

(interview) **chris bangle**

J Mays, Ford's global design guru, is no fan, but he admits Bangle has been significant in reshaping modern cars. Martin Smith—former GM Europe design chief and now head of design for Ford of Europe—talks of him as an instigator of the trend toward "surface entertainment" in cars. Take a look at the complex forms and creases on the panels of his Frankfurt show-stopping Iosis concept—said to be the blueprint for Ford's future European design direction—to see why Smith wholeheartedly buys into that idea.

"He's certainly the most talked about [designer]," says Patrick Le Quement, design boss of Renault and probably the world's most admired car designer. "His designs have a great deal of presence, and they're well proportioned. He's been highly influential. My only concern is his use of concave surfaces: They're hollow shapes and lack that tightly muscled look I feel helps design."

Before Bangle, premium cars—following the leads of Mercedes-Benz and more recently Audi—were organic, clean, simple designs. Modern cars are fussier, busier, multi-angled, more

sharply edged. That's the Bangle influence. Bangle calls it "visual energy." He's to automotive visual energy what Picasso was to cubism or Gropius was to Bauhaus.

"A car designer is really a sculptor," says Bangle. "Cars are the sculptures of our everyday lives. We at BMW do not build cars as consumer objects, just to drive from A to B. We build mobile works of art." He says he draws his influences from the world around him: "From everything. From airplanes, to boats, to cathedrals...but we try not to be too influenced by other cars."

When Christopher Edward Bangle was given the top design job at BMW in 1992, it surprised more than a few auto-industry insiders. After graduating from Art Center in the 1980s, Bangle worked for GM's Opel division in Germany and headed Fiat's design facility in Turin, Italy. But he'd only been credited with one complete car, the curiously angular Fiat Coupé, when he moved to Munich. No one knew what to expect.

BMW was then an engineering-dominated company, as German

■ ■ ■
"A car designer is really a sculptor...cars are the sculptures of our everyday lives. We build mobile works of art."
■ ■ ■

bangle influenced...

1. MERCEDES-BENZ S-CLASS

Once the epitome of conservative good taste, the S-Class has now gone flashy. There's visual entertainment galore, but the most BMW-like feature is the Bangle butt—that extra layer of steel on top of the trunk.

2. FORD IOSIS CONCEPT

This is Ford of Europe's new design direction—though Ford in Europe changes design direction as regularly as it changes its management, so nothing can be certain. The Iosis is multi-angled, multi-planed, and has more creases than John Kerry's face. It's Blue Oval Bangle.



1.

3. AUDI Q7

Audi was once the bastion of anti-Bangle: simple, pure, classic, organic forms. But the Q7 sport/utility vehicle has a busy body—a Bangle hallmark. The ravenous front air intakes, including the grille, and slit eyes, also are BMW influenced.

4. CADILLAC BLS

GM's angular and flamboyant Saab-based 3 Series rival has the deep body flanks of the 5 Series, the hard-edged high shoulders, and a noticeable angular hood crease that blends with the A-pillar. It's bold and extroverted: pure Bangle.



3.

5. LEXUS LF-SH

Toyota's luxury division is a convert to Bangle-ism. Both the new GS and IS sedans have Bangle cues like strong shoulders, sheer surfaces, and a high deck. The LF-Sh concept shows Toyota will keep the faith with the next generation LS, too.

6. TOYOTA AVALON

The Kentucky-built Toyota is a conservative thing, as its customers demand. But this full-size sedan has unusual curling 5 Series sedan-style taillights and a Bangle butt to give some edge to the otherwise cautious shape.



5.



2.



4.



6.