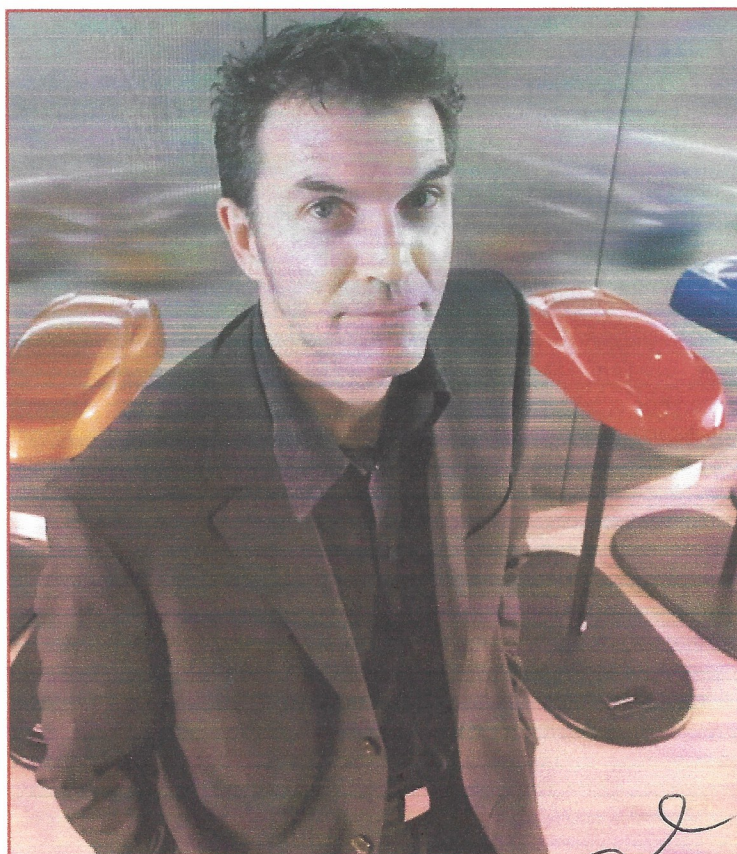


CHEVY DESIGN: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE – PART II

BEHIND THE SCENES WITH GM'S MIKE SIMCOE



LAST MONTH, WE LOOKED AT THE CHEVROLET'S DESIGN PAST – AND TOUCHED ON ITS PRESENT UNDER GM'S HIGHLY LIKEABLE, TALENTED AND ARTICULATE SIXTH DESIGN VICE PRESIDENT, ED WELBURN.

Under Welburn's direction, Chevy has clearly cut ties with its past conservatism. The breakout Camaro, the iconic Corvette, a string of passenger cars and crossovers — especially the HHR, Malibu, Equinox and Traverse — all have re-established the Chevrolet brand among full-line car and truck makers. Only the compact Cobalt still reflects the boring old days, but not for long: The 2011 Cruze is on the way.

Is Camaro still the “icon vehicle” for Chevy design, as Welburn told us a few years ago? Mike Simcoe, GM's design executive director of exteriors and architectures, confirms that it is: “Yes, in its character and surfacing and the use of simple but sculptured body sides and bold graphics. The front and rear graphics are very strong — the twin elements in the tail lamps — the piece of jewelry that is the bowtie surmounting the body color

between the two horizontal grille ports. Inside, you have the twin-cockpit with contrasting colors and surfaces and a lot of detail through the center stack.

“That design was quite specific and deliberate, and it spawned the level of detail and performance feel to the surfacing and graphics that is pervasive through the whole range now. It's bringing character back to the bowtie.”

We saw that original Camaro concept coupe (shown here, illustrating how much of the concept was incorporated into the final 2010 production version) as the first breath of fresh design air after years of bland and conservative styling. Simcoe agrees: “For the longest time, we'd been showing concept cars that talked to where we are now in production, with character of surface and more excitement. But it wouldn't be unfair to say that Chevrolet was being treated like a commodity brand, where you don't want to offend anybody so you take the middle ground. Camaro broke that up and sent a very clear message.”

He says that the Camaro concept was also important for its heritage value: “A percentage of the market instantly relates to Camaro and understands the history and what it means to Chevrolet. The boldness of that design also does something for those who may not understand the heritage and gives them a reason to give Chevrolet a look as well.

“You can see that design language in the Aveo, the Spark and the Cruze,” he continues. “There's a character and a feel to the surfacing and the graphics



that makes them immediately identifiable and allows them to be a little bit iconic in their own way."

We note that Camaro remains an exception to the current Chevrolet signature dual-port grille look. "We're asked that a lot," Simcoe says. "The dual-port grille means a showroom where, no matter where the vehicle comes from, there is a hook. But we chose not to give the Camaro and Corvette that face because, while they are Chevrolets, they're very extreme, iconic vehicles – almost brands in themselves."

Will that dual-port face be around for a while? "Interpretations of it," Simcoe says. "We need customers in other regions where Chevrolet is growing to understand what a Chevrolet is in the showroom. We also need to be able to send a clear message without tying the designers' hands and give visual signposts to designers who don't have the background of those in North America. But the creative guys in the studios always will be looking at alternatives, and one day we might hit on something that sparks a new direction."

On the topic of Chevy's soon-to-come new small cars, Simcoe says: "The Spark is a size and proportion and level of character

that our customers here haven't seen. It needs to be bold for its class to get people to look at it, and the production car will be as close as possible to the concept.

"The Aveo, until now, has been very functional and common, but we're trying to change that to drive some emotion into the purchase of such a small car. Some may call it polarizing. We call it bold. It's a credible design that makes a real statement that customers can hook into. That leads ultimately to personalization and accessory opportunities, the tuner market and taking Chevy back to where it was as a performance leader."

Yet the Cruze, which replaces the Cobalt, is far from bold: "It is a little conservative, a little more formal. It's the volume car. It is to the rest of the world what Malibu is to North America."

He sees the Equinox as a good example of a spirited vehicle with a lot of emotion in its design: "It is quite bold for the market it plays in, yet bold in a way that customers don't feel polarized. It's a wide-appeal vehicle compared to something like the Spark."

What about the Impala, which we thought might soon disappear thanks to accelerating fuel-



economy requirements? "We are doing a new Impala," Simcoe says. "It will be equally bold, but a formal car, and a Chevrolet flagship. With customers the size they are, no one here is trying to chop off the top of the market and drive us all into tiny cars."

Simcoe speaks passionately about Chevrolet's heritage, including the emotional strength and the brand's performance record: "We're trying to bring that back. The message Ed has given us is that there will be no more boring Chevrolets. You can see that already in our products. We're pushing both style and performance and not holding back any more."

"Chevy is not just North American. It's our biggest global brand. If you walk into just about any GM studio around the world, you'll find a Chevrolet of some sort being done. And, people are not getting any smaller. We need to package the vehicles and their powertrains more efficiently to make the vehicles that customers want as efficient as possible." ■

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