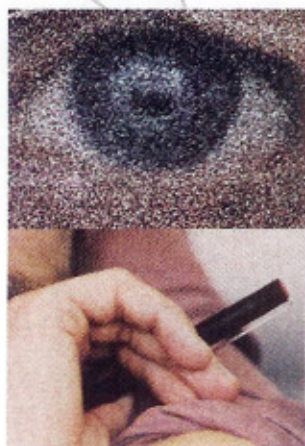


# { THE SHAPE OF } THINGS TO COME

Controversial auto designer Chris Bangle has only just begun his quest to change the world}}

■ words gavin green



**}}** **A WILD-EYED** revolutionary destroying one of Europe's blue-chip luxury brands? The most influential automotive designer of the early 21st century? Passions run high whenever BMW's design chief is the topic of discussion. He might have been born and raised in the Midwest, but with Bangle there is, it seems, no middle ground.

Love or loathe his work, Bangle's impact on auto design has been profound. No other designer, not even legendary GM design chief Harley Earl, has so rapidly become a part of the industry lexicon. To "bangle" a design is now an auto-industry verb for ruining it. Auto writers use "Bangle butt" to describe a tail with an extra layer of metal on the trunk (think new Mercedes S-Class). Bangle, some rivals will remind you, is only one letter away from "bungle."

Web sites petitioning for Bangle's dismissal continue to attract support, other designers still treat him rather as the *grands artistes* of the *Académie des beaux-arts* treated the young Manet, and most auto writers still regard Bangle as the antichrist of car couture. But Bangle BMWs sell. And some critics are starting to wonder whether maybe, just maybe, this intense 47-year-old, who once considered becoming a Methodist minister before studying at the renowned Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, might be onto something.