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THE 1960s DREAMERS
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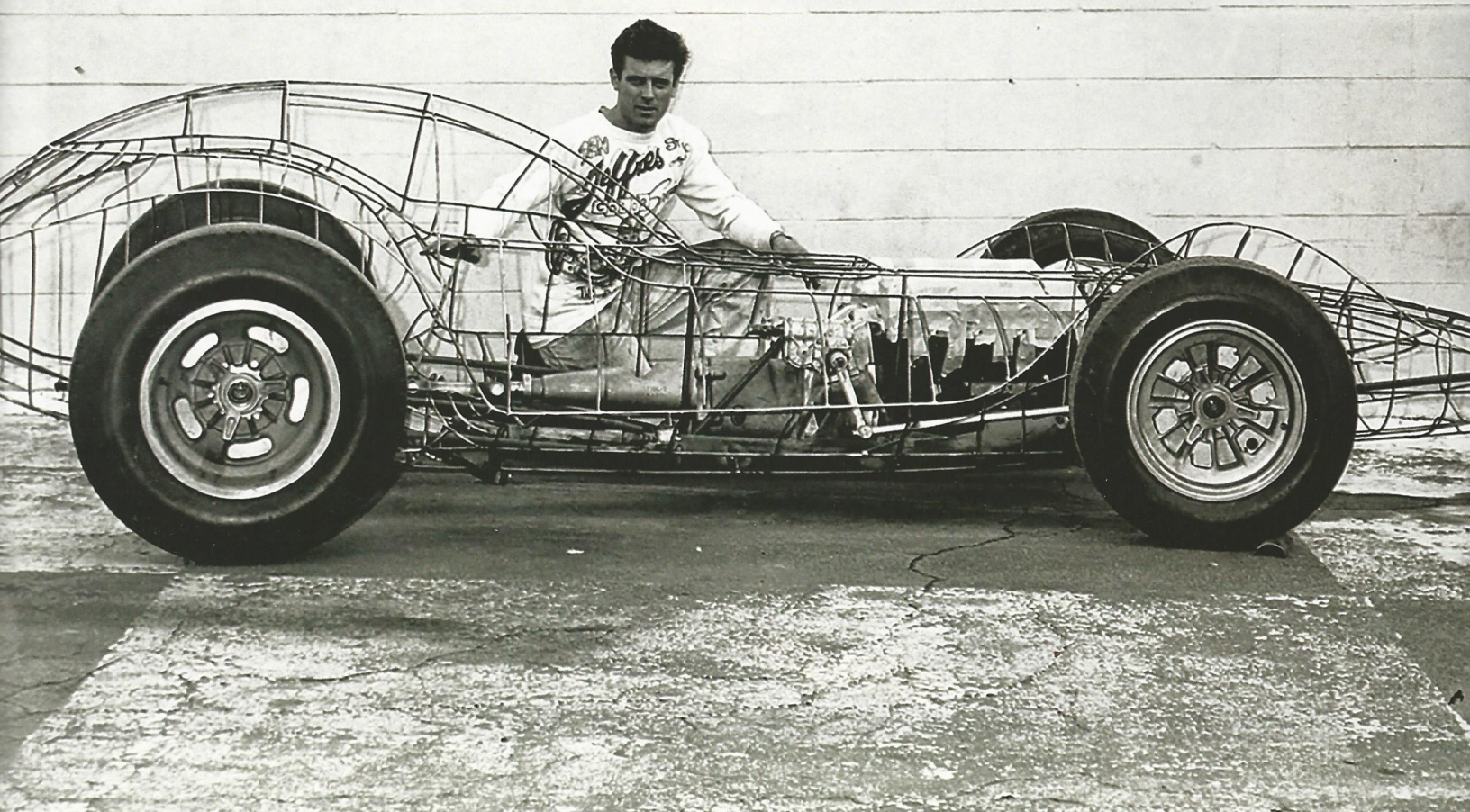
PEBBLE BEACH

DRIVEN TO BUILD

The Dreamers Who Designed Some of the Most Creative One-Offs of the 1960s

By RAFFI MINASIAN



The garage door opens, revealing two people hard at work, laminating composites, soldering streams of wires and assembling hardware. The blueprints, metal shavings and raw castings indicate this is not the first all-night venture for these intrepid entrepreneurs. But this isn't Silicon Valley 2017, it's middle America 1965, and a unique concept car is about to emerge, an example of the innovation and courage of dreamers and doers in a decade of dramatic change.

The seeds of their creativity were sown soon after the Second World War. In the early 1950s, schoolhouses, basements and garages across America exploded with concepts, prototypes and new technologies. Half a century before tablets and cell phones, the world of model trains, airplanes and cars, and *Popular Science* Do-It-Yourself Radio Kits captured our youthful imagination. If you were ambitious, you might enter the Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild Competition, which offered awards and scholarships to boys who designed their own model cars. America was inviting the intellectual curiosity of young artists and builders, while the media featured entrepreneurs in magazines, movies and television. Building meant achievement. Displaying a handcrafted object of beauty not only celebrated your skills, it validated your character.

Across America youth were inspired to build their dreams—and it wasn't just backyard fascination. Our nation was building 43,000 miles of highways, pioneering space exploration, guidance systems and atomic energy. By 1958, General Motors had captured 75 percent of

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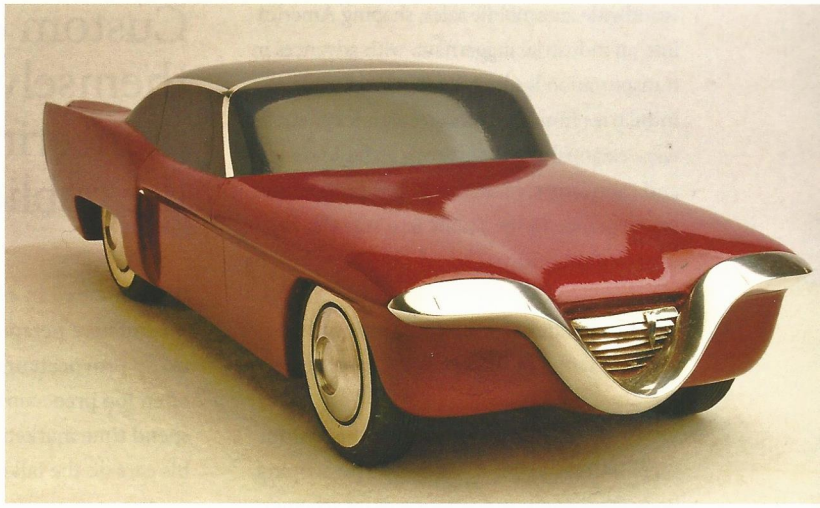

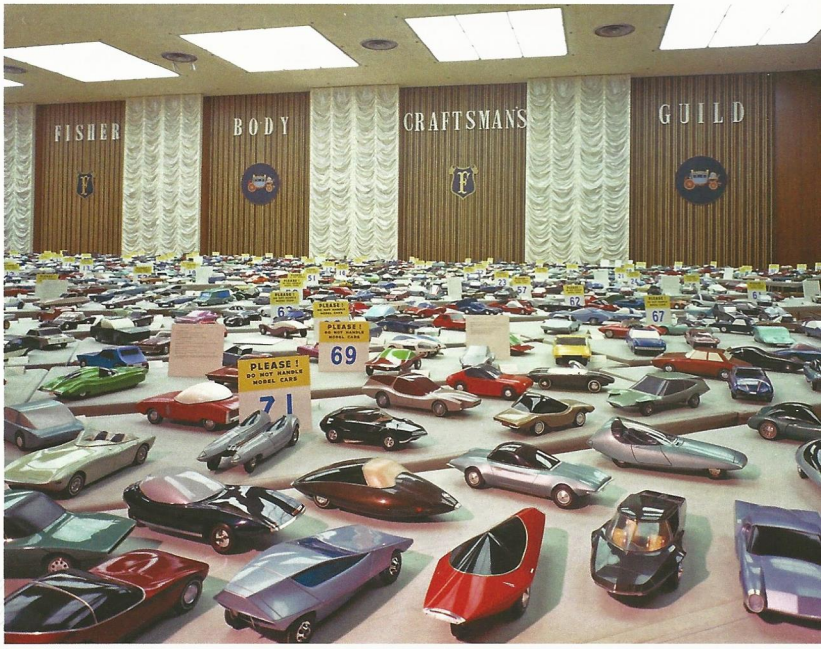

LEFT: Using a 1950s Maserati Grand Prix chassis as his starting point, Dean Jeffries built his famous Mantaray street rod for the 1964 Tournament of Fame. To construct the frame, he used ¼-inch steel rods similar to those used in the 1960 Maserati Birdcage along with many components from the two Maserati chassis owned by his father. Jeffries had honed his aluminum-fabricating skills while working on Carroll Shelby's first Cobra in 1962.

RIGHT: The inspiration for many full-sized car creations of the 1950s and '60s came from the Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild, which ran an annual competition to design a car for the future. By 1968, some 8.5 million teenagers had submitted their model cars.

worldwide automobile sales, shaping America into an industrial juggernaut, with advances in transportation leading the way. And while our industries hummed along, custom car shops were establishing themselves as builders and innovators, pioneering new designs and performance to the public in a way the Big Three could not.

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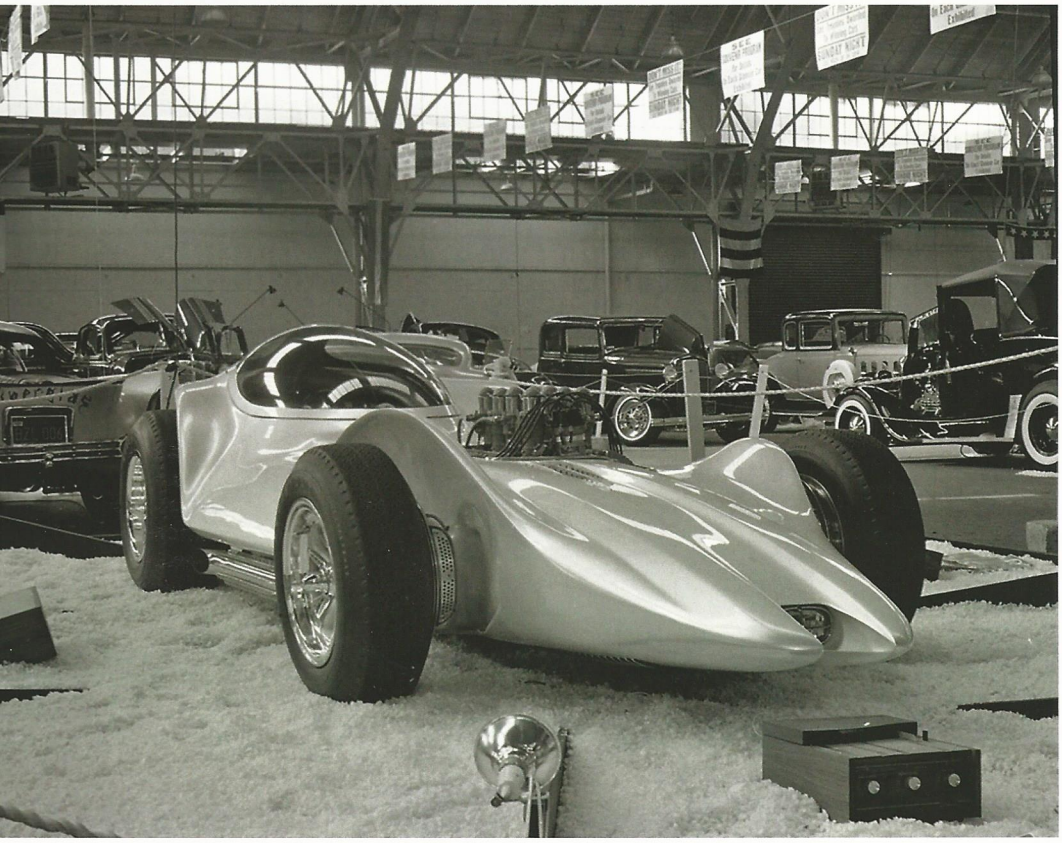
Custom builder **Dean Jeffries** set out to do just that with his outrageous Mantaray.

Dean Jeffries was no stranger to the custom scene. Already renowned for his pinstriping, body fabrication, and amazing paint schemes, Jeffries had goals beyond custom body and paint, and, in 1963, he began to craft what would become one of the most important customs of the decade. Though influenced by classic European cars (he owned a Horch while in the military) and modern fighter planes, Jeffries was a racer at heart, spending time with legendary drivers while pinstriping their cars. He was also his own man, talented in every respect, with an imaginative perspective on cars. Unlike many provocateurs of the period, he was often too preoccupied with his creations to spend time marketing and promoting; he let his cars do the talking.

The Mantaray featured an innovative, aluminum, asymmetrical body, bubble top, exposed engine and unusual seating. The exposed mechanicals and seamless body architecture, blending low-profile dragster elements and detailed suspension, somehow came together in unique harmony. The modern look contrasted classic fender lines and innovative coachwork, moving over the wheels, cradling the engine and then culminating in the aeronautically inspired bubble cockpit. How Jeffries both envisioned and executed these many themes in a singular creation still inspires designers today.

The Mantaray pushed vintage motoring themes into the future, and novelty was not limited to the exterior. Inside, a classic engine-turned dashboard was offset to the side, as if to say the future of driving makes instruments secondary. Jeffries's vision for the future was unique, inspiring a new generation of car enthusiasts and giving Jeffries himself the confidence and freedom to take even more risks with his future creations. He would go on to produce "Black Beauty" for the television show *The Green Hornet* and the "Monkee Mobile" for that group's television show as well as dozens of other award-winning custom cars and hot rods.



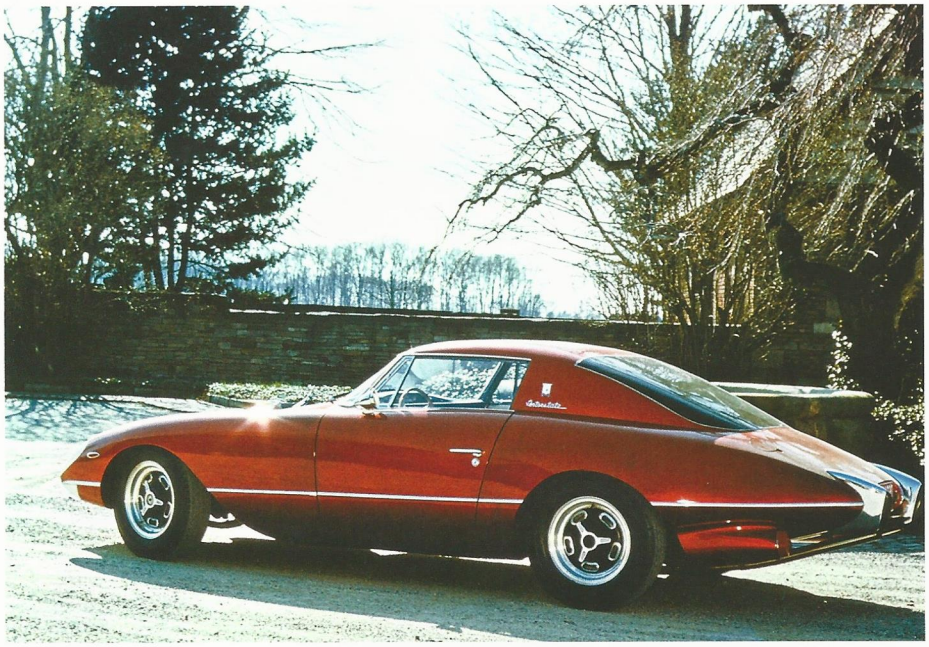
Dean Jeffries's finished Mantaray was shown at the Oakland Roadster Show in 1964, sporting its futuristic bubble top and a Cobra Mk1 289-cubic-inch Ford V8 engine that was a present from Carroll Shelby. All the mechanicals, including the drum brakes and suspension components, were taken from a Grand Prix Maserati.

The 1960s brought about significant changes to our transportation geography, as motels, roadside attractions and diners dappled our multilane highways. To meet the beckoning distance, **Richard Bosley**, a horticulturist by trade, cultivated his second independent sports car design. In 1953 Bosley had

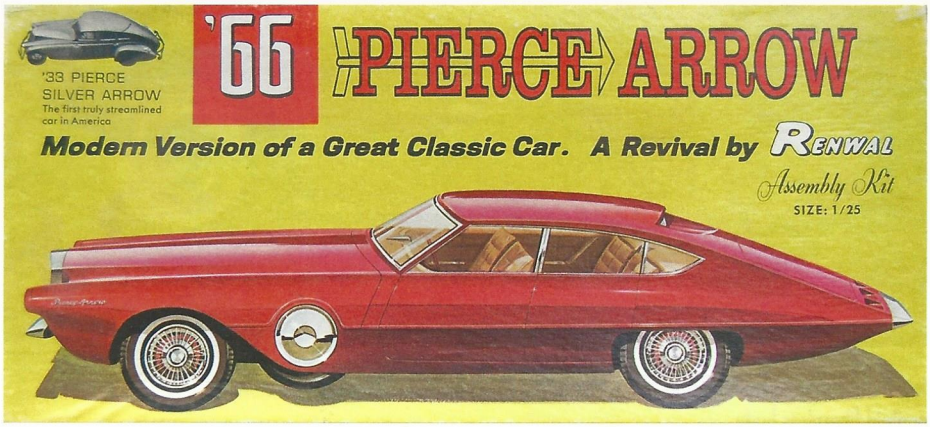
The 1953 Bosley Mark I prototype was built by Richard Bosley, a horticulturist from Mentor, Ohio. The car featured a steel tube frame; Ford, Mercury and Lincoln mechanicals; and a Chrysler Hemi engine, all clothed in a handlaid fiberglass body.

successfully built the Mark I, thereafter driving mile after mile as the roads around him changed. Rural lanes made way for highways, accommodating faster and more agile cars. In 1966 Bosley decided it was time to design a new car and arranged to trade the Mark I for an ex-Sebring Corvette SR-2 chassis (GM retained the body) that was to form the basis for the "Interstate."

Bosley envisioned the Interstate with high-speed capability, a long wheelbase and an expansive greenhouse. The Mark I had been Vignale-inspired, but the Interstate pushed the edge, presenting a dramatic appearance and offering advanced features for highway driving. Bosley designed a steeply sloping hood line, diving toward the narrow grille opening, flanked by two pontoon fenders and enclosed headlights. Two driving lights are also positioned on each side of the grille but face curiously downward to illuminate



Bosley built his second car in the mid-1960s, using the chassis from a Chevrolet Corvette SR-2—one of three that were built for racing in 1956. Designed for the fast new roads that were springing up across the United States, the Bosley Mark II Interstate was fitted with a 345-bhp Pontiac V8 and a 4-speed manual transmission.



the highway. The entire side is a progressive arc, tapering toward the elongated tail, with gentle tumblehome into the fastback roof and backlight. This sweeping arc crowns at the B post, creating a crouched, muscular stance. Like the front running lights, the brake lights are positioned under the rear bumpers, and a third brake light is installed in the rear glass—quite progressive for its time.

The Pontiac V8 engine provided plenty of torque and high-end capability, but the interior was more composed, hinting at luxury. Advanced safety ideas filled the cockpit, including roll bar construction, tinted rear glass, seat belts and headrests.

Bosley's longing for creative freedom is fully captured in the stretched-out, high-speed cruising and sensual performance of the Interstate, a final delight before the emergence of highly linear vehicles, culminating in the 1970s "folded paper" era of design.

Bosley drove the Interstate personally for many years and then sold it to fund his next design—but a third car never materialized. Instead, realizing his financial means would never match his creative urges, he elected to work in 1:10 scale, creating dozens of unpublished outrageous and advanced concept models through the 1990s.

Individual design achievement in the 1960s was not limited to those outside the corporate arena. For a time, back in the

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TOP: Based on the Virgil Exner concepts, the Renwal Company produced several plastic kits in 1964. These included the futuristic Bugatti 101 and a Pierce-Arrow design. Others followed in 1966 based on the Duesenberg, Mercer, Packard and Stutz.

LEFT: Virgil Exner with Ghia's chief engineer and designer, Luigi Segre, at right. Exner's first concept car designed for Chrysler, the K-310, was built by Ghia and shown for the first time in 1951.

1950s, no one was more in demand than the gifted and diverse automobile designer, **Virgil Exner**. Capable of extraordinary artistic skills, Exner was a painter, sculptor, commercial illustrator and design visionary. His early career accomplishments at GM and Studebaker would have satisfied ny professional, yet Exner went on to completely transform the drab vehicles of Chrysler into some of the most imaginative concepts of the century. Exner not only redefined Chrysler as a brand, he challenged Goliaths Harley Earl and Bill Mitchell of GM, becoming Chrysler's first Vice President of Styling.

Well known for his industry-changing "Forward Look," Exner and Ghia produced several stunning show cars with innovations in body design and interior elegance. Then, at the height of his fame, in 1956, Exner suffered a heart attack, leading to a brief departure from Chrysler. Upon his return the following year, Exner was crestfallen at the grossly malformed downsizing of his designs by ill-advised staff acting on erroneous corporate brass edicts. Sales plummeted and Exner, ever the gentleman, took the fall, retiring from Chrysler.

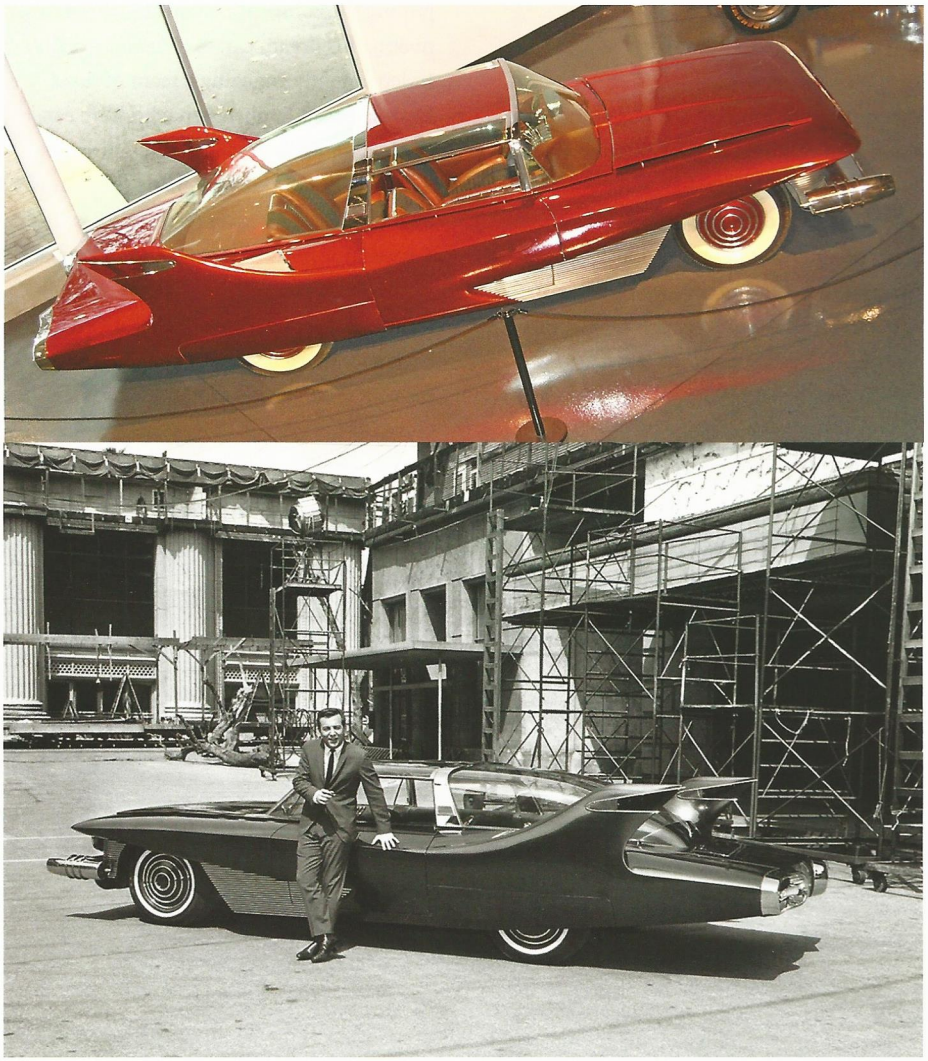
Eager to prove his creative vitality, Exner began consulting with his son on a series of "Revival Cars" for *Esquire Magazine*. The article featured new renditions of former grand marques: Duesenberg, Pierce-Arrow, Packard and others. Little resulted from these concepts with the exception of the Duesenberg, which saw limited production. In payment for design services, Ghia arranged for the last Bugatti 101 chassis to be delivered to Exner. Eventually, Ghia completed a steel-bodied car, designed by Exner Sr. and featuring an interior by Exner Jr.

Today, the 1965 Exner Bugatti remains a beautiful anomaly. Revival cars were gaining interest when Exner penned his Bugatti, but American brands were the primary focus. Bugatti had little to no presence in America and virtually no postwar market.

Undeterred, Exner's vision for the new Bugatti was revealed at the 1965 Turin Auto Show as a total redefinition of the marque.

Beginning with the Bugatti horseshoe grille, Exner delivered a low-profile sports car, juxtaposing classic and modern design elements. The broad, bladed front fenders appear as part of a single envelope design, yet in front view create a classic hood with floating fenders. The long hood terminates at the cowl, topped by a prewar windscreen. Yet farther back, the doors and rear fenders blend together, forming a roadster cockpit with beautifully sculpted modern rear haunches. Yet these powerful and fluid forms compete with the front of the car. Exner was challenging two very distinct statements—a trim and upright formality as well as a modern stance and profile.

Exner himself was a formal person, as was evident in his beautifully tailored classic designs and impeccable fashion sense. But with his new studio and newfound independence, the mannerisms and poise



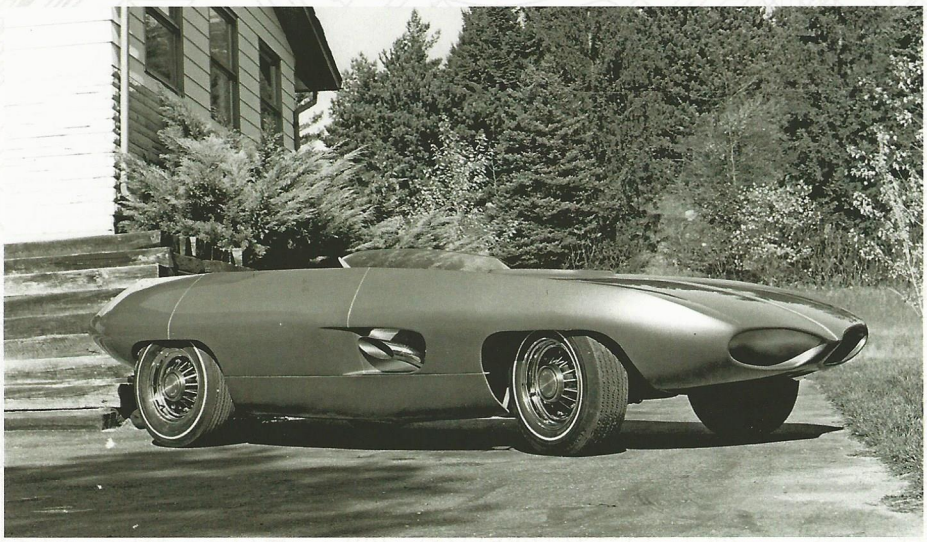
The extraordinary DiDia 150 was designed by Andrew "Andy" Di Dia. The car was hand built by Ron Clark and finished by Clark Kaiser Customs between 1953 and 1960 at a cost of $94,000. The following year, Di Dia sold it to singer-songwriter Bobby Darin for $150,000, making the DiDia the most expensive "custom-made" car in the world.

he exhibited in the Chrysler era were emboldened. The novelty of this classic juxtaposition against new shapes would go largely unnoted until General Motors began to experiment with colonnade design in the mid-1970s, a brief period of classical revival highly influenced by Exner's ideas.

Exner's Bugatti embodies the designer's courage, working with two disparate themes and two fading names, and his willingness to seek out new challenges. But it also serves as a bittersweet reminder of bespoke coachbuilding, the glory of classic era cars and the final creative voice of one of America's greatest automobile designers.

When asked to imagine a 1960s lightweight aluminum roadster, large American V8 engine, capable suspension, short wheelbase, built by a designer with performance in his blood, most people think of Carroll Shelby and his Cobra. But when fifteen-year-old **Herb Adams** set pen to paper and envisioned his first concepts for a unique roadster in the late 1950s, Shelby was, very likely, still plucking chicken feathers from his overalls. Adams's concept, a 1:12-scale handmade aluminum roadster, won him a scholarship in that year's Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild Competition, beginning his career. The unique design lingered with Adams for several years before he finally decided to build it.

In 1961, immediately after graduating from the General Motors Institute, Adams joined Pontiac, embarking on a career that would soon lead to a position with its Advanced Design group and put his signature on nearly every performance Pontiac of the '60s and '70s. Shortly after joining the company, Adams set about making his dream car, the Vivant, a reality. Independently engaging a team of three Detroit-based Englishmen who were eager to ply their skills at aluminum fabrication, Adams created a custom-made tube chassis and installed a rare competition V8 with a 4-speed transmission, sourced from Pontiac's racing division. Unlike the heavily clad full-sized cars that Adams developed at GM, the Vivant was a big block front-engined sports car with crisp, fluid aluminum body lines.



The Pontiac-engined Vivant was created by Pontiac engineer Herb Adams, who had been a Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild award winner in the 1950s with a unique roadster design. Adams's boyhood dream came true when he finished building his full-size, road-worthy Vivant in 1965.

Not only was the design unique, it was void of any chrome, sparsely optioned, and yet futuristic in every respect. The Vivant had a taut plan view, coaxing subtle streamlines from the Pontiac-inspired split grille openings. These lines created progressively arched tail fins, embracing the cockpit and short deck. The Vivant had no bumpers, no roof, no side glass and no extraneous trim. The purity of the design is interrupted only by three physical elements—the wheels, the exhaust, and the engine. Adams makes it clear: the priorities are power and wheels, embraced by fluid form. This no-nonsense clarity is the embodiment of Adams's approach to design and engineering, evident in his success, both at GM and independently.

Although Herb Adams would continue his remarkable career at Pontiac and later go on to develop limited production vehicles, the Vivant appeared in just a few car shows before vanishing for decades into obscurity.

Like so many industrial artifacts, the importance of many innovative concepts is masked by the prevailing market of the times. Designers have to strike a moving target, infusing creativity into a project while facing daunting time constraints and personal demands. As a result, individual car designs often evolve into historic relevance rather than being celebrated upon release. The car-buying public can be a fiercely dismissive group, deterring many people from building a car in the first place.

Nonetheless, the individuals profiled here courageously made their dreams a reality, crafting unique expressions with a range of interpretations despite the risks. Thankfully, their designs remain for our appreciation, having been preserved or restored by passionate enthusiasts with the same vigor that forged their initial existence. The forthcoming competition field at the Pebble Beach Concours d'Elegance will serve as a showcase for these designs, and those from other 1960s dreamers such as Tex Smith, Andrew Di Dia and Alex Tremulis.