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1. AeroVironment's AVX 400 wind turbines: "Often when people think about renewable energy, they think about it very functionally. We wanted something attractive, so people would say 'we want to have that on our building,' and DesignworksUSA came through with that design."
— Paul Glenney, Project Lead, Architectural Wind turbines



CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

The eclectic range of projects at BMW Group DesignworksUSA lets designers renew their creative energy, cross-fertilize ideas and influence consumer worlds.

Text: Sarah Yarnell

“One idea leads to the next idea. And when you look back in history, all the big changes came from good and provocative ideas,” says Verena Kloos, President of BMW Group DesignworksUSA. **“Living for an idea, moving that idea forward, has always brought great progress or change – change for the better.”**

Many automobile manufacturers have California design studios, but DesignworksUSA is the only one with such a diversity of clients, depth of experience, and broad set of skills. Kloos oversees the company’s operations and strategic direction, including two studios in Munich and Singapore. Having an international presence allows the designers to learn from different cultures, be globally involved in every trend and hot spot in the world, and use their multinational talents to serve international clients.

“More than ever, it’s all about sustainability and future responsibility,” says Kloos.

When ecopod founder Troy Hoidal wanted to transform recy-

cling in the home, DesignworksUSA came up with design ideas that suited his product idea, as well as the engineering and innovation to make the product work.

“BMW Group DesignworksUSA has their foundation in sustainability,” says Hoidal, **“and this product is all about sustainable living – a clean life, doing the right thing. Their philosophy matched up wonderfully with what we were trying to achieve.”**

Users of an ecopod place aluminum cans and plastic bottles into the top and step on the foot pedal to compact 50 or more containers. Glass and other recyclables can also be placed inside; the bin is then left at the curb for pickup.

“We’re very environmentally minded,” says Brad Cracchiola, the engineer on the ecopod project at DesignworksUSA. **“Everybody who works here is very concerned about sustainability, the impact of product development, and designers’ ability to affect the ecology of the planet. Not only that, but transforming people’s mindsets**

about products and about disposability, waste and recycling. This product really fits our global direction in terms of how we want to affect the world with product design.”

AeroVironment asked DesignworksUSA to combine functional engineering with outstanding design for its Architectural Wind turbines. Low-profile buildings such as big-box stores, low-rise offices and distribution centers, organize the wind into accelerated airflow that can be turned into green energy. AeroVironment’s AVX 400 is a building-mounted wind turbine that generates electricity and feeds it into the utility that normally powers the building.

“Originally we had these in sheet-metal boxes, but everyone said they looked very industrial,” says Paul Glenney, project lead for Architectural Wind. **“We’re known for innovation and superior engineering, and when we wanted to build an aircraft that flew at 97,000 feet and was solar-powered, we built it for function. However, when you want to build something that is aesthetically pleasing, something that you want to put on a building, you need to look**

outside the box. We wanted DesignworksUSA to come up with something that was truly sexy, and I think they accomplished that.”

“It sometimes starts with a raw idea,” says Kloos. **“A client comes to us, we bring our diverse team together, we sketch some ideas, and the really charming thing is we’re a full-service consultancy, so we can develop nearly every product here, from the idea up to being market-ready. We have research, design, modeling and prototyping facilities, as well as a very capable engineering group, brand specialists and communication designers. It’s quite rare to find all that under one roof.”**

“Knowledge transfer” was one of founder Chuck Pelly’s original ideas. He set up shop in a Malibu garage in 1972, combining automotive with product design because he loved all design, and because it gave designers the opportunity to move around. Pelly’s motto was simple: **“Great Projects. Great People. Great Fun.”**

DesignworksUSA added BMW to its client roster in 1986, and in 1995 became a wholly owned BMW subsidiary – the first independ-



2. Boeing 787 Business Jet: This business jet’s interior brings modern luxury and architecture to private-jet design, and showcases the owner’s BMW 6 Series below the transparent floor.

AT DESIGNWORKSUSA, ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY IS CLOAKED IN SLEEK FORMS.



3. Auto-Cross: BMW Group DesignworksUSA transferred automotive design to product design for this BMW bicycle project. The engineers utilized a unique new manufacturing methodology to join the two pieces of the bike structure together in the middle.



4. Ear-Ring: Although DesignworksUSA developed this concept several years ago, today it stands out as a far-sighted glimpse of future consumer worlds. The Kyocera Ear-Ring was a push-to-talk phone whose form fit securely and comfortably around the ear.



ent design studio to be bought by a car company. It is internationally recognized as one of the top design consultancies, and it is still the only mixed-use design studio in the automotive world. The studio's creative capital includes 140 individuals from 24 nations.

"Our people are really the biggest treasure we have," says Kloos. "The whole group meets twice a month to exchange ideas. We have very open, frank discussions here, so it's also refueling creative energy. It keeps people fresh and agile." In addition, there is a designer exchange program between the California, Munich and Singapore studios, to share inspiration.

"I have a strong belief that when you are a global company you have to let the world in," says Kloos. "Munich is a beautiful city, but if you live in L.A. you see the world with different eyes." The designers see their creations differently, too. Metallics and silvers have little impact under Munich's cloudy skies, but come to life in the California sunshine.

DesignworksUSA's international list of clients are headquartered in Brazil, Canada, Korea, Japan, Germany, England, Sweden and both the east and west coasts of the United States. There are 53 currently, and the list is growing. "We are constantly improving our client portfolio," says Kloos. "We work for premium clients who are willing to push the envelope with our help." Projects include environmental innovations, fitness systems, espresso machines, vacuums, shavers, business jets, trains, yachts, tractors, photo kiosks, lifestyle fashions, sports equipment and BMW Group vehicles.

DesignworksUSA started its first car exterior design project for the BMW E46 3 Series in 1993. Subsequently, the Z4, X5 and X3 originated here. The designers may enter internal competitions to determine who will design the next BMW Group vehicle. They also have a special role: to challenge Munich headquarters with bold new ideas.

"Our main job is to be advanced thinkers, to look to the future,



PHOTOS: BMW GROUP DESIGNWORKSUSA



and try to influence BMW from afar," explains Chris Chapman, Director of Automotive Design at DesignworksUSA. "We're not here to mirror what they do over there. The most important thing is that it be an appropriate response to what they need, but it also has to be something they don't expect. It has to be something that inspires them, or something that they normally wouldn't do."

"BMW is our biggest client, but 50 percent of the work we are doing here is for non-BMW clients," says Kloos. "Right now we're designing complex radiation equipment for a very important client. We learn from a lot of diverse user scenarios, and we bring back that learning to our future car exteriors and interiors."

Non-BMW clients can benefit from BMW's precision, quality and experience. For example, the RAMSIS ergonomics database, which is used extensively on car interiors, was also used to help design Star Trac exercise equipment.

The extensive tools at the 70,866 square-foot Newbury Park

facility in southern California include rapid prototyping. There is a five-axis computer numerical control (CNC) mill that can create a model as large as a plane interior or as small as the keys on a cell phone. The vast clay-modeling studio has space to accommodate huge transportation projects. Computer designers work with the latest software in 3D and freehand computer drawing.

One reason BMW AG acquired DesignworksUSA was to learn more about BMW customers, and understand the forces shaping their lives and desires. Developing such a diverse range of ideas generates a creative atmosphere in which ideas and expertise cross-fertilize and enrich one other.

"Up to 10 years in advance, we try to explore the future consumer worlds and experiences," says Kloos. "We're always part of a bigger team, but we have an influence in the way something is produced. It is up to us to convince our clients – and very often it works."

5. Kitchen icon: DesignworksUSA's Munich studio began with a research phase, evaluating user wants and needs, and then prepared a design statement that focused on the ritual of coffee preparation and Saeco's passion for coffee. The Saeco Odea cappuccino maker has an exposed coffee compartment, jewel-like brewing button, refined dynamic surfaces and contrasting colors.

6. Step on it: The ecopod e1 is the world's first home recycling center that combines functionality and design. Users insert cans or plastic bottles, step on the pedal to activate the patented eco-step compaction system, and then flattened containers fall into the removable pod.

7. Designed to inspire: "Star Trac believes in the power of design to not only communicate their brand, but also make it approachable, distinctive, intuitive, motivational and rewarding. BMW Group DesignworksUSA was really instrumental in that they helped us develop our brand." — John Cook, Star Trac

8. Positive influence: "Our people like to work on projects that could have a deep impact on changing behavior for the better," says Verena Kloos, President of BMW Group DesignworksUSA. "It's all about sustainability and future responsibility."

9. Start to finish: Whether for something as small as a cell phone or as large as a luxury jet, the complete design process begins with strategy and research phases and extends through engineering, rapid-prototyping and surfacing. This modeling studio can accommodate transportation projects, such as buses and trains.