Specialty

Transportation design

Designs vehicles and mobility products (cars, buses, trains, motorcycles, bicycles): their exterior form, their interior and how space is shared between people, cargo and mechanics.



In Spanish
Diseño de transporte

Origin
Usually traced to 1920s styling; General Motors' Art and Colour Section (1927)

What problem it addresses

A vehicle surrounds the body and moves. Its form has to make room for people, mechanics and safety, and also be recognizable.

Principles

Package first
Before drawing the form, space is shared out between people, mechanics, cargo and visibility.

From the body
The hip position of the seated occupant (the H-point) is the reference for placing seats, controls and sightlines.

Form and brand
Proportions, silhouette and details make the vehicle recognizable and read as part of a family.

Applications in design

✓ Use it like this
Test the package at full scale: sit in, get in and out of the vehicle before settling the form.

✗ Avoid
Drawing an attractive silhouette that then leaves no room for people or mechanics.

👁 Don't fall for it
Work with engineering from the start: aerodynamics, safety and manufacturing also shape the form.

Connections

Builds on

- Ergonomics and human factors
- Most advanced yet acceptable

Related to

- Automotive HMI design

Authors and works

1927	**Harley Earl**	General Motors hired him that year to lead the Art and Colour Section, an in-house department devoted to the form and color of its cars.
1994	**David Gartman**	Wrote a social history of American automobile design that places the birth of styling in the 1920s.
2014	**Stuart Macey and Geoff Wardle**	Gathered the fundamentals of packaging in a handbook: how people and components are placed before giving form to cars and trucks.
	ArtCenter College of Design	Its transportation design degree is divided into exteriors, interiors (including UI and UX) and alternative transportation: aircraft, marine, motorcycles, personal mobility and public transit.

Sources

Secondary sources

- Lamm, M. (1998). The Earl of Detroit. American Heritage of Invention & Technology, 14(2). View source (https://www.inventionandtech.com/node/85954)
- Gartman, D. (1994). Auto opium: A social history of American automobile design. Routledge.
- Macey, S., y Wardle, G. (2014). H-Point: The fundamentals of car design & packaging (2nd ed.). Design Studio Press.
- ArtCenter College of Design (n.d.). Transportation Design: BS degree overview. Consultado el October 26, 2026. View source (https://cms.artcenter.edu/academics/undergraduate-degrees/transportation-design/overview.html)

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