior design, even in mass-produced cars: "We have a duty to expand the harmony of our interiors, to offer a wider range of trim options to address all tastes."

While more colours and trim options are necessary, does this alone go far enough in addressing the needs of individual drivers?

Andreas Wlasak, Director of Design at Faurecia Interior Systems, thought not: "The challenge that component suppliers face is that we must standardise in order to meet the cost and performance targets we're set by the OEMs. But the consumer must still feel like the IP was made 'just for me'."

One way of doing so, said Wlasak, is to introduce changeable IP, seat and interior panels that can be fitted at dealerships or even, in some cases, at home. "It would be like swapping your mobile phone covers with a friend." The design of these components would need to be done very early in the creative process, however, in order to keep costs to a minimum. One day, Wlasak envisions manufacturers offering integrated (yet removable) interior designs created by high-street fashion labels and artists. Innovation from the bottom-up is the way forward, he said. Done correctly, this approach could offer a sizeable degree of differentiation for very little additional outlay on the part of the manufacturer.

Initiatives such as these are very much the focus of the Art Centre College of Design's new Color, Materials and Trends Exploration Laboratory, set up with a \$2m donation from Nokia

and equipped with a full-size interior space simulator supplied by Johnson Controls.

### Multi-discipline design

Expanding the horizons of the students as they come up through the education system is just the start, though, said Stile Bertone's Design Director, David Wilkie. He believes in giving his designers experience of as many design disciplines as possible, getting them involved in the creation of car, truck, boat and aircraft interiors – even mobile phones: "There's more good design in industrial design than gets into the mainstream car industry. The concepts are great, but the products themselves are still really boring – the industry is too conservative."

### Creative future in China

Inevitably, the impact of the rapidly expanding Chinese car market also emerged as one of the major discussion points of the conference. While the fledgling car manufacturers in China are still very much at the early stages of development, much as the ones in Korea were in the late 1980s, it's only a matter of time before they outgrow their desire for copies of Audis and BMWs forecasted Wilkie.

So far, said Joziassse, a total of six design and brand Masters courses have been set up in China – and many more Chinese



Top, from left: Dave Muyres, VP of Educational Initiatives, Art Centre College of Design; Joe Ferry, Head of Design, Virgin Atlantic Airways; Adriana Monk, Chief Interior Designer, Jaguar and Land Rover Advanced Design; Laurent Boulay, Research & Development, Exterior Designer, VW; Dale Harrow, Head of Vehicle Design, Royal College of Art

Left: The gala dinner was held on a boat and included a cruise on the River Thames

students are already enrolled in European and American colleges. Within ten years, he says, the country will evolve from a manufacturing giant into a centre of creativity, research and design.

Geoffrey Holland pointed out that architects and designers in China "aren't held back by the puritan scriptures of modernism" and that they may "show us how to bring decoration into cars. Looking at the skyscrapers in Shanghai, they could be fabulous."

Terry Spall of MIRA Shanghai, which has been operating in the country since 1998, concurred: "Soon we will be a small taker compared to their home market, and that's when we'll start to see some Chinese designs that are truly impressive."

Director of Advanced Design at GM, Anthony Lo, highlighted the importance of his line of work, particularly in making alternative forms of propulsion attractive to consumers in the future. Studios like his have a duty to look as far as 45 or 50 years into the future, into how technology such as fuel cells, solar power and hybrid drivetrains can be made attractive, not only for their environmental credentials but also their aesthetics and functionality.

GM's claim that it will bring a fuel cell car to market by 2010, however, are exaggerated: "I can tell you with some certainty that that won't happen," said Lo. "It will take a bit more time. But if we don't take in these issues early enough, they won't happen in the

production phase."

One issue, which Carole Favart from Toyota R&D feels is being neglected, is that of sustainable material usage, particularly bioplastics. "It's not just about hybrid technology, we need to take a more holistic approach.

Advances in technology, said Lo, are effectively handing the design community a clean sheet with which to completely redefine to the concept of personal transport. "What if we were inventing the automobile today instead of 100 years ago?"

### Responsibility for change

While the themes and issue thrown up during the two-day design conference spanned a wide range of subjects, there was a message that threaded them all together: the industry has a responsibility to change the way that we think about design – how it relates to the environment we live in, the people and emerging markets it serves. Ultimately, though, pointed out Dale Harrow, this change is coming whether the design community likes it or not: "Most of the students coming through now have a great deal of concern about the environment, about the impact of the car. The average graduate is 28, and has already had some experience of the vehicle industry before they arrived. They want to go back in and do something different, to change it from within." △