

# BLACK INK

THE ART OF EXTRAORDINARY LIVING • SPRING/SUMMER 2013

ISSUE No. 28

## **DRIVE**

*To move in a desired direction; to carry on energetically; to progress with strong momentum, as in classic-car collecting, racing and tactical driving, buying sexy supercars, restoring retro moderns, designing the future*

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## MOTOR WORKS

*Fine design is finally having its moment in the art world.*

In 1951, New York's Museum of Modern Art mounted an eccentric exhibition. Developed by Arthur Drexler, the institution's new architecture and design curator, the show was called "Eight Automobiles" and featured just that: eight classic and contemporary cars from marques such as Bentley, Mercedes-Benz and MG, displayed like objets d'art. In his catalogue essay, Drexler referred to the vehicles as "hollow, rolling sculpture."

Veteran automotive journalist **Ken Gross** has recently taken up Drexler's mantle. After four decades writing about cars in books and for magazines, judging classic vehicles at prestigious concours and collecting and restoring early Fords, Gross was asked in 2007 by the Phoenix Art Museum to help them create an automotive exhibit.

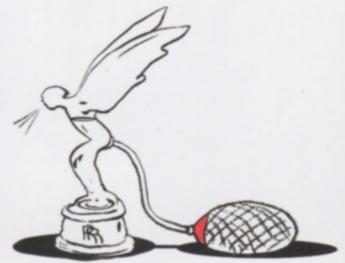
The show, "Curves of Steel: Streamlined Automotive Design," featured elegantly aerodynamic vehicles like a 1936 Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic Coupe and a 1957 Ferrari 625/250 Testa Rossa. It was a surprise hit. "That led to the High Museum of Art in Atlanta asking if I could help them as well," Gross says.

The result, "Allure of the Automobile," which was exhibited in 2010, was a huge success for the High, drawing record crowds—traditional patrons as well as museum newcomers—and receiving critical acclaim: Former *Washington Post* art critic Blake Gopnik called it "sex on wheels."

Gross has since curated other auto shows in fine art museums and has two exhibits scheduled for later this year. "Sensuous Steel: The Art Deco Automobile," which will feature models like the 1920 Cord L-29 Cabriolet

above, opens in the summer at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts in Nashville (*June 14 to September 15; 919 Broadway; fristcenter.org*). And this fall Raleigh's North Carolina Museum of Art will showcase "Porsche by Design: Seducing Speed" (*October 12 to January 20, 2014; 2110 Blue Ridge Rd.; ncartmuseum.org*). "I'm not an art scholar," Gross says. "But many objects that were not considered art when they were created—like furniture—have come to be considered art over time."

Of course, not every car is a Chippendale highboy. But the most exquisite examples clearly have the breathtaking power inherent in great art. "In Atlanta, I installed Clark Gable's Duesenberg on a spotlight platform right at the gallery entrance," Gross says. "And every time the elevator doors parted, you could just hear this collective gasp." —**BRETT BERK**



## MISS THAT NEW CAR SMELL?

It could be argued that, for an automobile enthusiast, the thrill of turning the key in a new car's ignition is surpassed only by the rush of inhaling its fresh-from-the-factory fragrance. But when the "new car smell" fades, options for re-creating it, until recently, were restricted to hanging a sterile-smelling cardboard pine tree on the rearview mirror. Thanks to last year's collaboration between **Rolls-Royce** and French perfumer **Robertet**, the era of the new new car smell has arrived, elevating auto-inspired fragrances to a level that befits their vehicular muses. "We wanted to transcend the idea of new car smell," says Paul Austin, owner of Austin Advisory Group, which oversaw the endeavor. "The project evolved out of the companies' mutual interest in using natural materials in their respective design processes." In recent years certain automakers, not wanting to alienate clients, have made strides to create odorless cars, even employing nose teams to sniff out materials whose essences may be overpowering. The Austin-led initiative represented a break from this trend, inspired by the marque's woods and leathers and its appealing innate scents. While the resulting limited-edition concept fragrance of roses, burl and leather was never for sale, other auto titans, like Mercedes-Benz and Bentley, followed suit, now selling products from colognes to shampoos that evoke the singular aromas one might whiff upon entering his brand-new car.

—**ANTHONY ROTUNNO**