

SOLSTICE

WELCOME EDITION



INSIDE:

MAXIMUM BENEFIT — LEARNING ABOUT YOUR SOLSTICE

NEW STYLING DIRECTOR
DEFINES PONTIAC AS
'SEDUCTIVE ... ENGAGING ...
YOUTHFUL'

Design Central

BY GARY WITZENBURG

YOU MIGHT SAY CARS ARE IN LIZ WETZEL'S BLOOD.

She's the fourth generation of her family to make a career in the auto industry, dating back to her great-grandfather, who worked as a tool and die maker at the Hudson Motor Car Co. Her mother and father both worked for GM, and filled Liz's weekends with car shows, races and rallies.

True to her heritage, Wetzel studied at the University of Michigan School of Art and Design, and right out of college took a position with GM. She first made an impact on the award-winning interior design team at Cadillac, and eventually became vehicle chief designer in 1997 — the first woman to hold that position at GM.

She's now director of GM's new Global Design Brand Center. Together with a team of 10 young designers, Wetzel is helping GM define the soul and core of each brand.

Q What is special about Pontiac, and how will that be reflected in its designs?

A The Pontiac brand has a legacy of design and performance. Today's Pontiac offers seductive performance, rogue individualism, engaging agility, hyper-focused design, and viscous attraction. It's youthful and energetic — standing out in the crowd.

Q How will Pontiac's performance-oriented heritage be reflected?

A Pontiac remains performance-oriented



LIZ WETZEL

but follows a new direction for the future of the brand. The brand's performance is more than horsepower and torque. The vehicle becomes a piece of you; it's as agile as you are.

Q How will Pontiac designs be differentiated from other GM brands?

A Seductive, sexy and organic — a pure fashion statement.

Q In terms of brands, what are Pontiac's primary competitors?

A Mazda in terms of aggressive styling. Also BMW, but [Pontiac offers] affordable performance.

Q There is speculation that there may be a Pontiac counterpart to Chevy's stunning new Camaro. What might a future high-performance Pontiac look like?

A If you are looking for a symbol of Pontiac's future design direction, the Solstice is our icon vehicle that future design vocabulary will evolve from.

Q What's your reaction to speculation that Pontiac may evolve into an all rear-wheel-drive brand?

A There is obviously an industry trend to rear-wheel-drive and we've never made any secret that Pontiac would like more rear-wheel-drive vehicles. But you're not going to see a complete retreat from front-wheel drive in the near term.

Q How do you feel about customers using accessories to add flavor to their Pontiac models — do you see Pontiac as a natural brand for customization?

A Absolutely. Being a fashion brand, [owners] will accessorize and make their own creations.

Q How will Pontiac's design goals help it excite younger buyers?

A The aggressive styling that's both youthful and energetic will be attractive to young buyers. ▽

GM DESIGN CHIEF
ED WELBURN DETERMINED TO KEEP
DESIRE IN PONTIAC STYLING

Sight Lines

BY GARY WITZENBURG

AS GM'S QUALITY, RELIABILITY, DURABILITY, fuel economy and performance continue to rank as high as, or better than, its competitors' vehicles, the key to success for Pontiac likely will be product design.

How does Pontiac pull off truly fresh, distinctive and desirable styling and differentiate itself from GM's seven other U.S. brands? GM Design Vice President Ed Welburn addresses those questions.

"That is a big challenge, but one I enjoy," Welburn says with a confident smile. "I think we can keep them all fresh and very different. There's the 'channel' strategy with Buick, GMC and Pontiac. With a complete range of GMC vehicles at these dealerships, Pontiac can focus on what it does best — very spirited, sporty, athletic cars. They don't have to do trucks and SUVs. And Buick can focus on great Buicks without compromising them in any way."

Welburn's strategy begins with a strong design "icon" vehicle for each marque. Future Pontiac models, for example, will take their cues from the sexy new Solstice roadster.

"Dramatic proportions are a huge part of Pontiac design because Pontiacs are so athletic, meaning no bulk and no excess," Welburn explains. "The Solstice has a very striking proportion with a long dash-to-axle dimension. G6 has a very different proportion but is just as athletic. The G6 was already well under development when the Solstice concept was created, but we had time for it to influence the front end design."

Welburn adds that a renaissance in interior design is a vital part of this future vision.

"We have put a lot of our absolute best designers on this mission, and there is a real spirit around it,"

he says. "We had to get a better understanding of materials, fit and finish, harmony and human factors, and they've been building on that with efforts that become more creative with every design they develop. They've put together 'SWAT' teams to address certain issues ... not just the styling but the grains, textures, gloss levels and colors, placing chrome accents in just the right places and sectioning the chrome so that it gets that sparkle."

Lifelong Ambition

Ed Welburn is just the sixth Design VP in the nearly 100-year history of General Motors. Welburn grew up in and around cars in Berwyn, Pa., near Philadelphia, where his father ran an auto repair and body shop. Attending the Philadelphia Auto Show at the tender age of 8 in 1958 — an exciting and flamboyant time for American auto design — he decided he wanted to be a part of that excitement.

His mother encouraged him to read everything he could about cars and design, and he did. Three years later, he confidently wrote GM for suggestions on what high school courses to take and how best to prepare for college. Someone there kindly responded: take art courses ... get good grades ... develop a portfolio.

Welburn majored in sculpture at Howard University and, following graduation in 1972, applied to GM Design. Someone there apparently remembered the eager, car-loving kid who had impressed them more than a decade earlier and Welburn was hired.

Before long, the affable, energetic young designer was running an Oldsmobile studio, and by 2002 he had risen to executive director. When Design Vice

President Wayne Cherry retired the following year, Welburn was chosen by Cherry (and GM product czar Bob Lutz) to preside over the hallowed studios once ruled by legends Harley Earl and Bill Mitchell.

Welburn walked us through the other icon vehicles and his vision for each brand. Chevrolet will rely on the Camaro concept to instill the spirit and energy to other models. Cadillac will maintain the dynamic edge defined in the 1999 Evoq concept. Saturn models take their cues from the SKY and will share the same clean, contemporary design vocabulary with Opel. And Buick will follow the Enclave concept. "The shapes flow, like there's wind blowing over

"Dramatic proportions are a huge part of Pontiac design because Pontiacs are so athletic, meaning no bulk and no excess."

them," Welburn notes. "I believe Buick can go after Lexus in a very strong way."

For GMC, Welburn cites the Denali models. "GMC is 'professional grade,' a very strong brand. We have very much used Denali as the halo, and it is influencing everything we do. There are those who want the premium feel of an Escalade but not as overt and in-your-face."

And Pontiac will remain "youthful and aggressive without being angry," says Welburn. "In a market as crowded as ours, it's very important that a brand has to stand for something. It has to be recognizable and have a clear identity. If you look at those icon vehicles for each brand, they are all very strong and clearly different from each other. That proves that we can do it, and we are getting it done." ▼

