

PressRelease



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: Jennifer Nyholm
Tel: +815/777-4444

CHRIS BANGLE VISIONARY MAVERICK OF THE GLOBAL AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY WINS THE 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN

Chris Bangle is Honored for His Life-Time Achievements in Radically Rethinking Transportation Design Earning Him the Highest Design Recognition in the United States

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS (MARCH 15, 2021) - In conjunction with GOOD DESIGN® 2021, The Chicago Athenaeum has announced that the iconic American designer, Chris Bangle, has been named as this year's laureate of the prestigious American Prize for Design®.

Chris Bangle is the prolific American automobile designer known best for his work as Chief of Designer for BMW Group, where he was responsible for the BMW, Mini, and Rolls-Royce motor cars.

Bangle is one of the biggest, legendary names in the global automobile industry, venerated by his fellow designers across the globe and acclaimed by car manufacturers and even by the general public for the very successful career he has had thus far churning out award-winning designs, one after the other, and for several decades.

Gorden Wagener, Chief Design Officer for Mercedes-Benz's Daimler Group, states this about Bangle:

"Chris is a true visionary and a lateral thinker. He was always ahead of his time and created cars and products that were the same. He is an inspiration for every young designer and so he was for me."

"On top of that, I truly appreciate his great personality and his great sense of humor."

"In the world of transportation design, Bangle is the Titan," states architecture critic Christian Narkiewicz-Laine.

"From 1992 until 2009, as head of BMW design, Bangle is and continues to be one of the most controversial car designers of all time."

—MORE—

CHRIS BANGLE WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN

Add One

“Love or hate him, Bangle has pushed the envelope and revolutionized the design of luxury cars.”

“The cars that came under the second half of his tenure at BMW from the 7-Series on, completely transformed the idea of what defines the design of a luxury car.”

“To the general public, he is a rock star.”

“If ever there was an avant-garde, revolutionary in automobile design in the post-years of Henry Ford, Bangle is our contemporary times’ *enfant terrible*.”

“He shook up the entire automobile industry during the declining, slump years of the late 1990s with his radical designs for BMW, particularly the Z9 Gran Turismo concept of 1999 and other concepts he designed while in Munich.”

“The Turismo design study heralded the return of the BMW 6-Series to the company’s modern line-up, and Bangle immediately became known as the industry’s ‘bad boy’.”

“Inside the Turismo was an early iteration of BMW’s iDrive, while even further inside sat the 4.0-litre diesel V8 that would later find its way into the 740d.”

“Outside, of course, the car was built of the requisite carbon fibre over an aluminium space frame, though with one vital addition: the gullwing doors.”

“Why BMW never made a 6-Series with gullwing doors is beyond anyone’s speculation and regret.”

“From there, the Turismo influenced nearly a decade of the entire BMW lineup, including Bangle’s designs for the BMW Z4, 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7 series, as well as the Mini X3, X5, and X6 the newest design SUVs.”

“During that Bangle era, BMW overtook Mercedes-Benz as the global leader in premium car sales.”

“For all those reasons and hundreds more, the 2021 American Prize for Design and the professional and public acknowledgement of Bangle’s imprint on the history of design today is long overdue,” concludes Narkiewicz-Laine.

Each year, The American Prize for Design is awarded jointly by The Chicago Athenaeum: Museum of Architecture

CHRIS BANGLE WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN

Add Two

and Design and The European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies to designers who have made a commitment to forward the principles of design excellence within the context of our contemporary society and who have elevated design to a more a profound humanist statement about how our modern contemporary society can advance and progress as a result.

Given in conjunction with the Museum's historic Good Design Awards, which were founded in Chicago in 1950, this Prize honors a specific design practitioner with the highest public accolade for producing design that promotes design excellence, innovation, and lasting design.

Candidates for the Prize are sent to The Chicago Athenaeum by design practitioners, press, and educators from around the world and the Museum's International Advisory Committee that ultimately selects the winner.

The Committee's decisions are based on core criteria: design excellence, innovation, and contributions to humanity and to the public good.

The American Prize for Design is the highest and most prestigious design award in the United States.

Previous laureates include Gordon Wagener, Chief Designer and Executive Vice President at Daimler AG.; British architect/designer Sir Norman Foster; Italian Ferrari Designer, Flavio Manzoni; and American designer Karim Rashid.

Christopher Edward Bangle was born in Ravenna, Ohio in 1956, and was raised in Wausau, Wisconsin.

After considering becoming a Methodist minister, Bangle attended the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, earning a Bachelor of Science degree, and a Master of Science degree in Industrial Design at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

Bangle started his career at Opel in Germany, where he worked from 1981 until 1985. The first work that he designed was the interior of the Opel Junior concept car.

In 1985, he moved to Fiat in Italy to work on the second generation Fiat Panda, which was released 2003. From 1990, he worked as a chief designer of the Fiat Coupé, the brightest car of its time for its radical, unusual shape, which was released 1993.

Still at Centro Stile Fiat, in 1994, he designed the Alfa Romeo 145 Quadrifoglio hatchback under the auspices of

CHRIS BANGLE WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN

Add Four

legendary Volkswagen designer Walter Da Silva.

Bangle's design for the 145 immediately symbolized a new era at Alfa Romeo.

"It was there at Fiat, where he earned the title: 'The Revolutionary from the USA'," continues Narkiewicz-Laine.

"What is most intriguing about Bangle and his design philosophies—and unlike most industrial designers today, he has a tight intellectual approach to design—is that he so very much profoundly influenced by architecture," states Narkiewicz-Laine.

"In fact, he approaches the design for an automobile much the same as an architect does a building or a city."

"He has himself pointed out that Frank Gehry has been a major influence on him and he has embraced some revolutionary architectural theories in his work such as Deconstructivism.

"His thinking also evolves from the same social and civic Utopian concepts as Alessandro Mendini or Aldo Rossi—a kind of 'form follows emotion'."

"The classic approach to design is from the user-centric side, which is great for problem-solving," states Bangle.

"With this 'objectomy,' you don't look at the world only like that, but rather also consider the object itself and what it wants to do and dreams to be, how it feels about its abilities, potentials, even limitations; what it wishes it could do and what it wishes people would ask it to do."

"Out of this, you get a car that is more than an automobile—it is a personality, a character. A set of functions won't bring you the same level of emotions that a character will," Bangle stresses.

"In every respect, Bangle is a 'car architect'," continues Narkiewicz-Laine.

In the early 1990s, when Munich-based BMW company executives wanted to take the bull by the horns and push Mercedes-Benz off of the royal luxury throne, they summoned Chris Bangle to help.

With the beginning of the new millennium, BMW had begun to implement the company's most ambitious expansion plan.

In 2001, BMW launched the next generation of Bangle's 7 Series, and one year later, the Z4, then the 6 Series,

CHRIS BANGLE WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN Add Five

and then the new interpretations of the 3 and 1 series.

In 2003, he oversaw the design of the Rolls-Royce Phantom, selecting Yugoslavian designer Marek Djordjevic "to achieve the same type of assertiveness and panache that the Rolls of the 1930's, 40's and 50's had."

During that time, Bangle designed the 2001 X Coupé and the press went bonkers.

The X5-based four-wheel-drive coupé powered by a 3.0-litre straight-six diesel engine featured a rear-end that hatches almost completely off to expose everything inside.

More controversy was soon to stir.

In 2006, he designed the retro 2006 BMW Concept Coupé Mille Miglia exactly how people in the 1950s imagined the future would be, and his design with its streamline body reminiscent of Flash Gordon movies was nothing more than a sensation.

Pushing the envelope still further, in 2008 Bangle designed the ultimate visionary fantasy called "Gina," a cloth-covered, form-changing, autonomous concept, which deconstructed the traditional motor car and allowed his team to "challenge existing principles and conventional processes."

GINA stood for "Geometry and functions In 'N' Adaptations."

Bangle reckoned that the Gina was the future of car design, allowing customers to create their own unique cars and around their own unique requirements.

Reportedly, after a full-scale Gina was built at BMW headquarters, Bangle was so excited that he could hardly contain himself; he was seen sprinting up and down the spiraling BMW Museum staircase jumping up and down with enthusiastic glee.

"Both BMW concepts by Bangle look very much influenced by Buckminster Fuller's Dymaxion car of 1933," states Narkiewicz-Laine, "for their vision of the future and for their streamlined, free-thinking design."

"This was a car designer way ahead of anything seen before."

Next came the 2008 BMW M1 Hommage with its low, wide 1970s arrogance with a panache of modernity thanks to Bangle's "flame surfacing."

CHRIS BANGLE WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN

Add Six

His last BMW concept was the 2009 BMW Vision EfficientDynamics, a plug-in hybrid with a 1.5L three-cylinder turbo-diesel engine, which was as exhilarating as it was efficient, and one of most talked-about concepts ever.

Model after model, while his designs were captured by the press in giant headlines, car enthusiasts generated only loud criticism. The dramatic changes in Bangle's car designs actually angered many conservative drivers. Some said they thought the American had permanently damaged BMW's image, but, in fact, they were dead wrong.

Bangle has always defended his works, even against the tsunami of fierce criticism.

He said that in order to properly appreciate the work of him and his subordinate team, one must first see the car with their own eyes because the pictures fail to convey the real view.

And when they finally came and they saw, they were thoroughly convinced.

Most recently, Bangle has designed an electric car throwing his hat into the all-electric foray of the dozens of manufacturers in Europe, Asia, and the U.S.

His stunning "Reds by Redspace"—an all-electric city car that he designed 2017 won a prestigious Good Design Award from The Chicago Athenaeum in 2018.

In Reds (an acronym for 'Revolutionary Electric Dream Space'), Bangle believes that "form is now truly following function,"

"And still, after his previous role as BMW Group Design Director and in his current position in Italy, Bangle has not been one to avoid controversy, never shying away from what he thinks or believes," continues Narkiewicz-Laine.

"In a recent article for *L'Automobile* magazine written alongside his architect son Derek, maverick Bangle argues that overall, mainstream car design doesn't radically challenge form language enough—that what is designed and produced does not reflect the spirit of our times."

"He says, it's a missed opportunity."

"Automotive design needs a new way of seeing now, as architecture did a century ago."

"Of course, we are the dreamers, but 'dreams plus truth' is the formula for overcoming resistance to change,"

CHRIS BANGLE WINS PRESTIGIOUS 2021 AMERICAN PRIZE FOR DESIGN
Add Seven

“How can we really create cars if we refuse to look at ourselves in the mirror?”

“Look at automotive design today: does it reflect who we are?”

“We’ve been remixing the same flavors since the 1960s: dynamic, elegant, premium, sexy, feminine, masculine, harmonious, sporty; words that lose their meaning with each passing day.”

“Car design can be more, it can reflect the paradoxical nature of our society; the unresolvable ambiguity, the irrational superimposition, the uncertain duality and the constant state of becoming of our lives—and in embracing these words create a new conception of beauty, of the dynamic, and of elegance.”

Chris Bangle will officially receive The American Prize for Design at a reception late summer (TBC) along with recipients of the 2021 Good Design.

Other exhibitions, events, and lectures are being planned in the United States and Europe during 2021 to celebrate Chris Bangle and The American Prize for Design.

For press information and photographs, contact Jennifer Nyholm at jennifer@chicagoathenaeum.org.

NOTE TO REPORTERS AND EDITORS: Photos of the 2021 American Prize for Design are available for download. For more details on the award and previous winners, visit The Chicago Athenaeum’s website at chicagoathenaeum.org

About The Chicago Athenaeum (www.chi-athenaeum.org) is a global nonprofit education and research institute supported by its members. Its mission is to provide public education about the significance of architecture and design and how those disciplines can have a positive effect on the human environment.

About The European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies (europeanarch.eu) is dedicated to public education concerning all aspects of the built environment—from entire cities to individual buildings - including the philosophical issues of arts and culture that ultimately give the final shape to design. A high emphasis exists on contemporary values and aesthetics, conservation and sustainability, and the theoretical exploration and advancement of art and design as the highest expression of culture and urbanism.

The American Prize for Design © 2021 by The Chicago Athenaeum and The European Center together with Metropolitan Arts Press Ltd.