

Grant Larson: three decades of shaping the Porsche dream

08/12/2025 After 36 thrilling years with Porsche, designer Grant Larson is preparing to retire. He talks the Porsche Newsroom through some of his career highlights – and the importance of listening to customers.

At the end of 2025, Porsche marks the retirement of Grant Larson, Director Special Projects Design. He steps away from a career defined by collaboration, artistry and a deep affection for Porsche's people and products.

Through this time, he has helped steer countless projects including design concepts, special editions, road and track cars, and one-off customer commissions. He stresses that his achievements were only possible thanks to his close-knit and talented team. "Everyone has their strengths, and the strengths all bounce off each other," he says.

Childhood in Montana

Larson's interest in cars began during childhood in Billings, in the US state of Montana. He remembers standing at bumper height in the 1960s, drawn in by what he saw. "At that age you are at a much lower level. I was just fascinated with cars, everything about them. All senses are activated." He also drew constantly as a child. Seeing how the shapes of American cars evolved left a lasting impression. "I noticed that all these cars are changing every year," he says. "And then I realised that people actually do this as a job."

Larson first studied Industrial Design at the Milwaukee Institute of Art and Design and only later committed to automotive design. Encounters with ArtCenter College of Design graduates, including automotive designer Tom Peters, convinced him to take the leap. "I thought 'this is what I've always wanted to do'. So, I quit my job, sold my car to pay the tuition fees, and went for it."

In 1989, aged 32, Larson moved to Porsche

After graduating in 1986, he moved to Germany and joined the highly motivated team at Audi during a particularly creative period. "It was amazing to think those cars were coming out of such a small studio," he says. In 1989, aged 32, Larson then moved to Porsche, joining the highly focused team at Weissach. The environment made an immediate impression. "I walked in and met people who were icons," he says.

Over the years, Larson contributed to countless designs. As to which meant the most, he smiles: "The projects where I had the most freedom." The atmosphere on key studio programmes was energetic and highly respectful, especially, Larson recalls, when it came to working on the Carrera GT showcar or on the Boxster show car, which was revealed at the Detroit Motor Show in 1993 during what was a difficult economic period for Porsche. "Our boss, Harm Lagaay, gave clear input and really pushed me on the design. We were lucky that we had an excellent clay modeller who worked freehand, using the drawings. Nothing went wrong. Everything fell into place."

Larson followed an "authentic" design philosophy. "I do not want to say 'form follows function' because everyone uses that. But for me, things must be there for a reason. I was never a big fan of embellishments or an intake where there is no air needed."

Working closely with engineers shaped that mindset. "At Porsche you are surrounded by extremely capable engineers," he says. "When they come to you with a solution and say this is the best way technically, I listen. Then my job as a designer is to make the best of it."

Sonderwunsch: Making dreams come true

In recent years Larson has devoted much of his time to the Sonderwunsch individualisation programme,

working with customers to bring their visions to life. It is work he has found deeply rewarding. “You are really making dreams come true,” he says. The programme requires designers to listen closely and guide customers through choices. Colour, for example, is highly personal. “Customers often ask which colour to choose. I always say: I can tell you what I like, but that is *my* taste.” Larson, as it happens, is a fan of greens.

On one-off projects, he describes helping customers refine early thoughts into something that fits both their personality and the Porsche identity. “Usually they have several ideas,” he says. “Maybe two are so outrageous that you must steer them gently away. Then you work together on the other three.”

Although he is officially retiring, Larson does not regard this as the end. “Designers never really retire. I will be leaving Porsche, but I will continue designing cars as a hobby.”

“I fell in love with the Porsche brand”

He’s staying in the Stuttgart region and will be enjoying his own classic cars, including a silver and black 356 Speedster, a lightweight 356 Coupe painted in New York Stone Grey and a 997-generation 911 Carrera S that is black on black – “my first choice for those forms, especially at sundown”.

Of his time at Porsche, he says: “I have loved it here. I fell in love with the brand, I enjoyed the people I worked with, and I was fortunate to have success with the projects I was involved in. When you put that together, three and a half decades go by very quickly.”

For the next designers, he emphasises maintaining enthusiasm. “As cars become more autonomous, some of the traditional passion risks fading. Designers need to keep it alive.”

And for his successor, Emiel Burki, his advice is clear: “It is all about the customer: share their passion and enjoy the ride!”

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