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Henning Knoepfle

Design Director

Leadership that lifts products to a higher level of quality. A track record of creating fresh design directions, and of rebuilding and forming brand design languages.

Design leadership across Germany, the US, Japan and China. The way I work is open and iterative during the early stage, where the direction is still being found and the team needs room to explore, then disciplined once it is chosen, to ensure the intention and feeling is kept without being rigid. What I bring is a point of view on where a brand should sit and what its products should promise the customer. The eπ brand and the Forthing relaunch both began as questions about which customer the company wanted next, and became products that answered them. The eπ 007 took a Red Dot in 2024. Fifteen years teaching design has shaped how I build teams as much as any studio job has.

What I want to work on next is where AI belongs in the early process. I use it daily for research and concept exploration and I am testing it in 3D and surfacing. The question that interests me is whether it puts more real options in front of a team before the direction gets locked, and what a studio should look like once it does.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Dongfeng Motor, DFTC, Wuhan, China — Oct 2021 – Present

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Creative responsibility for the eπ brand's first models — Dongfeng's new premium EV brand — and for the overhaul of the Aeolus line-up from brand DNA definition through A-Class industrialization.

- Defined the eπ brand design identity: muscular, sensual surfacing with premium proportion — a first-of-kind vocabulary for Dongfeng's EV sub-brand.
- **eπ 007** Fastback GT — led creative development from first sketch through digital surfacing to production. Winner, Red Dot Award 2024.
- **eπ 008** Family SUV — led full design development from concept through A-Class, currently in production ramp-up.
- **Aeolus Sky EV, L7 and L8 PHEV** — guided creative development for two facelift programs.
- Directed full-size truck cabin design for the DFPV Commercial Vehicle division.
- Led and mentored Dongfeng's in-house design team across exterior, interior, digital surfacing and studio engineering.

Great Wall Motors, Baoding, China — May 2021 – Oct 2021

DESIGN DIRECTOR *(NEV Commercial Vehicle & Truck Division)*

Established a design team from scratch for GWM's newly created New Energy Vehicle commercial division. Built creative infrastructure, set program timelines, and led the first vehicle into development.

- **GWM Long March Truck** — personally led and created the cabin design from brief to production.

Dongfeng Motor, DFLZ, Liuzhou, China — 2019 – 2021

DESIGN DIRECTOR

Led a complete brand relaunch — repositioning Forthing vehicles through the 'Striking Clarity' design philosophy: sensual volume, precise lines, visual premium quality.

- **Forthing T5 EVO** — formulated the new design language for Forthing's mid-size SUV, which brought in a younger customer base the brand had not reached before.
- **Forthing M4 Concept and Production (MPV)** — personally conceived and led design from sketch through clay to A-Class surfacing. 2021 Shanghai Auto Show.
- **Forthing V9 design model (MPV)** — personally conceived and led design from sketch through clay. Later completed to production.
- **Forthing T5 Tarmac** — defining concept, leading execution. 2021 Shanghai Auto Show.
- Guided additional sedan/SUV facelifts, heavy truck, MPV and C&T programs.
- Developed strategic product story for marketing campaign.

Volvo Trucks, Greensboro, USA — 2019

STUDIO MANAGER *(External Studio at XDIN)*

Ran the extended Volvo Design studio, managing delivery of next-generation Volvo and Mack Heavy Truck design to Volvo's in-house design leadership.

- Managed a multidisciplinary studio: Creative Designers, UI Designers, Digital Sculptors, A-Class Surfacers and Studio Engineers.
- Coordinated with Volvo Design leadership on program activities.
- Ensured quality and on-schedule delivery of all creative and technical content.

Core Competencies

- ➤ High-impact design transformation
- ➤ Product / brand vision & strategy, product story
- ➤ Design thinking and idea generation
- ➤ Open leadership and coaching
- ➤ Market analysis, strategy & execution
- ➤ Project definition & delivery
- ➤ Exceptional translation from 2D to 3D

Awards

- Red Dot Award 2024 — eπ 007, Product Design

On the Road

- *eπ 007*
- *eπ 008*
- DFM Aeolus Sky EV
- DFM Aeolus L7 PHEV
- DFM Aeolus L8 PHEV
- DFM Aeolus L8Y / L8+
- M-Hero M817
- DFM Tianlong KH Truck
- GWM Long March Truck
- DFL Forthing MPV
- DFL Forthing T5 EVO
- DFL Forthing V9 MPV
- Baojun 360
- Chery Tiggo 3 Interior
- Foton Grandeur (Ext & Int)
- Mitsubishi Endeavor (facelift)
- Mitsubishi Galant (2 facelifts)
- Mitsubishi Eclipse (special ed.)
- Chevrolet Cobalt
- Opel Astra (adv. concept)

In the Show

- Forthing M4 Concept
- Forthing T5 Tarmac
- Opel Frogster
- Opel Omega V8.com
- Opel Speedster
- Mitsubishi RA
- Mitsubishi Endeavor RallyArt

Languages

- German — Native
- English — Fluent

Passport / Visa

- German Passport
- US Green Card
- China Work Visa

Technical Skills

- Autodesk Alias
- Adobe Photoshop & Illustrator
- Microsoft Office Suite

Community Leadership

Maple Village School,
Long Beach, CA
2007 – 2009
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD — FOUNDING MEMBER
Primary financial and physical contributor to establish the school.

Pininfarina SpA, Los Angeles, USA 2018
BUSINESS & OPERATIONS DIRECTOR *(Consultant via CADRE — reporting to CEO)*
Developed the strategic business case for Pininfarina's California studio initiative.

- Built full California business concept: market strategy, client targeting, financial forecasting.
- Established connections with clients, universities, suppliers and partners on the West Coast.

Beijing Auto Yinxiang (BAIC), Chongqing, China 2017 – 2018
DESIGN DIRECTOR *(Consultant via CADRE)*
Strategic and creative consulting for BAIC Yinxiang's two brands, Huansu and Bisu, working directly with CEO to raise design quality and establish brand identity principles.

- **Bisu next-generation SUV** — led design from sketch to A-Class via full-size clay. Unreleased.
- **Huansu S6 7-Seat SUV** — guided design from sketch to A-Class via full-size clay. Not produced.

Technicon Design, Frankfurt / Los Angeles / Shanghai 2011 – 2017
DIRECTOR, STUDIO SERVICES | GM & DESIGN DIRECTOR | HEAD OF ELITE TRAINING
Board member. Built the Shanghai studio from zero to 35 staff, including its second and third studio locations. Directed the Frankfurt studio launch, planned the Portland studio and won its approval, and set up the global Studio Services structure.

China Operation (GM / Design Director, 2012–2015):

- Set and implemented new business strategy; grew revenue from 5M to 23M RMB in 3 years.
- Won 14 new clients including Qoros, Audi, BMW, Jaguar Land Rover, Foton and Volvo.
- Built new local team from zero to 35 staff. Added surfacing, animation and C&T capability.
- Started the HMI practice in 2014 with Technicon's Munich team: cluster UI design and animation for Continental (Great Wall Haval H8/H9 program), cluster UI pre-study for Changan.
- **Honda Advanced Autonomous Concept** — vision for their autonomous vehicle.
- **SsangYong Korando** — multiple Ext and Int production design concepts.
- **MAN Next Generation Truck, Audi A8 Interior, Foton Grandeur, Chery Tiggo 3** — Ext & Int.

Mitsubishi Motors R&D, Los Angeles, USA 2002 – 2009
MANAGER DESIGN | PRINCIPAL DESIGNER | LEAD DESIGNER
Led design and clay modeling teams across B- and D-segment global programs. Won 4 of 5 internal global design competitions.

- **Mitsubishi RA** — acclaimed NAIAS show car, 2007.
- **Galant '09** — full-change production program developed from sketch to production in Japan.
- **Endeavor '10 | Galant '07 | Eclipse '08** — production programs. Mirage — advanced concept.
- **Endeavor RallyArt** — SEMA concept from sketch to hard model.
- Responsible for B-Segment and D-Segment global product initiatives.

GM / Opel (via IVM Automotive), Rüsselsheim, Germany 1998 – 2002
CHIEF DESIGNER / ASST. MANAGER | PROJECT MANAGER | DESIGNER
Led a 25-person team delivering production and show-car programs for GM/Opel under compressed timelines. Personal conceptual and creative work alongside project planning and delivery.

- **Opel Frogster** — IAA Frankfurt 2001 Show Car. Created concept and full design.
- **Opel Speedster** — Geneva 1999 Show Car. Project Manager.
- **Opel Omega V8.com** — IAA Frankfurt 1999 Show Car.
- **Opel Astra** 2000 — advanced exterior concept, used directly for the production car.
- **Chevrolet Cobalt** — planned and executed full production program, sedan and coupé.

Mercedes-Benz, Sindelfingen, Germany 1997
MASTER'S THESIS PLACEMENT

- Maybach exterior concept design — Master's thesis project.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Academy of Art University, San Francisco, CA 2002 – 2017
INSTRUCTOR — TRANSPORTATION & AUTOMOTIVE DESIGN
15 years of parallel teaching alongside industry practice.

California State University Long Beach, Long Beach, CA 2009 – 2010
LECTURER
Led several award-winning student projects.

EDUCATION

University of Applied Sciences & Arts, Hannover, Germany 1993 – 1997
MASTER OF FINE ARTS (MFA) — TRANSPORTATION / INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

- Exchange semester: University of Illinois, Chicago, IL — Industrial Design Studies