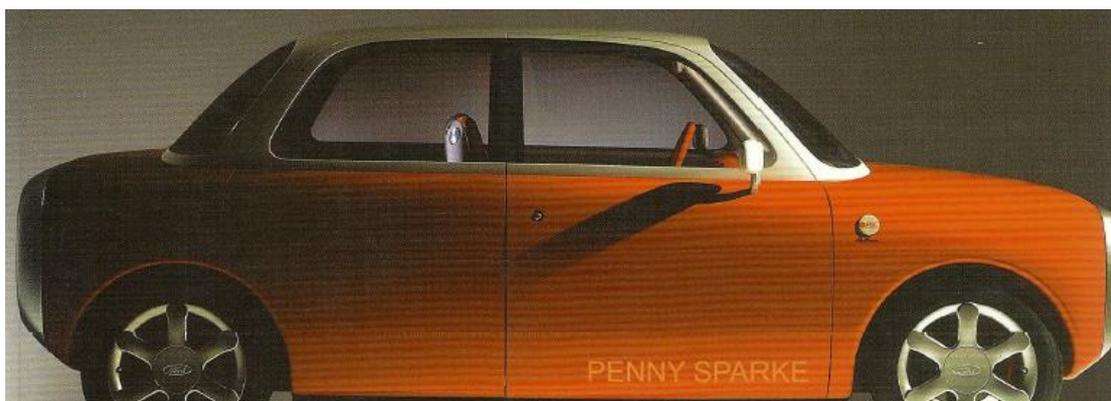


# A Century of Car Design

- Pioneers in Car Design in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

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### **French Style**

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the tax policy of French government restricted the development of car manufacturers, mainly for this reason, the relationship between France and famous car brands born during the two world wars including Bugatti, LagoTalbor, Delahaye, Hotchkiss and the like gradually faded out of people's sights. Only a few small-sized manufacturers tried to follow the brilliant tradition. For instance, in the period from the mid 1950s to the mid 1960s, Facel Vega took a risk to launch a series of limousines with very fashionable design on French market. The car model FVS debuting on Paris Motor Show in 1954 was designed by Monsieur Brasseur. It was an elegant car with streamline modern appearance. After that, other famous cars were launched successively, including Facellia sports car. However, in 1964, the company had to admit a complete failure. On the contrary, other French manufacturers survived by virtue of mass production. Volkswagen and Peugeot made a strong development in the postwar, but paid no attention to styles. Simaca Aronde born in 1951 was an exception. It

introduced some Italian style (Simca once manufactured Fiat cars during the two world wars) and achieved success. It was produced till 1962. Meanwhile, Peugeot 203 born in 1948, i.e. the first car model launched by Peugeot after the ravage of war, borrowed the car style of the US. Nevertheless, neither the two companies contributed to "French-style" cars. This peculiar challenge was left to Citroen and Renault, two great car manufacturers in France.

### **Characteristics and Originality**

Citroen and Renault had built a good reputation in terms of small cars by 1950s. Their designs were innovative and particular, completely different from others. The originality showed by the two companies before long would hold French car's head high again. Both Citroen 2CV (see Page 102-105) and Renault 4CV (see Page 110-111) were practical and visually innovative at the same time. This laid a solid foundation for the two companies to invent a type of brand new car design method later on in the mid 1950s.

**Right:** Citroen Ami 6 regarded as the successor of Citroen 2CV had been produced from 1961 to 1969. This car had an odd appearance, especially its reversely tilted rear window design.





Left: Citroen DS19 designed by Flaminio Bertoni was undoubtedly the most vivid and everlasting design launched by Citroen in 1950s. Its science-fiction appearance and sculpture-like lines, together with automotive innovation technology, created one of the car symbols in this century.

### Challenges for Citroen

The largest challenge before Citroen in 1950s was to further develop based on Traction Avant born in 1930s and 2CV born in 1948. Most notably, it rolled out DS19 in 1955, with the hope of transcending the achievements made by the above two car models. "Deesse" (The Goddess) was a car model turning experts' criticism into praise, which was really few in number. Roland Barthes, a French cultural critic, called it "a magic creation" and said that it aroused interests more through "the combination of its components rather than simple composition". The DS model designed by Italian sculptor Flaminio Bertoni had the support of Pierre Franchiset. Like previous 2CV, its smooth body shell shape was different from any other car designs before then. It had an aerodynamic shape, while its front-wheel drive could make the front

and rear axles remain away from each other, namely that there was more space between wheels, giving people some steady experience. The most thorough design change of DS was the removal of the front radiator grille. The charming line of the engine hood stretched downward almost to the ground, giving the car a peculiar profile and quite prominent appearance features. The design of the rear window line was quite smart, which could prevent from raindrops' stay on the window. In addition to innovative style design, it also enjoyed amazingly innovative appearance design and technological breakthrough for the front of cars, with the removal of hydrodynamic and pneumatic designs. This model was too attractive to French citizens, so that it received 12,000 orders on the first day when it was launched.

**Right:** Renault 5 launched in 1973 was described as a "super mini" car. It was compact, comfortable and reliable, strongly attracting the emerging market wild about car culture sharing in cities.





Bertoni also designed another car, i.e. mini Ami 6, in 1961 for Citroen before his death in 1964. This model might not be as unforgettable as DS, but its reversely tilted rear window was undoubtedly unique. This proved again that Citroen was absolutely an avant-garde car company, which needed not study other countries' car designs. Bertoni's position in Citroen later was replaced by Robert Opron from the US. Before that, Robert Opron had been working in the company, so he learnt the company's working culture quite well.

The design plan for Dyane born in 1967 was a modernized reform of old model 2CV, but its final service life was not as long as 2CV yet. It was designed by the design group of Panhard, which at that time had been taken over by Citroen. After that, Opron made his major achievements

that were closely related to those large-sized cars launched by Citroen after 1970. The SM model launched following Dyane had fruity lines and a nice appearance, mainly featuring the part called "photo-temperature chamber" in the front. The GS model born in 1970 was a high-performance flagship car model, while the CX born in 1974 further propelled the symbolic feature of DS – aerodynamics. In this year, due to the high development cost for CX, Citroen was purchased by Peugeot. Although this did not cut off the link between Citroen and innovation (this could be proved with Visa, Xantia and Saxo), there was no car could surpass the fashion height achieved in 1950s and 1960s. Designer Jean-Pierre Ploue – a former member of the design group in Renault – became the style design director of Citroen in 2000.



**Above:** The headlights of Citroen Maserati could turn along with the steering wheel. This smart detail design was a design feature of Citroen.



**Left:** Designers raised a series of design suggestions for Citroen cars in 1960s. The GS two-passenger car (upper left), C60 (upper right), BX (lower left) and CX (lower right) in the Fig. all laid a solid foundation for the mass production cars of Citroen later on.

**Right:** Citroen launched four-wheel-drive Mehari cars in the late 1960s, trying to take this opportunity to launch a practical car model. In a sense, it repeated the rough and practical characteristics of 2CV cars, but with only moderate success.

**Lower left:** Citroen SM model was an achievement of the short-term cooperation between Citroen and Maserati in the early 1970s. This fashionable car model had our familiar Citroen appearance, especially in the rear. This model was designed to add another high-performance car product to Citroen.



### Renault Models

Renault took more time than Citroen to be a car model leader. Although the Renault car produced for the upstream market in 1964 could be regarded as the first “domestic car” of Citroen, it experienced many a financial hardship. However, Renault achieved success with small and smart Renault 5 in the early 1970s. Renault 5 was described as the first “super mini car” model. As early as in 1940s, the company had recognized that the design of an innovative car referred not only to innovative appearance and visual details, but above all, to new car ideas in conformity with socio-cultural changes. Renault 5 kept this tradition and provided the matured emerging urban market with a good life assistant. This was similar to the Mini car (see Page 106-109) designed by Alec Issigonis 10 years ago to some extent, even though Renault 5 achieved another brand new level by virtue of its complete, stylish and fashionable new look.

The breakthrough made by Renault with Renault 5 reappeared on Espace model

13 years later. As the first constant-width “passenger transport vehicle” or MPV (multi-purpose vehicle), Espace was rapidly imitated by other major car manufacturers. Lifestyle once again promoted the development of this brand new concept, showing us that we could thoroughly reconsider the appearance of cars to recover the practical performance. The family travel thought itself at that time was a processional technical activity and imperfect to a large extent, but it stimulated the design of this car mode known as “No. 1” and made Renault go back to the track concerning blueprint design in a vivid way.

With the successive creation of 19, Clio, Megane Scenic, etc., by 2000, Renault had established a strong design force.

Now, France has lost its reputation in large-sized cars and limousines built in the prewar, but its role has been fully consolidated. It is a country who can generate a large number of innovative, radical and mature designs in terms of new concepts and new aesthetic languages.