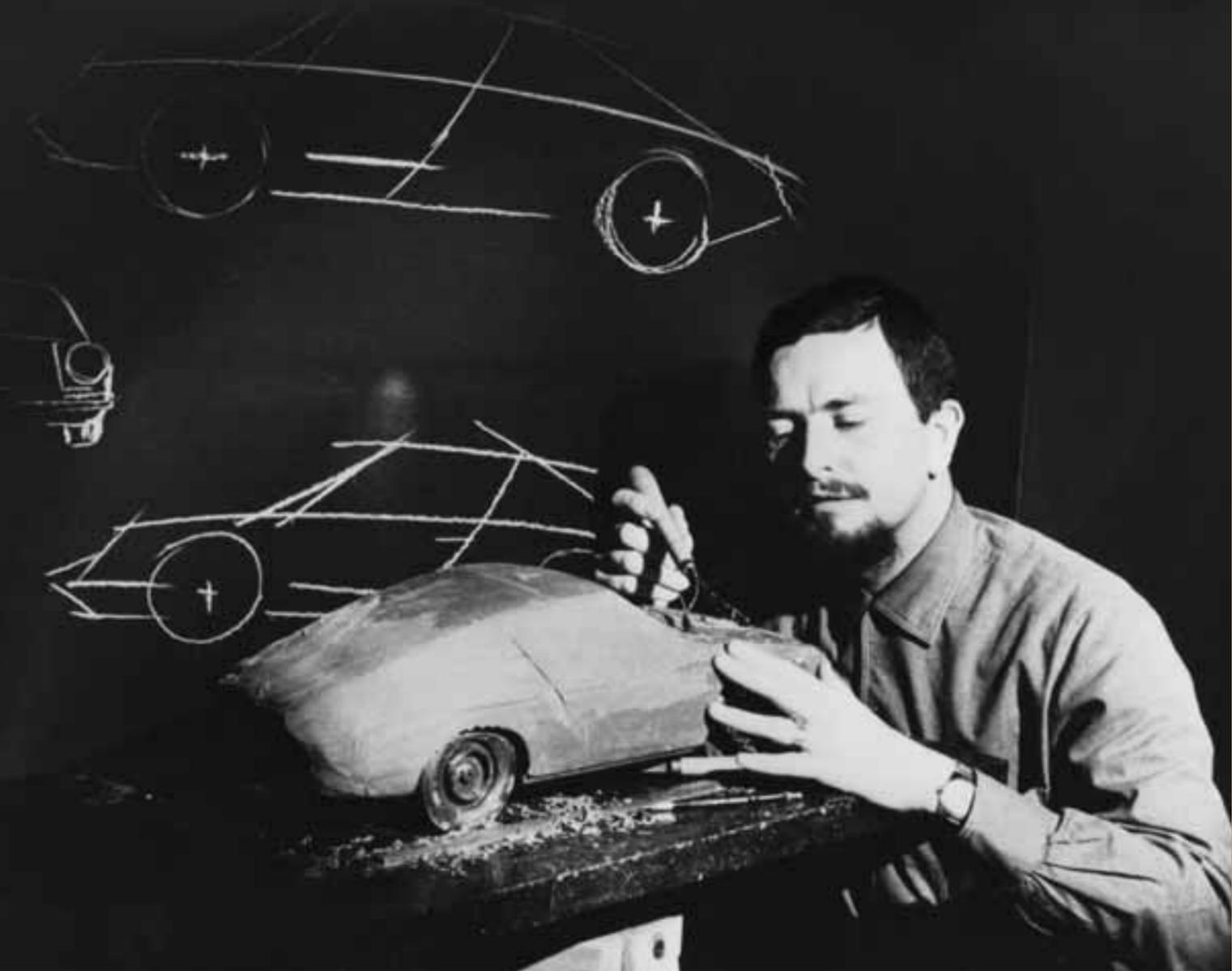


F. A. PORSCHE

A NO-FRILLS KIND OF GUY

A living legend turned 75 on December 11, 2010: Ferdinand Alexander Porsche, “father” of the 911 and the man whose philosophy continues to shape Porsche design to this day.

By Fabian Brunner
Product photography by Jürgen Schwöpe



The Chronograph I (1972)

The look of the Chronograph I—the world’s first black wristwatch—was modeled on the nonreflective instruments used in racing cars. It featured luminous white hands and indices against a matte black dial, with a red second-hand providing the only dash of color.



“Function is the first consideration. If you proceed from there, you get functional design from within rather than just exterior styling.”



“I just get a kick out of making things better—because in the end, I’m always also making them for myself.”

His no-frills approach is as evident in the clean lines and clear-cut forms of his drawings as it is in the name he goes by: Professor Ferdinand Alexander—better known simply as F. A.—Porsche. It is equally manifested in the wording of the pronouncements in which his design philosophy is encapsulated, such as “design has to be honest” and “our products show what they can do.” F. A. Porsche, who celebrated his 75th birthday in December, has shaped the signature Porsche look more than any other single person. To his mind, design is about more than just looks or mere faddishness. Above all, he believes design should never be gimmicky or an end unto itself. And although he withdrew from the day-to-day business of the company that bears his name in the early 1970s, that uncompromising philosophy continues to inspire every product marketed under the name Porsche to this very day.

F. A. Porsche is widely regarded as a brilliant designer, and he has received numerous honors and awards over the course of his long and productive career. He is a purist, and his designs are characterized by timeless elegance. Rather than chafing at the constraints imposed by the principle of “form follows function,”



Drawing the line
F. A. Porsche working on the design of the 904 Carrera GTS (1963)

he has always considered it a spur to his creativity and a challenge to be relished. What makes his work so fascinating is that the rational, no-nonsense approach he takes to realizing his ideas produces results that elicit such ardent enthusiasm. When F. A. introduced “his” first Porsche 911 (which was then known as the Porsche 901) in 1963, he explained the rationale behind its flowing lines and graceful curves by saying, “I wanted to create an absolutely neutral, no-frills car.” “Absolutely neutral”... well, *that* did not quite pan out. Even today, almost half a century later, the evolved 911 is still one of the most “emotional” cars the automobile industry has ever produced. But F. A. Porsche is not just the father of the 911; he also designed all Porsche race cars in the 1960s, such as the Porsche 804, and above all the Porsche 904 Carrera GTS, widely regarded by automobile buffs as one of the most beautiful race cars of all time.

F. A. Porsche came to the realization that design is inextricably linked to technology at an early age. Born in Stuttgart on December 11, 1935, as the oldest of Ferry and Dorothea Porsche’s four sons, he spent a lot of time as a child in the design offices and development workshops of his grandfather, Ferdinand Porsche. In 1943



Porsche times three
Ferry Porsche and his son F. A. in front of a portrait of F. A.’s grandfather Ferdinand (1960)

Exclusive shades (1978)

Aviator shades are among the most popular kinds of sunglasses in the world. Thirty years after Porsche Design launched its first aviators, it reissued the classic P’8478 model from 1978 as part of its Heritage Collection. The P’8478 unites the characteristic look of the 1970s with the contemporary high-tech material titanium, which makes these sunglasses especially lightweight, flexible, and robust.



“Functional product design is the result of combining tradition and high-tech intelligently.”

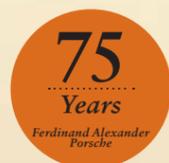


Pipe (1983)

The striking cooling fins on this pipe were inspired by the cooling ribs used in motorcycle engines. They create a larger surface area so that the pipe becomes less hot when smoked and the tobacco has a milder taste, thus enhancing smoking enjoyment.



“My work as a designer is based on my own, very specific understanding of freedom. It demands a fundamental willingness to question everything and take full advantage of the latitude that that gives you, as conscientiously as possible.”



“Durability is a hallmark of good quality—and the basis for durability is excellent workmanship.”

the family and the company relocated to Austria, and F. A. Porsche spent the next seven years attending school in Zell am See. After returning to Stuttgart in 1950, he finished at the local Waldorf school and enrolled at the College of Design in Ulm. In 1958, he began working for the family business and soon established a reputation for designing unique sports and race cars.

Although F. A. Porsche and all the other family members withdrew from the operational business of Porsche KG when it was converted into a publicly traded company in 1971/72, F. A. remained involved in the company's fortunes. As a shareholder and member of the supervisory board, he oversaw the development of the newly established Porsche AG for many years and served as the chair of the supervisory board from 1990 to 1993. In 2005 he passed the mantle of responsibility as a Porsche AG supervisory board member to his son Oliver, and became honorary chair of the board.

Throughout his career, however, design remained F. A.'s true passion, and he founded the subsidiary Porsche Design in 1972 in Stuttgart. Two years later, he moved the company to Zell am See in Austria. With its spectacular views of the lake and the majestic Kitzsteinhorn and Grossglockner peaks serving as a source of inspiration, the town where he spent his youth proved to be the perfect environment for creativity to blossom. In the decades that followed, F. A. applied his prodigious talent primarily to designing classic men's accessories such as watches, eyeglasses, and writing implements, which won the Porsche Design brand an international following of devoted fans.

Porsche Design caused quite a stir when it launched the world's first black wristwatch—its very first product—in 1972. The Chronograph I has long been regarded a classic and today is a highly coveted collector's item. It is also a perfect poster child for F. A. Porsche's design philosophy. The way he saw it, it was much more than just a decorative item of jewelry; it was a precision instrument. Accordingly, he modeled its look on that of the nonreflective instruments used in racing cars. After this milestone in watch design, F. A. Porsche and his



Eye candy
Ferdinand Alexander Porsche sketching the design for one of his legendary sunglasses models

team went on to design numerous industrial products, consumer goods, and household appliances for clients from all over the world.

In 2003, F. A. Porsche and the other shareholders of Porsche Design joined forces with Porsche AG to found the Porsche Lizenz- und Handelsgesellschaft (PLH) in order to tap the potential of the Porsche name in sectors beyond the automobile. Its focus is on the Porsche Design trademark, which has its own marketing network and has in recent years become one of the world's leading luxury brands. The Porsche Design Studio is still located in Zell am See, but it is now housed in a more prominent, glass and concrete building. F. A. Porsche's successors are continually venturing into new territory, designing everything from sunglasses, watches, and shoes to a “kitchen for men,” yachts, and even the interior of a luxury catamaran. But even as the company continues to grow and evolve, in keeping with its founder's spirit, one thing will probably never change: F. A. Porsche's office in the Design Studio has remained untouched and looks as if this most gifted of designers will be returning to his desk any minute. ●

PORSCHÉ DESIGN STUDIO

THE TEN COMMAND- MENTS

When Roland Heiler is asked about the approach he and his team take to their work, the head of the Porsche Design Studio in Zell am See likes to use the TecFlex P'3110 ballpoint pen as an example. Its distinctive sheath is made of high-grade stainless-steel braided hose of the type used to sheath brake lines and electrics on high-performance cars. This high-tech material translates beautifully from the world of racing to the realm of writing instruments. It does not corrode, ensuring durability, and it feels great to the touch. But that is not all. Its flexibility has been harnessed to add functionality: to retract the ballpoint, one simply compresses the pen along its axis—the steel weave flexes and contracts accordingly. Heiler: “No cheap gimmicks, no trendy fads. We believe in credible, authentic design.”

The rules are clear, the standard is high. The Porsche Design Studio has always had a reputation for distinctive design of timeless elegance. “We want to make products that will stand the test of time,” says Heiler, “the kind that are passed down to the next generation.” The criteria to be applied in this endeavor were set down in writing by F. A. Porsche himself. Within the company, these rules are known as the “ten commandments.” But while everyone working in Zell am See is expected to be familiar with them, these “commandments” are not written in stone; the designers are encouraged to give their creativity free rein and think outside the box, too. The Porsche philosophy actually provides plenty of scope to design pretty much anything—the Design Studio team even designed a dentist’s chair once.

The world of Porsche Design has traditionally been dominated by men, but that is gradually changing. As Heiler says, “We’re thinking about hiring more women designers, because a lot of women find our products appealing.” The company is committed to maintaining its high standards and proud tradition in the future while remaining innovative and evolving with the times.

True to the spirit of Porsche Design Studio’s founder, Roland Heiler and his team in Zell am See aim to create timeless, honest design. Not content to design mere products, they make items that owners will cherish for their entire lifetime.

One way it has been working toward these goals in recent years is by systematically fostering and promoting young talents, with experienced staff members acting as mentors to student interns and graduate students.

As diverse as the activities of the Porsche Design Studio are, the shared heritage and relationship with Porsche cars are always discernible. As Heiler puts it, “Our affinity with the automobile designers at Style Porsche is manifested not only in the forms and shapes of our products, but in our entire approach.”



Stepping into new territory
The head of the Porsche Design Studio, Roland Heiler, with a shoe created by Porsche Design

Photo: Bernd Kammerer

STYLE PORSCHÉ

FUTURE MODERN CLASSICS

Of all the prizes the automobile designers at Porsche have been awarded over the years, one that made Chief Designer Michael Mauer especially proud was the Springer publishing house’s designation of the new Cayenne as a “Future Classic.” “To launch a new car onto the market that’s deemed an instant classic is every automobile designer’s dream,” he says.

And indeed, with its compellingly timeless design, the team at Style Porsche in Weissach has proven time and again that it can do the seemingly impossible: create cars that are supremely functional, yet surprising; always fresh, yet never gimmicky or faddish. Each model is distinctive, yet the signature Porsche look is always instantly recognizable—no mean feat. Mauer puts it this way: “Everyone working at Style Porsche has to be able to walk the tightrope between introducing new style elements without starting a revolution.”

The Style Porsche team manages this balancing act successfully because it follows the blueprint set out in the Porsche Design DNA, which goes back to the godfather of all Porsche models: the 911. The ultimate classic car, the 911 is the yardstick by which all Porsche models are measured in terms of lines, proportions, and certain style features to this day. “F. A. Porsche was the father of the 911, and there’s a lot of him in every Porsche,” says Mauer.

Actually, F. A. Porsche’s influence goes even deeper than that. Mauer regards his statement that “our products show what they can do” as nothing short of brilliant. Style Porsche’s chief designer is convinced that “honest design” is the key to the enduring success of the Porsche brand. Of course, functionality cannot be the sole criterion when it comes to maintaining a distinctive brand identity, but it is nevertheless always a chief consideration at Porsche. As Mauer says, “Many of the cars we build can reach top speeds of

There’s a lot of F. A. Porsche in every Porsche model. This should come as no surprise. As Michael Mauer, head of the Porsche Design department in Weissach, points out, the 911 is the basis for the brand’s “design DNA”—and a key ingredient for making “future classics.”

well over 300 km/h [180 mph], so the air intake vents we design serve an important purpose. And our wheel rims are not only handsome; they’re also lightweight and show off the brakes and thus the high degree of safety that our vehicles offer.”

Michael Mauer likes to surround himself with classic design at home, as well. He already owns a Porsche Design toaster and coffee-maker, and he has been hunting for an original Chronograph I for years. “That watch was real dynamite.”



Back to the roots and into the future
Michael Mauer, Chief Designer at Style Porsche, with a model of the “ur-911”

Photo: Bernd Kammerer