

What Goes into Automobile Designing

BY HARLEY J. EARL

Discontent, dissatisfaction, and restlessness are not ordinarily considered admirable characteristics in human beings. They seem to be absolutely necessary, however, for any person engaged in the field of automobile design. A car stylist must be discontent with past achievements, dissatisfied with present accomplishments, and continuously in search of new ideas, new ways to design more beautiful and more graceful automobiles.

His obligations are many. To himself and to his firm he owes the obligation to put forth his best efforts and in this way meet his greatest responsibility — that of presenting to the public for whom he styles the most beautiful, graceful, comfortable, and serviceable automobile within his power to design.

In meeting these obligations, alertness is a stylist's greatest aid. He must be aware of new trends, new influences, and changes in public taste. These things are signals to a stylist, signs which guide him in his search for the design which will come closest to satisfying the discriminating taste of the car-buying public.

Because an auto stylist looks to and works for the years ahead, current modes of design are always in the past to him. He must remain ever conscious of the fact that he is working in the future and that automobile styling must keep pace with progress. His work today must neither run ahead of nor lag behind the amount of change which the public will accept when his designs go to the market place.

The matter of timing, then, becomes one of the most significant factors to a stylist. No one can predict the time of birth of an idea. When an idea is born in the mind of an auto designer, the decision as to when it should make its public debut—if ever—is all-important. The fact that there is no foolproof method for reaching this decision is one of the intangibles which make the automobile design business the fascinating, dynamic profession that it is. Mistakes, in timing or in judgment, are bound to be made, but even from mistakes there is a lesson to be learned.

The stylist's real pride is in the creativeness of his hands—hands which mold the offerings of a dreamer's mind into an automotive design which is aesthetically pleasing to the public. He must be a dreamer, but a practical one. His imagination must be fertile, but the exercise of it must be tempered with common sense.

In the pursuit of success in the field of automobile styling, no designer can walk alone. He must of necessity be influenced by those around him in his studios and by the public for whom he creates. To the research man and the engineer he must look for the purpose of his work. Only after sound engineering quality has been assured for the engine and chassis of an automobile, can the stylist honestly set himself to the task of applying beauty and grace of line to the car.

In General Motors, the close cooperation of the styling staff with each of the automotive divisions has helped immeasurably in designing automobiles the public will accept. Through their efforts and those of the Customer Research department, we have been able to gain a better understanding of what the public wants in car design. We have tried to come as close as possible to giving the customer what he wants.

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Shakespeare has told us "neither a borrower nor a lender be." An automobile stylist must be both. He must borrow his ideas from the creatures and creations of nature which are all about him. And the minute the cars he designs have reached dealers' showrooms, they belong to everyone, and the ideas represented in them are public property. Then, because the public demands it, there must be born new ideas, new designs, new methods of making the automobiles of a coming year more beautiful than those of yesterday and today.

There is no rest, nor end to the process, but the true automobile stylist seeks none.



(Image Added)

Harley Earl, General Motors Vice President, is in charge of the Styling Staff and responsible for the design and decor of General Motors automobiles. He runs one of the world's greatest and most complicated style studios, personally coordinating its highly exacting operations.