Volvo Cars Strategic Design Centre In Barcelona

Gothenburg, CAMARILLO AND BARCELONA. EACH HAS ITS UNIQUE LOCATION, CHARACTER, POSSIBILITIES AND INFLUENCE ON ITS INHABITANTS. ALL THREE HOUSE A VOLVO CARS DESIGN CENTRE, EACH WITH ITS OWN SPECIAL COMPETENCE, FOCUS AND MISSION.

Volvo Cars has its roots and headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden. In the very heart of Scandinavia. And Scandinavian design is what characterises Volvo’s cars. Volvo is, however, a global brand. Volvo cars are sold in more than 120 countries all over the world. And they are the same in every country. However, they are owned and used by people with vastly different ethnic, religious, cultural and social backgrounds, with one thing in common: they have chosen a Volvo because they appreciate and share the Volvo values.

Consequently, for Volvo Cars, design is a matter of philosophy rather than geography. Internationalism blended with Swedishness, with influences from all continents. Therefore, the design of a Volvo car can be, and is, carried out in Gothenburg as well as in Barcelona and California.

Stepping out for inspiration
Design became really "hot" for Volvo some 15 years ago, about the same time the Volvo Monitoring & Concept Centre in CAMARILLO was established. It was intended to serve as both a design studio and think tank, hence its name. Many trends are born in the Los Angeles area and where if not there would it be possible to gain an idea of what is coming, how it will be and what it will look like. That is how the place still works. Here, both concept cars and production car design have been conceived. Along with some pretty wild ideas too…

The Strategic Design Centre in BARCELONA was opened in 2001 and is in many ways an inspiring and interesting contrast. In California, roads are straight and wide. Most cars are big. Parking is easy. In Southern Europe most roads and streets are narrow, especially in urban areas. Cars are smaller, parking is difficult to say the least. But there are several advantages with Barcelona. And Volvo is not the only automaker to have discovered this fact.

Design focus has in recent years shifted over from Italy to Spain, and Barcelona is in the middle of that transition. Barcelona has a fabulous tradition of design, architecture and materials, particularly with regard to furniture. The city is in the middle of a vibrant industrial region that also covers parts of France and Italy. And, not least, people really live here, and consume what life has to offer. So, like CAMARILLO in California, Barcelona is the centre of trends and events in this region.

Scandinavian design – from a different perspective
A Volvo designed in Barcelona may sound strange but there are more similarities between Scandinavian and Spanish, or Mediterranean, design than is generally believed. The choice of colours and materials may differ but purity and simplicity are keywords here too. The very essence of a piece of wood or glass is virtually the same, even if there is a superficial difference. An excellent example is studio furniture. It was designed by the design staff themselves, and half of them are Spaniards. It is pure and simple in design, functional, yet elegant and sophisticated. The material used is not light fir or oak as would have been the case in Sweden, but darker cedar wood. Apart from that, the furniture could well be a piece of Scandinavian design work.
100 years of culture and inspiration

Casa Berenguer, Diputación no 246. This magnificent building may at first contradict everything that has to do with clean and uncluttered design, but when it was discovered by chief designer and studio manager David Ancona, it was simply impossible for Volvo to resist:

"I had been scanning the city for some time when I heard about the premises in Casa Berenguer. The building may not seem suitable for its purpose at first sight but it sure beats any modern glass and concrete office complex for atmosphere and inspiration," says David Ancona.

The Casa was built in 1907 by wealthy Catalans who had spent many years in Cuba. They were in the rapidly expanding textile business, like so many others at the time, and this fact can be spotted in the form of decorations dotted all around the building.

Today, Scandinavian and Catalan design and architecture have been carefully blended into a beautiful combination which makes up an excellent and stimulating working ambience for the staff in the Strategic Design Centre. Culture and history are still very much present, functionality and practical use have been added in.

And this is the way it has to be, because the 4th floor in this fascinating building houses what was probably the world's first completely digitalised satellite design studio in the car industry when it opened in 2001. In fact, there are not many around even today. Passers-by in the street would find it impossible to imagine the building's high-tech content behind its exterior facade.

Computer design and how it is done

Crayons and pencils are still important tools for a designer. The moment an idea pops up, there must always be something at hand for a designer to get it down on paper. Today, however, the designer's most important tool is the computer. Even sketches are done on a computer although most cars may start their lives as a simple drawing. The sketch is further refined and worked on in the computer until the time is ripe to build the first physical model. That moment, however, comes at a much later stage in the development process than it used to do, thanks to advanced computer programs.

Today's designers do not work in splendid isolation. They work closely together with product planners and engineers, making sure everything that has to be packaged into to the car finds a suitable place already from the start, avoiding expensive re-engineering at a later stage. This is possible because everybody involved in the process uses the same computer model. This model can be changed, taken apart and put together again, turned and twisted at any angle in ways that a physical model cannot be handled. It's a method that saves both time and money.

Work around the clock

By using highly advanced computer programs such as Alias, a design can be worked on in Gothenburg and Barcelona during the day. It can then be transmitted to Camarillo where the Americans can take over when their European colleagues call it a day. The Americans work through their day and then transmit their results in time for the people in Gothenburg and Barcelona to take over after they have had their morning coffee. It all makes for optimum use of the time available. This applies both to 3-D computer models and physical scale models, machine-milled with absolute precision. So the days of building expensive design prototypes over a period of many years, prototypes that were also often rejected, is now history. A global network of dedicated colleagues, sophisticated computer programs and optimum use of time and money are the key elements for efficient product development at Volvo Cars.

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Descriptions and facts in this press material relate to Volvo Cars' international car range. Described features might be optional. Vehicle specifications may vary from one country to another and may be altered without prior notification.
Computer design and how it is done

Due to the largely digitalised form of car design at Volvo, this discussion is no longer valid. No more physical models are made. However, it is interesting to note the development from the days when the people in Gothenburg and Barcelona would meet face to face during the morning coffee and then discuss what they would have to do that day. The discussion would then be transmitted to Camarillo. From there, it would be possible to work on the design without having to be in the building or sorts. The computer would facilitate: a "virtual meeting". This was, however, the foundation of the Strategic Design Centre in Barcelona.

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