

AUTOMOBILE HAUTE COUTURE

MERCEDES- BENZ DESIGN GENIUS PAUL BRACQ



In celebration of his 80th birthday the chief designer at Daimler-Benz from the years 1957 to 1967, Paul Bracq was interviewed by #EXTRAORDINAIRE regarding the art of automotive design.

Mr. Bracq, as a little boy, did you play with cars a lot?

At age 12, I started playing with cars in different ways. I painted them and changed their shapes with play dough. I made car sculptures out of Balsa-wood. As a result, entirely new car shapes emerged.

It seems that as a child you already knew that you wanted to be a car designer. Why did you choose this design discipline?

In 1948, I was invited with my family to visit the famous Saoutschik car manufacturer. That was the trigger moment for my future because I became fascinated by the different shapes, as well as, the smell of paint, welded sheet metal, wood and leather. I was very impressed with excellent quality craftsmanship. In this profession you can look back far into antiquity, even as far back as the parade carts of Tutankhamun. These (carts of the ancient Egyptians) had it all, elegance, comfort and speed.

Which of your designs for Mercedes-Benz are you most proud of and why?

I love my profession. My designs are like my children and I love them all the same. I do not have a preferred design. As long as I respect the company's image and I have pushed the limits of the future with style for each new model then I am happy.



What do you associate when you hear the brand name “Mercedes-Benz”?

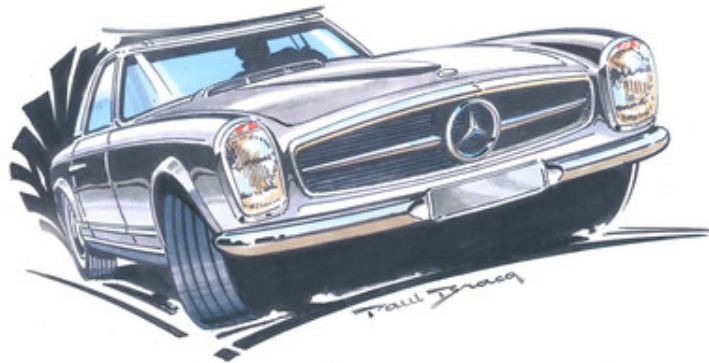
It gives me great pleasure that the brand image of Mercedes-Benz has been consistently associated with charisma and a good reputation internationally. The company has made extraordinary progress with constant research in safety, comfort and new technology.

You came up with the legendary Daimler definition for oysters: “This is a fish with a shell.” How did this happen?

In October 1957, on my first trip to the Mercedes-Benz Motor Show in Paris, during dinner at a restaurant the employees asked me to translate the menu. And that is how I translated oysters. I myself do not eat oysters, nevertheless, this statement still ensures laughter.

During your time in the military in the 50’s you were stationed in the Black Forest and had to bring the company car of a commander to Stuttgart for maintenance and there you stood unceremoniously with your portfolio in the press department of Daimler. How did you manage to gain access?

I had to take the general’s car to be serviced and the driver and myself brought it to Untertürkheim. It was a 300 Mercedes Adenauer. I left the driver of the car in the inspection room and I went to the press department to ask for the Silver Arrow posters for my room. The press department was then headed by Fürst von Urach. Fürst von Urach was a very polite, French-speaking press officer and a friend of Picasso and Dali. In the course of our conversation, I showed him a photo of my Mercedes designs for the future. Eight days later he called me in my barracks and asked me for a second visit. This time it was for the design department of Karl Wilfert in Sindelfingen. Karl Wilfert was very enthusiastic about my designs and offered me a job after completing my military service. Because of the Algerian and Indochina War I was held back and it took me a total of 30 months instead of 18 months of military service. I was very touched that Mercedes-Benz did not withdraw the offer. When I left after 10 years Karl Wilfert said to me that he lost a son.



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What qualities do you consider essential for a young designer in order to stand out from the crowd?

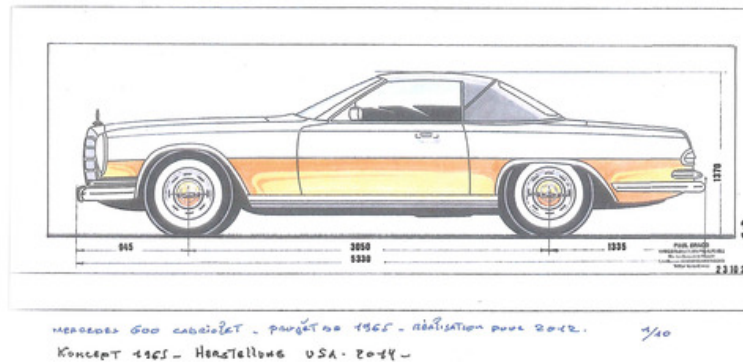
A designer must be proficient in all subjects such as, 3D drawing, working with wooden sculptures, building models and computer renderings. A designer must learn about the brand and have empathy for the brand and for its future. A young designer should use current and new technology as much as possible to design flowing models without falling into pseudo-Baroque modern design with unnecessary decorative details. In the future, no matter which vehicles are driven, we must never forget to preserve the individual mobility and freedom of the occupants of the vehicle.

What do you think of your Mercedes-Benz 600 model and the fact that it is the favorite car of superstars, and of the rich and famous?

The Mercedes-Benz 600 is a modern, timeless and classic example of a great pre-war car from Mercedes-Benz. Compared with older models of Rolls-Royce and Cadillac this car is different and far ahead in comfort, road handling and technology. The proof is that this car is still used today in many countries and has remained a limousine car.

As a juror in major automotive competitions, for example, the Inter Alia and the Mercedes-Benz sponsored "Concours d'Elegance" in Pebble Beach California, what is your criterion for successful and quality automotive design?

I now have about 30 years of experience as a judge and I have found that the best criticism is time. Design is the visible condition for a successful and instantly recognizable trademark. Cars are particularly appealing and even after 30 years simple, modern and flowing models still win the first price in the *Concours d'Elegance*.



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In your opinion, what is the future of automotive design?

The job of a designer will remain and the body of the car will evolve constantly, especially in view of advanced technology.

You have devoted your life to design and art. What's next for you?

Parallel to my profession, I have always devoted myself to painting and making sculptures. When I was 19 years old at the École Boulle, I won the first prize in sculpture making. In 1989, I received the first prize at the "Concours d'Elegance." I have several pieces exhibiting at the Grand Palais in Paris including my paintings and sculptures. In 2004, I began developing custom made models for existing Mercedes-Benz vehicles for private clients and I worked with museums on car restorations. Even at 80 years old I have the same enthusiasm for automotive design as I did when I was 20.

Paul Bracq's son Boris continues the legacy of the 60-year career of his father in Bordeaux in the form of a restoration workshop for SL models from the 60's and 70's.

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