



# CHEVROLET CORVETTE STING RAY

If the original Corvette was a handsome experiment, its second generation was world-class in its execution.

Bill Mitchell was the heir apparent to General Motors' styling department, handpicked by Harley Earl to lead the company into a lofty new era. It would be inspired by everything from the natural world to European coach-building, and both would play a part in Mitchell's "sheer look:" where a new generation of designs would be sleeker, more aerodynamic, and more exciting than the bloated beasts of a decade before.

However, it was Larry Shinoda who operated under Mitchell's tutelage on the next Corvette. A first-generation Japanese American who lived through the internment camps of the Second World War, he emerged into Southern California's hot rod scene. Shinoda claimed that after he beat Mitchell in a street race, he was hired into Mitchell's secret design program, Studio X.

Shinoda's first project was developing a one-off body for a canceled Corvette SS race car. Creased, wide-fendered, and quietly aggressive, it mimicked strong horizontal lines and "bubble" fenders from Italian streamliners such as the Alfa Romeo Disco Volante prototype, which Mitchell had seen in Turin. This was also the first car to wear the Sting Ray designation, avoiding Chevrolet badging because of GM's racing ban.

Another influence was the ocean—particularly a mako shark that Mitchell once caught while deep-sea fishing in the Caribbean and proudly hung in his office. Its gradient color scheme, blending from purple to silver, inspired the Mako Shark concept of 1962. According to Shinoda, the design team was ordered to paint the car exactly like the wall-mounted shark; replicating nature was so difficult to pull off that eventually the team stole

the shark from his office and painted it to match the car instead. Pleased with the results, Mitchell supposedly never noticed.

The power of a design is in its translation. When the Corvette debuted at the 1963 Chicago Auto Show, these styling cues were almost entirely intact. This is where the Corvette shifted from a quirky roadster to a genuine performance car. Its competitive streak was clear: it was designed as a coupe from the very start, and its hidden headlights were a result of wind tunnel testing at Caltech, the first on an American car since the 1942 DeSoto. Zora Arkus-Duntov had originally paired the Corvette with the small-block V-8, and now he had free reign to develop a chassis from the ground up, as well as a novel independent rear suspension of his own design.

The tapering fastback shape is Mitchell's work at his finest. The cabin tucks in from three dimensions to a singular point, without disrupting the long fender flares that extend unusually from above the rear wheels. Mitchell, again looking toward the Europeans, gave the production Corvette a "split-window" treatment with the tiniest crease of a fin. This tribute to the Bugatti Type 57SC Atlantic was lost on safety regulators and the buying public who carped about its limited visibility, and the split-window look was phased out a year later.

If the devil is in the details, then the legends are, too. The 1963-only fin draws your eye in, setting it along the length of the coupe's dramatically plunging shape. It is a flourish that is greater than the sum of its parts: the deliberate addition of a single line that launched the story of a world-class car.