



would have to change all the lines that followed on from it as well. It was all done by hand, on a huge table, by engineers in white coats.

“We also made tape drawings. That’s where you actually draw the car, full size, with black tape on a large board. We learned how to make adjustments, by eye, until the car was perfect. Then the modelers took templates from your tape drawing. Nowadays, it’s all done on a computer. The models are milled from data and everything goes a hundred times faster. But you lose something—it’s like the difference between doing a painting with oils and creating an image on an iPad.”

When Peter first started working on interiors, every element was modeled by hand. Even for something as small as an air vent, a drawing would be given to the model-making department, then a week or two later it would come back as a crafted wooden object, like the toys that Peter’s grandfather used to fashion in his workshop.

Working on exteriors presented thrilling opportunities to visit some of the most iconic destinations in the business. “We often tested prototypes in old-school wind tunnels,” recalls Peter who visited places “such as the Laboratoire Aérodynamique in Paris—which had been designed and built by Gustave Eiffel—and the Pininfarina wind tunnel in Grugliasco, Italy, a spectacular structure with an enormous vortex-generating propeller in the middle. When you went in there you could feel the history of the place—it was almost like entering a cathedral.”

The traditional approach to design that persisted at Audi in the 1980s makes it seem rather ironic that the brand’s advertising slogan at the time was *Vorsprung durch Technik*—progress through technology. Yet the catchphrase was not entirely marketing fluff: engineering innovation was central to Audi’s upward mobility, most noticeably the idea of putting permanent four-wheel drive transmission into a road vehicle, as debuted in the Quattro. The other key factor in Audi’s transformation was the leadership of Ferdinand Piëch, who, as well as being a grandson of Ferdinand Porsche, was an engineer himself. His combination of hereditary automobile knowledge and technical expertise made him a demanding taskmaster and a daunting first boss for a young designer.

“Mr. Piëch set us targets that seemed unreachable,” says Peter. “But because he set the bar so high we had a sense of being challenged, and we would work toward our goals millimeter by millimeter. He couldn’t tolerate people who, in his opinion, weren’t trying hard

enough, or people who pretended to be in control of their projects but didn’t actually know what they were doing. But if there was a genuine problem, you could get him to understand—if you approached him in a reasonable way.”

If Peter’s few years at Audi were a form of apprenticeship, the stakes were raised in 1983. Warkuss, dissatisfied with the interior of the Audi 80, asked Peter to propose a new design. His roots in “a BMW family” gave Peter intimate knowledge of the industry’s benchmark.

“At the time, everyone looked up to BMW as the model for interiors,” he recalls. “Everything in a BMW felt solid and strong—the gear stick was short and the console was high and wide, which gave the driver a sense of power.

“BMW’s advantage was that their cars were rear-wheel drive. At Audi, we had front-wheel drive: The engine was further forward, so the seats were also further forward, which meant we couldn’t make a big, wide console. But I wanted to surmount this obstacle and create an interior with a really integrated feeling, like a cockpit.

“I will never forget the presentation when Piëch chose my design. He announced, ‘This is BMW-plus,’ and I just went, ‘Ahhh’—it was a mixture of relief and delight.”

By drawing on his own family history and his passion for flying, and by applying his principle—nascent at this point—of aiming to design things that fulfill his own desires, Peter had made his first decisive contribution to the design of a major production car. His interior for the Audi 80, reflected in models built from 1986 onwards, set the template for a design language that the company still uses today.

2

Interior sketch of the Audi 80 B3, drawn from the driver’s perspective.

3

Exterior sketch of the Audi 80 B3 dating back to the early 1980s.

4

Front view sketch of the Audi 80 B3.

5

The interior of the Audi 80 B3, the first interior by Peter that made it into production.