

Japanese Seeking Its Own Concepts of Auto Styling

A man who ranks as one of the leading industrial designers in the Orient, here on a busman's holiday to study automotive design concepts at Art Center School, yesterday predicted that within 10 years, Japan will have its own "school" of industrial design theory.

Masao Morimoto, 40, who is chief stylist for the Toyota

Motor Co., Ltd., leading automobile builder of the Orient, has strong feelings about the present lack of a true Oriental concept in industrial design.

"I realize that the Italians have their type of airy, graceful artistry in automobiles and the British for years have espoused the razor-edge idea in traditional forms of automotive coachwork.

"Too, the Americans have a definite national kind of styling in the compound curves, ultra low silhouette and speed-line techniques which mark automotive and other industrial design created in major U.S. cities.

"But Japan, relatively new in the field of heavy industrial production, has still

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Japanese Styling Expert Studies U.S. Concepts



VISITOR.—Masao Morimoto, above, chief stylist, Toyota Motor Co., Japan, is here to study U.S. automotive styling.

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to incorporate into our design field the delicate and balanced art technique that marks our painting and other formal arts. I hope I shall be one of those who contributes to this accomplishment."

Quality Conscious

Morimoto stressed that Japanese engineers and designers today rely heavily on production of quality items to overcome an earlier reputation that Japan had for building strictly to a price basis. He subscribes also to the American theory of design directed as answer to consumer demands, rather than design for design's sake alone, without regard to consumer opinion.

He said Japanese car builders are faced with many of the problems that plague Detroit automakers, including a 50% increase in labor costs over the past five years.

"Lead time"—the interval between decision to produce a new model and the actual start of assembly line operation on the new car—is also a time-consuming factor in Japan, just as in Detroit, he said.

"Our lead time on a totally new car will run about two years, and on a styling change where only sheet metal face-lifts are involved, we need lead time of nearly a year," he said.

Family Touring

Employee relations are enhanced at the Toyota plant by such novel features as the Green Motor Club, in which all employees hold membership.

The club's activities include providing a new Toyota sedan without charge for a day-long outing by every club member, one day each month. The employee also gets the day off, with pay to take his family touring in the newest model car built by his factory.

Morimoto believes that even more research is nec-

essary in some of the basic materials used in car building.

"I am very unhappy about the characteristics of glass," he said. "It is a sort of Achilles heel in the automobile and has not enough strength for the role it plays. I feel that aluminum and the allied alloys also need a lot of improvement. They are wonderful materials, but still handicapped by too many disadvantages."

Car Lowered

But the Japanese designer leaned on the tradition of his craft as the interview drew to a close.

"What about these new small wheels?" he was asked. "You like them?"

"Yes," he replied. "As long as they are in proportion with the rest of the car, they help us lower the car without such great loss of head room."

"What about brake problems? The smaller the wheels, the smaller the brake drums. Doesn't brake efficiency fall off?"

Morimoto smiled his most inscrutable Oriental smile.

"We let the engineers worry about that," he said.