

*Pop culture is the only culture we have left. My job is to create cars that appeal to that culture. 1997*

JOHN HARVARD'S

# JOURNAL

## Short, Stubby, Sexy

THE LITTLE GREEN CAR NOSED its way into the concrete lobby of the Graduate School of Design in late January. At Harvard for a two-month visit to celebrate design excellence, "O21C" (named for its original, brilliant-orange paint job) worked its magic on countless admirers, filling them with desire. Woe to the lust inflamed—they'd get no satisfaction: the little green heartthrob was not for sale.

The car, the only one of its kind in the



Photograph by Jim Harrison

HARVARD MAGAZINE 47

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world, was commissioned by J Mays, designer of Volkswagen's New Beetle and the 2002 Ford Thunderbird. At a ceremony on February 20, the Design School honored Mays with its 2002 Excellence in Design Award, established in 1997 to "broaden the school's involvement with disciplines of the greater design community not formally represented" in its three main departments: architecture, landscape architecture, and urban planning and design.

Exhibit co-curator and assistant professor of architecture Joseph MacDonald says that there has been an "accelerated blurring between design disciplines recently

as a result of emerging technologies, and the school wants to acknowledge and foster alliances in that climate of connectivity." Mays himself reached out to tap Australian Marc Swenson, a designer of furniture, glassware, and restaurant interiors, to create O21C, for example. Built in 1999, the car, which Mays (now the head of global design for Ford Motor Company) has characterized as "more George Jetson than Georg Jensen," went on to appear at the 2000 Milan Furniture Fair (where it acquired its present green color). "That Ford would be present at a furniture show, how strange is that?" asks MacDonald.

Architects can learn from designers like Mays to "reflect and participate in contemporary culture in a meaningful way," MacDonald says. "We're less interested in the product than in the working method." Mays's design process, says MacDonald, begins with a design vocabulary that captures the essence of an era as expressed in the common language of pop culture: text, images, film, and music. The words for the New Beetle, for example, are "simple, reliable, honest." His own work in three words? "Lust, longing, and desire," says Mays. That George Jetson could be sexy, who knew?

## A Dean for All Weathers

WHEN HE ANNOUNCED on February 11 that he would relinquish the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) deanship this June, Jeremy R. Knowles signaled the end of a tenure that began together with Neil L. Rudenstine's presidency, on July 1, 1991.

Early in that decade-plus-one, Knowles addressed persistent deficits that would, over time, have sapped the faculty's strength. As means became available, he made necessary investments in FAS's ne-

glected infrastructure. And then, buttressed by support from faculty members and alumni, he pursued a select list of enhancements to the research and teaching conducted within what he came to call a "community of scholars." Those gains accelerated courtesy of the University Campaign—which brought FAS \$1.2 billion in gifts and pledges—and the unprecedented growth of the endowment in the late 1990s.

But such blessings were never inevitable. In retrospect, it is clear that the disciplined trajectory Knowles established put FAS in a strong position to bolster its

professorial ranks to take on the intellectual challenges of the new century.

THE HAND Knowles was dealt was unpromising. When economist A. Michael Spence resigned as dean in 1990 to take the reins at Stanford's business school, he left behind both a formidable list of needs (dozens of new faculty positions, huge capital projects like renovating the freshman dormitories in Harvard Yard) and an annual operating deficit of some \$12 million—nearly 5 percent of FAS's budget. Even a stern diet imposed by Henry Rosovsky in his one year as acting dean left FAS with a deficit of nearly \$10 million.

Why then did Knowles—who had turned down entreaties to become dean in 1984, succeeding Rosovsky—accept this time, during a recession, with costs to cut, on the eve of a massive fundraising effort? For one thing, Knowles, who was and is Houghton professor of chemistry and biochemistry, had by then had nearly a decade more of highly successful research and teaching, and was mindful, he said, that "Scientists tend not to grow wise. There is a fierce quality in this institution, and one would never want to be A-." So the second offer of the deanship—a surprise, in light of his earlier reluctance—appeared as an attractive opportunity to do "something very, very different." That the offer came from Rudenstine, a new president and almost an exact contemporary, made the proposition seem "an exciting, an invigorating and

**Jeremy R. Knowles in the Faculty Room of University Hall, which was meticulously renovated during his 11 years of service as dean.**

