

Doodling Sports Cars: The Art of Andre Hudson

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By Roger Witherspoon

From the perspective of a Denver middle school teacher, grading papers from Andre Hudson was a chore.

“Like a lot of kids,” the 33-year-old designer recalled, “I was always doodling on assignments and the teachers were not quite happy when I turned papers in with sketches of people and cars and boats on them. I never really imagined that you could make a career doing something like that.

“Then somebody gave me an automobile magazine since I had always loved cars. There was a sidebar story on Chrysler design and a story about a designer that had worked on the Dodge Viper concept. I was blown away. Somebody’s job is to go in and draw and design cars! I had never thought about it. Wow! This could be an amazing thing to do! That’s why I consider it a blessing to be able to do what I do for a living.”

Whether or not Black artists could do that for a living is a question the young Hudson didn’t ask. His middle school guidance counselors had no idea what it took to get involved in automotive design, or where to go for practical guidance. So Hudson went home and composed a letter to Bob Lutz, then at Chrysler Design, saying he was about to enter high school and wanted to know what it took to be a car designer.

“I would love to work for your guys at some point,” Hudson wrote. “I loved aircraft and cars and could you please enlighten me as to what I need to do to pursue a career?”

Three months later, young Hudson got home from school and found a letter from J.E. Hurlitz, then vice president of product design, stating the company was “thrilled with your excitement and willingness to work with us.” If Hudson attended the College for Creative Studies in Detroit and

earned a degree in industrial design he could join the Chrysler design team. Three years later, Hudson graduated from high school, packed up, and headed for Detroit, unaware of the downward spiral of the Motor City.

“Imagine the shock of this Colorado kid packing up his dodge shadow and rising out of I-94 corridor into downtown Detroit thinking where have I come to?” Hudson recalled. “That neighborhood was abandoned and there were barrels with fires burning in them. It looks like I have landed on the set of Robocop.”

But College was a different world. This was the study of utilitarian art in motion. To designers, a car is a form of performance art and those who appreciate your work buy replicas to take home.

“Cars are a very emotional product,” he explained, “and as a designer of cars, they are extensions of you. Trains and aircraft and other types of transportation are more engineering than design driven and, therefore, the attachment is not quite that emotional.

“There is much more freedom of expression in vehicle design, and it’s what made the connection with me as an artist.”

In his junior year, he received a summer internship with Chrysler. But his work brought him to the attention of Ed Welburn, a design executive at General Motors, who hired him when he graduated.

Welburn, who would eventually become vice president of global design at GM, mentored Hudson, steering him through several projects as he grew as a design professional. “I worked on several concept cars,” he said. “Your dream is to do that because you can get those dreams out on the turntable at shows. But as you mature you realize the importance of not only getting the cover of a magazine for a month or two, but working on a product that you can see in your neighbor’s garage or your parents’ garage.

“It’s been a quest to hone my skills and put out products that my friends and family can drive.”



His seven-year journey through GM's design system had the young Hudson working on big SUVs including the Chevy SSR and Hummer H3, as well as the slick, Saturn Sky roadster. He had a three month assignment in GM's design shop in Coventry, England, which stretched to three years.

Hudson was eager to see the world, and looked forward to working in other GM design studios. But then, the Koreans came calling.

"I was intrigued with Hyundai," he said. "They were on this mission to become much more – perception wise – than the staid company they had been. I was intrigued with the idea of becoming part of a company going through that growth process.

"Hyundai was up and coming and moving quickly. I felt it was time for something new for me."

Hudson left GM to become the senior designer at Hyundai's new studio in Irvine, California where he was to come up with a model for a new sports car. He came up with a head turner called the Genesis Coupe which, he said, "was a first for the new Hyundai. "The company said we know we are building cars that are competent and highly rated in safety. But we are not stepping gout aesthetically to establish who we are. The Genesis was to say we are not copying or mimicking anyone. We are standing alone. We are ready for this."

The Genesis was striking enough to earn a television debut as the high speed escape vehicle of Jack Bauer in the last episode of the adventure series "24." (<http://rwshiftinggears.wordpress.com/2009/11/16/rolling-with-the-road-runners/>)



In his five years with Hyundai, he said, "the biggest culture shock was the speed at which this company moves. I have worked on twice as many projects at Hyundai as I would have worked on at GM."

Cars resulting from Hudson's professional doodling which may now be found in neighborhood garages include the Elantra and Azera sedans, and the 2011 Sonata, now hitting Hyundai show rooms.

"The last generation Sonata was very conservative," said Hudson. "It would blend into a parking lot if you went to a mall and tried to find your car. With this car we sought to establish ourselves as design leaders. We looked at what it was going to take to make an attractive and competitive

design with its own distinct language. We didn't want people saying we were making knock-offs of Toyota or BMW.

“The romance of many cars in the last decade or two has been lost to a very architectural, tectonic, product-like feel. With the Sonata, you notice it has a three dimensional feel. Just as Ed (Welburn) use to say a car is the largest piece of sculpture working people will buy – that is true of the Sonata. You can follow a single line from the bottom of the grill through the hood, up the rail, across the roof and down the tail end. There is a beautiful inter weaving of details on the car. We call it fluidic sculpture.”

Whether the new Sonata catches on with upscale motorists remains to be seen. In the meantime Hudson, with his dream job and colored pencils, continues doodling.

