

Hopeful auto designers display their projects

By Michelle Krebs
KRT CAMPUS

Amina Horozic, 21, a senior studying transportation design at Detroit's College for Creative Studies, nervously waits for Dave Lyon, General Motors' executive director of design, to give some sign whether or not he likes her car sketches that cover the wall. Since she and her brother played with cars in their Harrison Township home, Horozic, born in Sarajevo, Bosnia, has had a life-long dream to be a car designer. Now, with her final school project, the dream is within her grasp. She and other seniors are assigned as their last semester project to design a GM vehicle for 2020. GM's sole requirement is that the futuristic vehicles use the skateboard-shaped chassis of its Autonomy fuel cell concept.

Horozic's egg-shaped concept looks more like wild sci-fi transportation than a current car. She designed the vehicle from the inside out, with the idea that the vehicle has replaced the family dining table as a place to converse and interact.

At long last, Lyon, a 1990 CCS graduate, delivers his verdict. "It's spooky," he says. "In a good way. Do one even more outlandish."

Lyon then moves on to the next student, spending the evening critiquing sketches that will be turned into three-dimensional clay models for a final grade and likely a ticket for a job this spring when Horozic and 16 others, including nine from

Michigan, in her class graduate.

Such design reviews are daily drills at CCS, one of the world's top breeding grounds for car designers, but one that few Detroiters outside the auto industry realize has a global reputation.

"CCS is the nation's best-kept secret in design education," said CCS dean of academic affairs Imre Molnar, who moved to CCS in 2001 from the rival Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, Calif., the nation's other major school for car designers.

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— Imre Molnar
CCS dean of academic affairs

CCS's transportation program draws students from the Detroit suburbs as well as from all over the world, like 25-year-old Sung-Yeah Song from South Korea, who picked CCS because "it's the best in the world. It's famous in Korea."

Students are a variety of ages, from 23-year-old senior Nick Renner from Iowa to adults making career changes, like Mark Surel, 33, a DaimlerChrysler clay modeler who wants to do his own car designs instead of create three-dimensional models of someone else's designs.

One of the strong points of

the CCS transportation design program is its close association with car designers working in the profession.

"On any given day, four or five established designers will be teaching here," Molnar said. "In fact, most transportation design classes are held in the evenings so we can attract the best designers to teach."

Once restricted to mostly GM, Ford and Chrysler designers, CCS's transportation design program has gone international in its associations with foreign car companies and their designers.

Projects like the seniors' assignment are another boost for the school. While seniors work on the GM project, juniors in the studio next door work on an assignment to create the next-generation of open-top vehicles. The day of the senior critique by GM, the juniors have just returned from a field trip to ASC headquarters in Southgate.

Changes in store for the transportation studies program will be more focused on digital skills used for rendering concepts, as well as on conversion of sketches to math-based data so models can be made on high-tech equipment like the school's new milling machine.

"We're trying to stay at least up to date or ahead of the curve with the changes in the auto industry," Rogers said.

The school also plans to offer a graduate program in transportation design, a first in the United States, said Rogers, who says CCS would then be the only school in the world to offer transportation design at both undergraduate and graduate levels.

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