

For 15 years car design was ruled by one style, but in 1996 something fresh arrived, something with a New Edge

Design cues from this ...



Lincoln Sentinel

... were used to create this



Ford Focus

The Lincoln Sentinel concept's sharp angles – which are at the core of new-edge design – were used to give the Ford Focus (right) a distinctive look when it replaced the Escort in Europe in 1998.

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Ten years ago automotive design was on the verge of some radical changes.

Cars with smooth, flowing lines were about to get some strong competition from models with angular, intersecting lines.

Alfa Romeo would introduce a look that would pay dividends for more than a decade.

And a Pininfarina concept would show styling cues that would soon become part of the most distinctive new car of the last 10 years, the Smart ForTwo.

Lorenzo Ramaciotti witnessed all of these changes – and played a key role in many of them – during almost three decades as a design manager at Italy's Pininfarina.

New edge

Ramaciotti says the concept cars shown at the major auto shows in 1996 indicated that the 15-year dominance of one design philosophy was beginning to wane and a new style was about to be born.

"The so-called bio design had already peaked, therefore many creative people already were trying to respond," Ramaciotti says. "At the Detroit show in January 1996, a number of concept cars represented the first attempts to express a new trend, which would later become known globally as the new-edge design."

Great examples of the competing design philosophies were on display that year in Detroit.

The Chrysler LHX and the Dodge Intrepid ESX exemplified the bio design, which was characterized by curvy, almost sensual, shapes.

Ideas from the LHX were used in production versions of two Chrysler models, the Concorde, launched in January 1997, and 300M, which debuted in January 1998. Only the 300M was sold in Europe.

Styling cues from the ESX found their way into the Dodge Intrepid, which debuted in January 1997. The car was not sold in Europe.

The first examples of the more aggressive, more imposing new-edge design were the Lincoln Sentinel and, to a lesser degree, the futuristic Ford Synergy 2010.

Ford – which would coin the term

new-edge design – completely switched to the new look.

Production vehicles such as the Ford Ka and first-generation Focus are examples of Ford's interpretation of new-edge design.

Competitors such as Mitsubishi and Nissan followed Ford's lead. Some of the resulting models were the Nissan Primera, which debuted in September 2001, and the Mitsubishi Grandis, which was launched in May 2003. Cadillac also switched to new-edge design with the introduction of the XLR coupe cabriolet in January 1999.

But the birth of new-edge design didn't kill bio design.

"Some companies, Chrysler in particular, but also many in Asia, are still connected today in one way or another to bio design," Ramaciotti says.

Examples of bio design live on in current models such as the Lexus GS and SC and the Mazda RX-8.

True concept car

Ramaciotti says the 1996 Alfa Romeo Nuvola is the perfect example of a true concept car – a car that served only to show what could be done on a production model rather than being a lightly disguised version of what an automaker soon would start selling. An example from 1996 is the Mercedes-Benz AA Vision, which would basically morph into the first-generation M-class SUV.

Though the Nuvola was never built, Ramaciotti says it exerted a strong influence on the Italian brand.

"With the Nuvola, Alfa Romeo reappropriated some of the design cues of its best years and created a new design language for the brand, which would be fully exploited with the 156 lower-premium and the 147 entry-premium models," Ramaciotti says, adding that the Nuvola was "the true beginning of Alfa's design renaissance."

Smart ideas

Ramaciotti's own work in 1996 also continues to influence today's production models.

Pininfarina unveiled the Eta Beta hybrid city car at the Turin auto show in April 1996.

At that time, Ramaciotti told Automotive News Europe that the Eta Beta was "more a piece of urban furniture than a typical car

Design cues from this ...

Chrysler LHX



The Chrysler LHX concept's smooth lines – a key aspect of bio design – were inherited by the Chrysler Concorde (below) in 1997.

... were used to create this

Chrysler Concorde



design, as its shape comes more from the way its different materials are put together than from the continuity of the body surfaces."

The concept featured many parts as they would appear during the construction of the car. The doors, hood and tailgate were unpainted anodized aluminum, and the car's door frame and the roof were unpainted plastic.

Those characteristics may sound familiar.

Although Pininfarina was not involved in the design of the Smart ForTwo, the cult city car was the first to use so-called exposed mate-

rials on its exterior.

The ForTwo was shown as a concept at the 1997 IAA in Frankfurt and went on sale in 1998.

"It is fair to say that, we [Pininfarina] and our colleagues at Smart had the same design idea at the same time," Ramaciotti says. "Nevertheless, I was told that in late spring 1996, the Smart design center was full of Eta Beta pictures."

Minivan mistake?

The influence of two other Ramaciotti-styled cars that debuted



Former Pininfarina chief designer Lorenzo Ramaciotti penned the Ferrari Mythos concept (above) and the Peugeot 406 Coupe.

The expert

Lorenzo Ramaciotti served as chief designer at Italy's Pininfarina from January 1988 until retiring in July 2005.

He started with the company in 1973. During his career he penned such famous cars as the Ferrari Mythos concept, the Ferrari 456 and the Peugeot 406 Coupe.

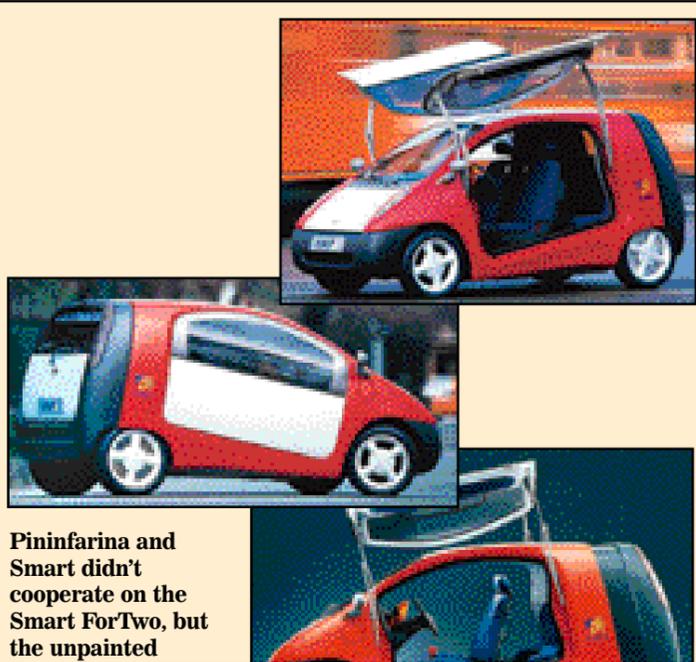
The legendary designer worked with carmakers in Europe, North America, Japan, Korea and China. This experience gives him a global perspective few can match.

That is why Ramaciotti was Automotive News Europe's first choice when we sought out an expert to assess how the concepts shown at the major auto shows in 1996 have affected the evolution of car design.

He spoke with ANE Chief Correspondent Luca Ciferri in Turin. [ANE](#)

Continued on Page 15

Concept cars from 1996 also influenced a quirky city car and a sporty minivan



Pininfarina and Smart didn't cooperate on the Smart ForTwo, but the unpainted exterior features on Pininfarina's Eta Beta concept (above and right) coincidentally ended up on the Smart car (below right).



Pininfarina first showed the Sing concept (above) in 1996. Some of the concept's sporty design could be seen in the 2004 Seat Altea (right).



The arrival of Alfa Romeo Nuvola (above) at the 1996 Paris auto show signaled the start of a design renaissance for the brand. The Nuvola inspired the design of the Alfa 156 (right) and the 147.



From Page 14

at the April 1996 Turin show also can still be seen today.

The Sing and Song twin medium minivans were done for Fiat to show the carmaker what it could create off its lower-medium platform to compete against the Renault Scenic.

The twins were shown one month after the first-generation Scenic made its debut at the Geneva auto show and five months before the market launch of what is still Europe's favorite minivan.

But Fiat didn't use Ramaciotti's design for its first minivan, instead opting to develop a car penned in-house. The Multipla, which had a more radical look than the Sing or Song, wasn't launched until autumn 1998, missing the two-year sales bonanza experienced by the Scenic.

While Fiat didn't use design cues from Ramaciotti's 1996 minivan concepts, he says the Sing's sporty flair can be seen in the 2004 Seat Altea.

He adds that the Song, a four-wheel-drive minivan with the looks of an SUV, served as a pre-

view of 4wd minivans such as the Scenic RX4, which debuted in February 2000.

Rebirth of a trend

When Ramaciotti looks back on 1996 he concludes that the birth of new-edge design served as a long-lasting wake-up call for designers by ending a 15-year period during which car styling became homogeneous.

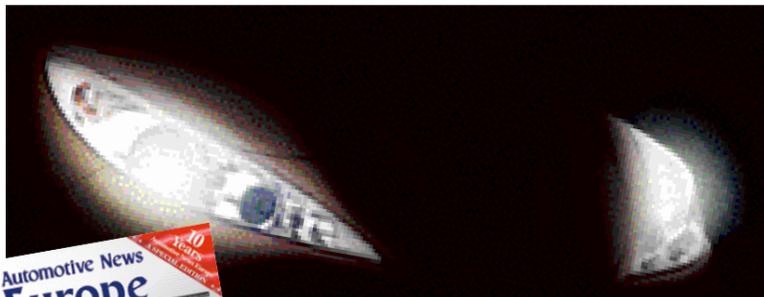
"Since 1996, the creative people designing cars better understand they should find their own design language for their brands rather than duplicate what everyone else is doing as they did with bio design," he says.

At the same time, the concepts that debuted in 1996 remind him that not everything that looks different and trendsetting is really new.

"Two-tone exteriors were born before the first motor car, appearing on luxury horse carriages more than two centuries ago," Ramaciotti says. "But after Eta Beta they once again became a 'modern' feature, used over the last decade not only on luxury cars, but all the way down to tiny city cars." [ANE](#)

New in 1996 – Concept cars introduced at the world's major auto shows

	Make	Model	Architecture	Highlights
Detroit	Ford	Indigo	2-seat roadster	Based on a Reynard racing car chassis; carbon fiber central tub
	Lincoln	Sentinel	4-door sedan	Sharp-edged waist line and flat sides, vertical front and rear lighting units
	Ford	Synergy 2010	4-door sedan	Futuristic-looking hybrid with engine between backseat and trunk
	Chrysler	LHX	4-door sedan	Preview of the LH production models
	Dodge	Intrepid ESX	4-door sedan	Preview of the Intrepid production model
Geneva	Mercedes-Benz	AA Vision	SUV	Preview of the M class
	Bertone	Slalom	2-door coupe/wagon	Based on Opel Calibra 2.0 4wd; huge vertical headlamps
	Italdesign	Formula 4	open-top 4 seater	Based on Fiat Bravo; kit-car type structure with 2 different body tops
	Zagato	Raptor	mid-engine coupe	Based on Lamborghini Diablo V; double-bubble roof with removable panel
	Renault	Fiftie	2-seat coupe	Inspired by 1946 Renault 4CV; glass roof, back window can be folded
	Peugeot	Toscana	2+2 convertible	Based on Peugeot 406; glazed dome with integrated rear spoiler
	Ford	Lynx	4-seat convertible	Preview of the Puma coupe
	De Tomaso	Bigua	2+2 coupe/roadster	Targa 2-seater that became Qvale Mangusta
	Isotta Fraschini	T8	2+2 coupe/roadster	Aluminum spaceframe, body, with Audi A8's V-8 engine
	NedCar	Access	5-seat minivan	Aluminum spaceframe, specially made 4-cylinder engine
Turin	Sbarro	Issima	2-seat roadster	Alfa Romeo-based cabriolet with 3.0-liter, V-6 engine
	Bertone	Enduro	3-door SUV	Based on Fiat Bravo/Brava; coupe body with V-shaped back window
	Italdesign	Legram	4-seat coupe	Based on Fiat Bravo/Brava; glass dome, wraparound C-pillar
	Pininfarina	Sing	5-door minivan	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based medium minivan with 2-panel sunroof
	Pininfarina	Song	5-door minivan	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based medium minivan with SUV looks
	Fioravanti	Flair	2+2 coupe	Fuel-efficient Fiat Bravo/Brava-based model
	Zagato	Bravo Bis	4-seat coupe	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based sports car; tail end wraps around spare wheel
	Coggiola	Sentiero	4-door pickup	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based car with extended rear floorpan
	Boneschi	Taxi Help	2-box city car	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based car with rear access for wheelchairs
	Giannini	Windsurf	4-seat coupe	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based car with huge rear spoiler and adjustable fenders
	Fiat/Maggiora	Armaddillo	3+2, one-box car	Fiat Bravo/Brava-based cars with LED taillights
	Pininfarina	Eta Beta	4-seat microcar	Extendable rear section, aluminum spaceframe and plastic body panels
	Stola	Dedica	2-seat roadster	Based on the Fiat Barchetta; modified body panels
	Fioravanti	Nyce	2-seat recreational vehicle	Double hinged modular door opens both ways
	Bonetto Design	Miki	2-seat microcar	Based on shortened Fiat Cinquecento floorpan; electric motor and combustion engine
Paris	Ghia	Saetta	2-seat roadster	Previewed new-edge design that would be used on Ford Ka minicar
	Ghia	Alpe	SUV	Ford Escort-based SUV with new-edge design and wraparound C-pillar
	Maggiora	Barchetta Coupe	2-seat coupe	Coupe version of Fiat Barchetta with tail inspired by Fiat V8
	Mercedes-Benz	F 200	4-seat coupe	Front end previewed nose of next S class; feature drive-by-wire system
	Alfa Romeo	Nuvola	2+2 coupe	High-resistance box-steel chassis (evolution of the Multipla spaceframe)
	Peugeot	Asphalte	2-seat roadster	Carbon honeycomb monocoque structure, had two "tubs" instead of seats
	Peugeot	Touareg	off-road roadster	Electric-powered 4wd car with carbon-fiber monocoque
	Citroen	Berline Bulle	5-door hatchback	Citroen Berlingo-based car with rounded bodywork
	Citroen/Bertone	Coupe de Plage	2-seat pickup	Citroen Berlingo-based car with rear tailgate that became a loading ramp
	Citroen	Grand Large	5-seat minivan	Citroen Berlingo-based car with canvas roof, new interior trim
Heuliez Torino	Intruder	SUV/coupe	Mercedes-Benz GE 300-based 2-seat car with removable roof panels	



The Peugeot 207's headlights are a key feature on the Automotive News Europe Dream Car. See what other features created or enhanced since 1996 made it into this very special model in ANE's 10th anniversary issue on February 20.

