

the shape of things to come

MAZDA'S SHINARI CONCEPT CAR BEGAN ITS LIFE AS THIS UNUSUAL OBJECT. FIND OUT HOW AND WHY IT CAME TO BE

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Mazda's striking new Shinari concept car has a lot resting on its muscular shoulders. It shows a clear vision of Mazda's design future and showcases the skill of Mazda's designers and the craftsmen who created it.

But to be a success it must be a bold statement of purpose. It has to generate publicity, create a media buzz, inspire blog posts, YouTube views and attract visitors to Mazda's motor show stands.

Shinari does all this, of course, but it also represents a new way of thinking at Mazda and, actually, an entirely new

creative process that's unheard of in the automotive world.

It's the first vehicle to display "Kodo—Soul of Motion," Mazda's new design language pioneered by the head of design, Ikuo Maeda.

Mazda design has always been a study of motion. The pure athleticism of cars such as the RX-8, or the subtle Nagare "Flow" of the new Mazda5 have one thing in common—they are cars that look like they're moving, or about to move, even when they're parked.

It's a formula that Maeda-san and his team are developing further still. Kodo "expresses living movement," explains



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Yasushi Nakamuta, head of the company’s Yokohama design studio.

To capture the essence of Kodo, Maeda-san opted to turn the traditional car design process on its head. A regular design process begins with benchmarking the competition, then developing the shape of a vehicle. But amazingly, what Maeda-san didn’t want at this stage was anything actually resembling a car.

Maeda-san started to develop the Shinari by trying to create the shape of a specific moment—the origin of a sensation. Instead of getting his team of international designers (see page 18) to start sketching straight away, he turned first to the select group of expert clay modellers at Mazda. Maeda-san explained the key elements of Kodo to them using single words to describe the forms he wanted them to sculpt. The shapes needed to represent “speed” and “tension” and “to be alluring.”

Nakamuta-san picks up the story: “We wanted to create something dynamic and strong with the sense of energy ready to release, like a cheetah waiting to pounce or a Kendo fighter about to strike. Our modellers are the best in the world. We put the clay modellers first because we wanted to pull out their skill and craftsmanship, to really challenge them.

“It was a long journey. First we made the clays, to pinpoint the essence of Kodo, the dynamic movement, the speed, but nothing at all in a car body shape. Then we focused more on car-like styling,

choosing elements from the clays to include, such as the shape of the cheetah.”

It was only at this stage that Maeda-san brought in the designers with their pencils, magic markers and computers.

Mazda’s design studios in Japan, USA and Europe were asked to come up with proposals for a car that would bring Kodo to the public. Maeda-san chose a four-door coupe, itself a radical departure for Mazda, to be the car on which Kodo should debut to the outside world.

The studios worked on their proposals, which were submitted to head office and narrowed down. Again, the clay modellers were asked to take charge—to choose which design (and designer) they wanted to work with to take these sketches into three dimensions.

Finally, one design was chosen above the rest—the work of Cho Yong Wook, who had previously worked with Maeda-san on the Mazda2.

Cho-san talks of the way he dragged the cabin towards the rear of the car, moving the peak to the rear seat to exaggerate the sense of a predator waiting to pounce on its victim. He also talks of the “twisted tension” of sharpness and elegance in the body surface, and how the headlights were inspired by a human or animal eye.

“This car has the will to run,” he says. “I hope you feel it is alive and that it has hot blood under its cool skin.”

With Cho-san’s exterior signed off, a full-sized clay model was created alongside incredibly detailed 3D

Early inspiration came from nature—the power of a cheetah preparing to pounce



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computer models that allowed the designers to visualize Shinari driving the streets of Tokyo. These beautiful, almost cinematic renderings proved what a truly breathtaking vehicle Shinari would be.

Using the full-size clay and the computer models, a team of expert fabricators created the final body, while engineers worked on the underpinnings—Shinari actually does drive, although the details of what’s under that beautiful body are a secret yet to reveal itself.

Meanwhile, at Mazda’s studio in Irvine, California, head of design Derek Jenkins had tasked his team with creating an interior that would also convey Kodo.

“Speed comes from the long sweeping lines that echo the exterior,” he says. “It’s alluring thanks to the craftsmanship and jewel-like quality of the instruments. The tension comes from the lean, light, open and spacious cabin.”

French-born interior designer Julien Montousse took his words to heart and created a luxurious yet sporty cabin.

“It’s fast, technical and modern,” he says. “We want the driver to be totally focused on the road, but to give a more ‘living room’ feel for the passengers.”

The hand-crafted interior features a mix of high-quality materials, from milled aluminum inspired by racing cars, to luxurious leather and wood with inspiration from travel accessories. The instruments have a deliberate mechanical feel influenced by the finest Swiss watches.

It’s sleek, but it’s also smart. The Human Machine Interface (HMI) has three modes—Business, Pleasure and Sport, which offer the driver different applications to suit his mood, from Internet searches, to music selection, to navigation control.

Just as with the exterior, a series of clay and digital models of interior parts were constructed before the final interior was painstakingly assembled.

“We worked very closely with the US team, making 3D models from their sketches, and rendering all the parts digitally—up to 200 parts,” adds Nakamuta-san. “But the actual interior was made in California and we had to put the interior and exterior together.”

Although the design teams on different sides of the Pacific Ocean had been in constant contact and the interior was based on Kodo, it was a tense moment when interior and exterior finally met up. They fit perfectly and finally, just six months after the project began, Shinari was able to turn a wheel.

“It was such a great feeling,” says Nakamuta-san. “A dream come true when we saw it for real. We get a good idea from the CGI [computer-generated imagery] what it’s going to look like, but when you see it, it is much more beautiful.”

Julien works on some ideas for the interior



All details, like the feel of the steering wheel, are considered



Lightweight but supportive seats and a cockpit designed around the driver are Shinari highlights

SHINARI: A STUDY IN PERPETUAL MOTION

With its long hood, cabin pushed to its rear haunches, low roofline, exaggerated fenders and changing surfaces, Shinari has been designed to look as if it is constantly moving. And moving fast. Meanwhile, Shinari's cabin is influenced by 21st-century race cars and feels as if it's been designed entirely around the driver. Passengers have their own luxurious space, but are positioned so as not to distract the driver from the business of driving. ■



The twisted tension of polished metal is a running theme, shown here in the tail lights and side vents



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FIND OUT MORE about how the Shinari was born at zoomzoommag.ca