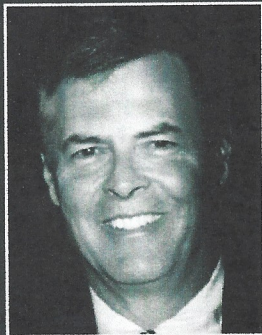
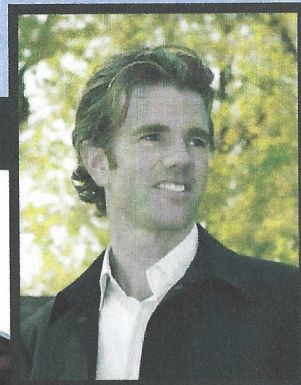


# design on the road

Gary Witzenburg



- Franz von Holzhausen

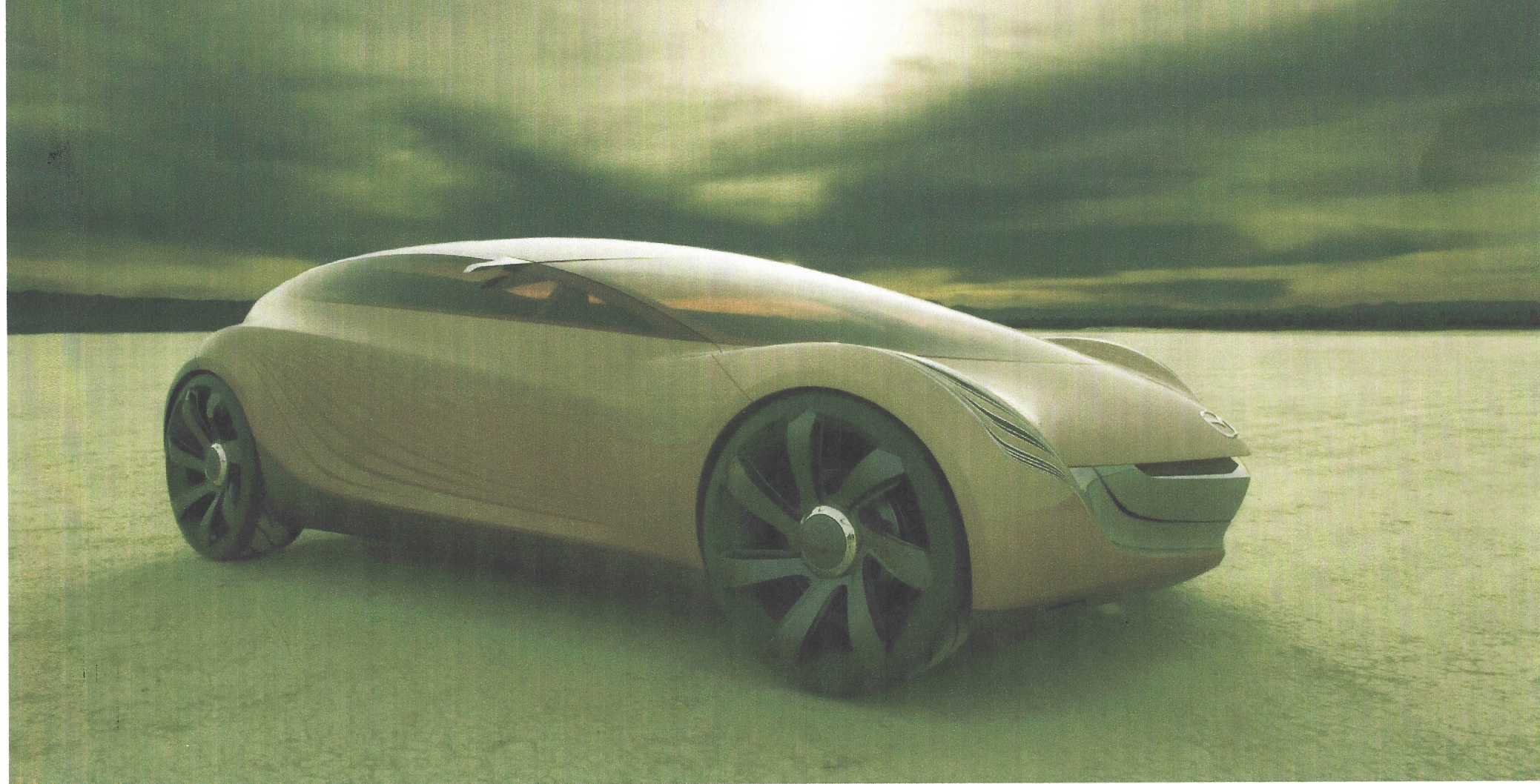


**Mazda North America's design director describes  
how his stunning Nagare concept sports car previews  
Mazda's future design direction**



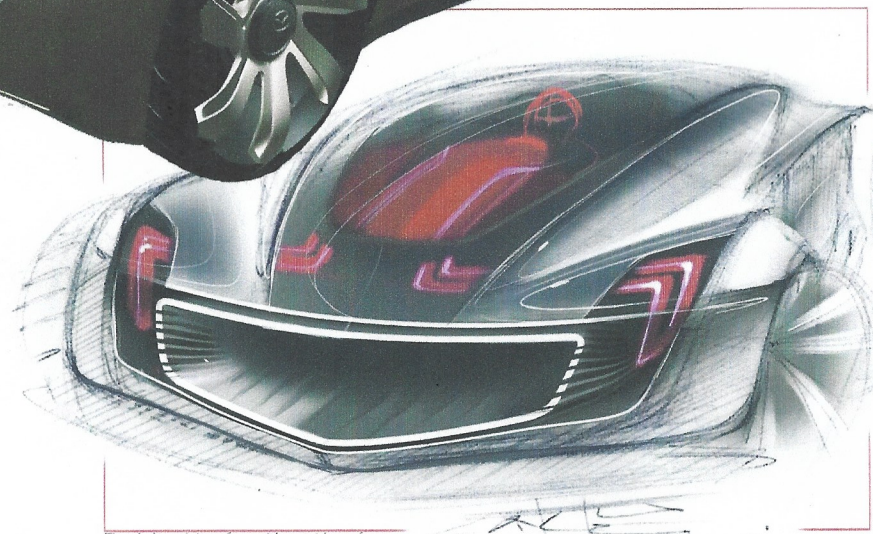
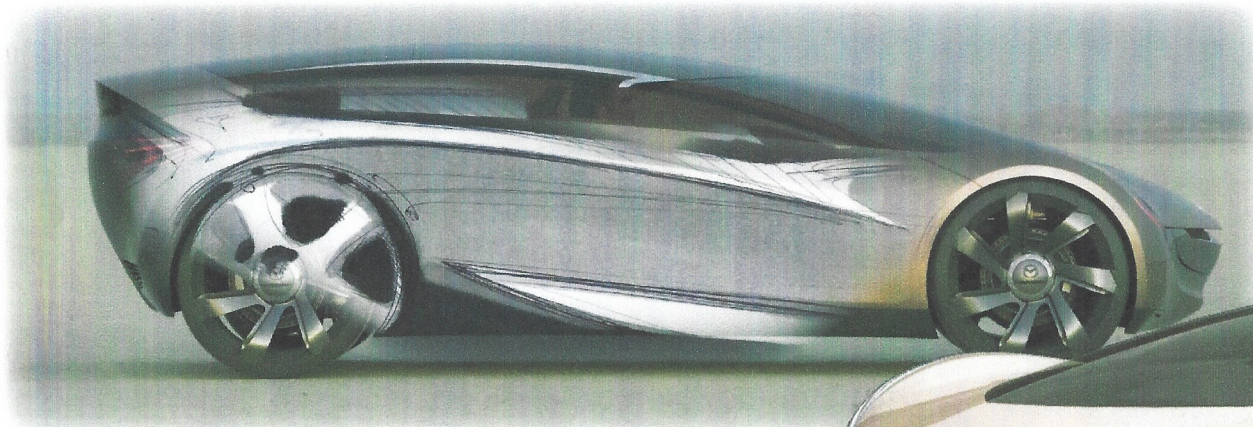


When the futuristic Mazda Nagare concept sports car was unveiled at last November's Los Angeles Auto Show, Laurens van den Acker, Mazda's newly appointed global design director, said it summed up the future of Mazda design in one simple word: **flow**. "Nagare is a celebration of proportions and surface language," he said, "[that] examines light and shadow and begins to reveal the global design cues for the next generation of Mazda vehicles."





"... our designers have captured motion, energy, and lightness and translated it into a beautiful language of lines and forms that are powerful yet effortless, provocative yet strikingly seductive."



The skeleton's interface with outside surfaces

Perhaps surprisingly, Nagare was designed not in Japan, but by a team in Mazda's Irvine, California, studio headed by, director of design for Mazda's North American Operations. "Inspired by the movement of nature's elements, our designers have captured motion, energy, and lightness and translated it into a beautiful language of lines and forms that are powerful yet effortless, provocative yet strikingly seductive," he said at the time.

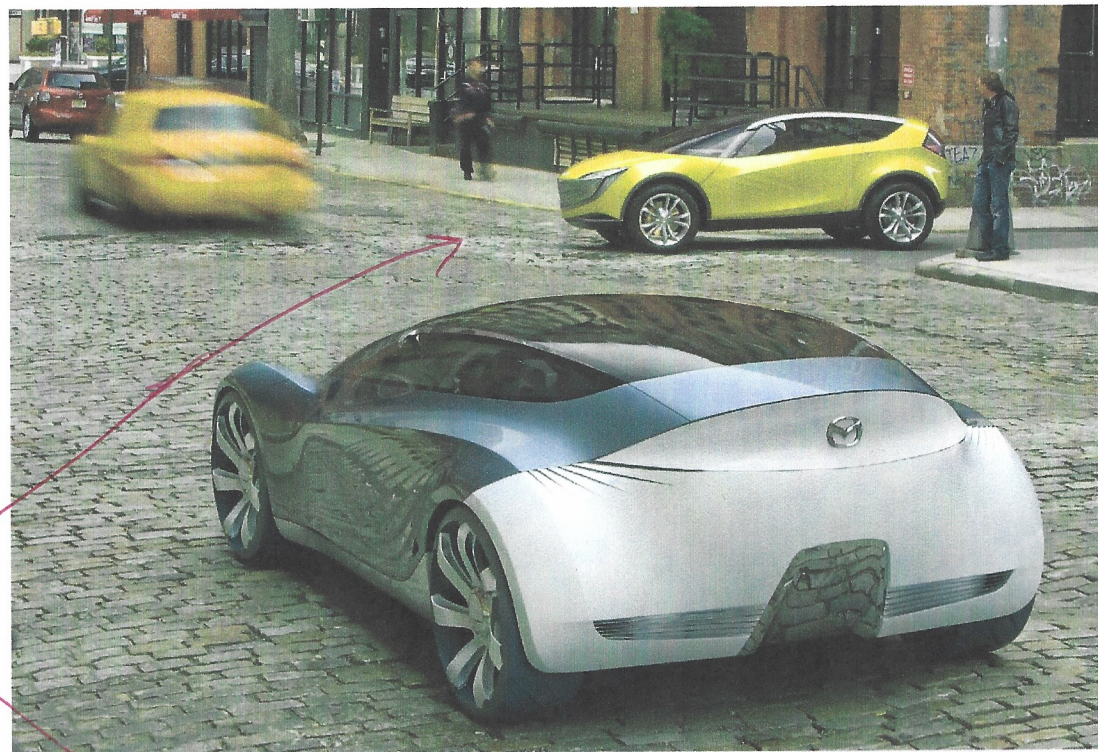
Von Holzhausen grew up near Hartford, Connecticut; he studied design at Syracuse University, Art Center College in Pasadena, California, and an Art Center sister school in Switzerland before joining Volkswagen/Audi in Germany in 1992. He returned to his native U.S. in 2000 as a studio chief at General Motors' newly established Advanced Design Center in North Hollywood, California, where he was responsible for – among other things – the highly acclaimed Pontiac Solstice roadster. He left GM in 2005 to take his current job. We caught up with him for a chat between meetings.





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Need to go there?



**AT:** Nagare was followed by Ryuga at Detroit in January and Hakaze at Geneva in March. We're guessing we'll see a fourth one this October at the Tokyo show.

**FvH:** Yes, it was the first of a series of four based on the theme of Nagare, which is a Japanese word meaning flow. We wanted to kick off this Nagare design movement with a very advanced car, then start dialing it back toward reality with the others.

**AT:** Are we seeing the future of Mazda design in these concepts?

**FvH:** Yes, definitely! We've got a great portfolio now, but we need to stay fresh and ahead of the game. We looked at last year's three concepts and pulled the best elements from

them to start a new vision, a new design language, for Mazda.

**AT:** Please describe that direction.

**FvH:** It's about the character and dynamic gesture of a car. We're striving to visually communicate "Zoom-Zoom," which is an expressive way to communicate a feeling and a great tag line...but what does it look like? For starters, it has a very expressive, powerful, characterful face. It could only be a Mazda. Also, it has very dynamic surfacing, with taut lines and fluid surfaces between them. Its back is powerful, with a great stance and a lot of energy; very concise, with no excess fat, like it should be a rear-drive car. We want Mazdas to be known as athletic cars, and athletes are shrink-wrapped, with no fat.





**AT:** Explain the lines on the sides.

**FvH:** The idea is an exploration of texture and nature, with flow coming from air moving across the desert sand, or water moving across the ocean floor. Or imagine a rake going through the sand of a Japanese zen garden.

**AT:** The roof is one low arc from nose to tail. Is that realistic?

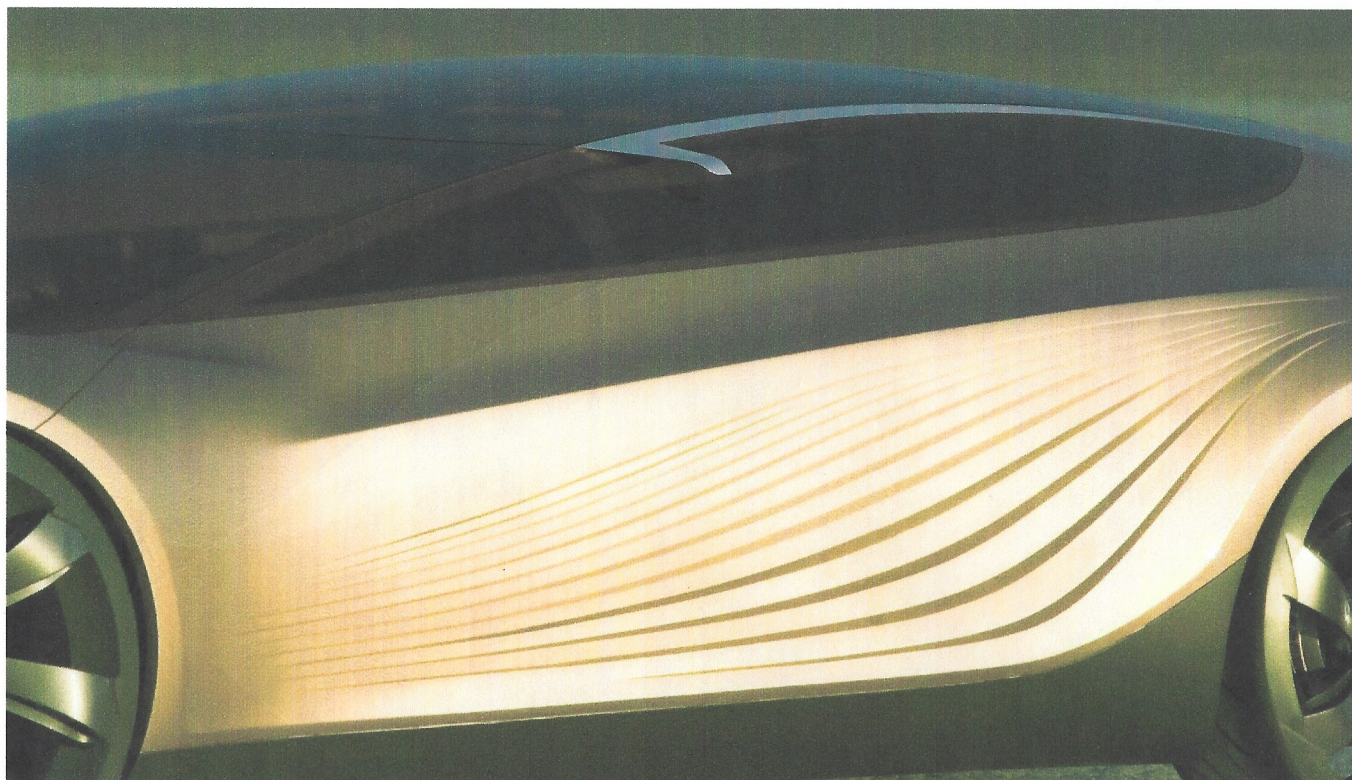
**FvH:** It is a little deceiving, because the character of that line makes the car look much lower than it really is. The packaging is realistic. I fit in it quite comfortably.

**AT:** But the beltline is so high that once you're in, you're looking out through a gun slot.

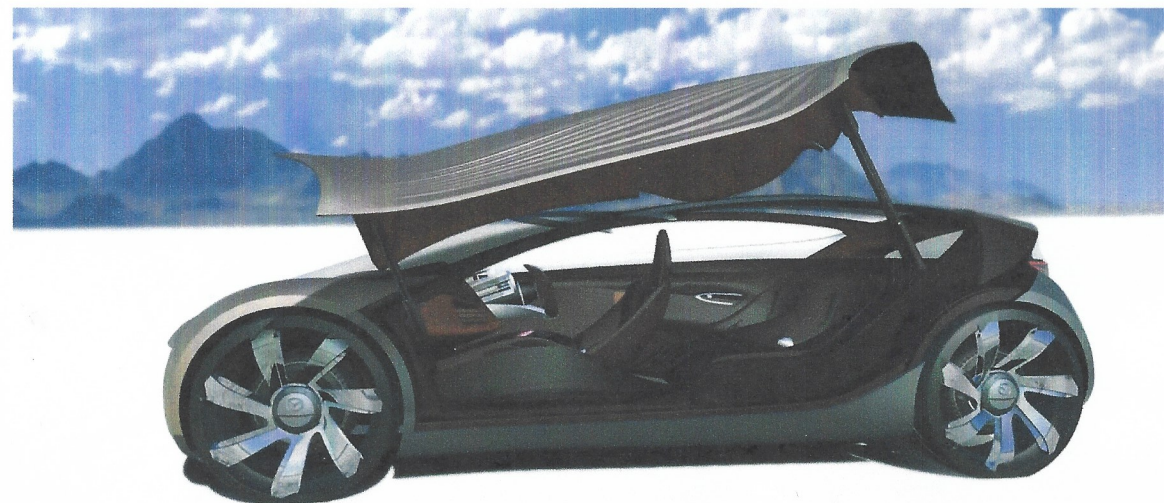
**FvH:** The beltline is high, but the car is a little bigger than it looks. That gun slot is not as small as on the Audi TT, for example.

**AT:** The grille has evolved. On early versions, it was almost a mouth with lips.

**FvH:** A big mouth is a key element of a sports car...a big air intake for power and performance. We're continuing to evolve the five-point grille as a key element of the Mazda face and exploring ways of doing it other than a big empty hole. In this case, it is a chrome piece that reflects the environment back into that mouth.







**AT:** You've put the driver's seat in the center, like in the McLaren F1?

**FvH:** We wanted to amplify its sports car character, and the ultimate sports car driving position is in the center of the car. We wanted to show that it's possible to create a four-passenger car with that ultimate driving position. The rear-seat arrangement is an arc, or a diamond pattern...the outside rear passengers' legroom is beside the driver, and the rear center passenger is further back. And it's a loungy, youthful hangout space when the car is parked. That tall line at the rear, the "shooting brake" feel, gives you space for headroom.


**AT:** On what kinds of roads do you visualize this car?

**FvH:** It's a glimpse at future proportions for our sports cars, and inspired by textures found in the desert floor, so the long, open roads out by Mojave are where this car thrives.

**AT:** What elements of this car are not realistic?

**FvH:** The butterfly doors that open up the whole body side may be a little extreme... but Nagare is targeted for 15 years down the road. We're exploring where future technology opportunities may lie and, as we have demonstrated, our concepts are not pure flights of fancy. Nagare is a serious design movement that we will continue to explore.



A photograph of two futuristic concept cars parked on a cobblestone street in an urban setting. The car in the foreground is a sleek, light blue or silver color with a very low profile and large, multi-spoke wheels. The car in the background is a bright yellow color with a similar low profile and large wheels. Two people are walking on the sidewalk in the background. The street is made of cobblestones, and there are buildings and trees in the background.

**AT:** If you could drive it to any destination in the world, where would that be?

**FvH:** We just drove it through the streets of Soho in New York City, and the juxtaposition of its form and textures against that rugged but hip urban environment was an exciting adventure. But the soul of this car lies in its replication of Nature, so I would love to drive it to the Grand Canyon and explore the vast opportunities Nature has created there.