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An Interview With Aston Martin Design Chief Marek Reichman



Nargess Banks, CONTRIBUTOR

I cover cars and design—and the intersection of the two. [FULL BIO](#) ✓

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Aston Martin makes handsome, powerful and exclusive motor cars. In today's competitive car market though, it pays to explore the wider world of luxury and so the British marque, with its impressive 104-year history, has had to dip its toes in other territories - fashion and lifestyle, nautical, even property. I caught up with the chief creative officer Marek Reichman to see how he juggles it all.

Nargess Banks: The evocative new Valkyrie hypercar is the first product be born out of your partnership with Red Bull Racing for the most technologically-advanced Aston Martin you've built. How would you describe this car?

Marek Reichman: Valkyrie promises otherworldly performance befitting of its name. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a designer and a customer because it is a naturally aspirated car. Valkyrie is new from the ground up with every nut and bolt - every single material designed specifically for this car. It really is an exceptional product. We have 600 customers wanting the limited-edition 150 cars. But the numbers will remain at only 150.

NB: The Valkyrie's dramatic form certainly expresses the power that lies beneath. What was it like collaborating with the Red Bull Racing Formula One chief technical officer Adrian Newey?

MR: He is dedicated, passionate and single-minded - one of the best F1 designers in history. We have a great relationship and tend to push each other to create cars that have the ultimate performance backed by Aston Martin's long heritage. The Valkyrie combines incredible racing technology with a completely new visual language. Yes, it has edge and there is more negative space in the car to look at. The under surfaces are Adrian's - so it is all about forcing the air to do what it needs to do to make the car efficient. Then, the upper surfaces are where I'm forcing the air to make the body beautiful. It was a brilliant marriage.

NB: Your brand collaborations are becoming wildly varied from racing to working with luxury Swiss watchmaker Richard Mille, the quintessentially British fashion line Hackett, designing a speedboat, curating art exhibitions, even venturing in the world of architecture. How do these experiences feed into your Q by Aston Martin bespoke collection?

MR: Our personalization program has grown substantially since it was established in 2012. The Q collection offers a palette developed without a specific product in mind. It is more of a fashion statement. There is a menu of colors to choose from, but the customer can also commission their own shade. There are no limits. Q is about the customer working with the manufacturer. It is about you telling me what you like whilst I translate this into automotive terms.



The 37-foot AM37 powerboat marks Aston Martin's entry into the nautical world [+]

NB: How much do you enjoy the process?

MR: I love it! It is the fun part, especially with a one-off car, that's when you get the chance to show your sketch and realize it without the constraints of worrying if a lot of people will like it. You're creating it for one person and they will love it.

NB: The emphasis on personalization and creating an experience seems to be more and more a focus here. With the concept of luxury evolving to mean so much more than the traditional notion, how do you see Aston Martin's unique response to this?

MR: I agree that the experience becomes more and more important in this picture. It must always be authentic though. It should never be a case of money buys you an experience. With Valkyrie, I'm getting to know every one of our 150 customers very well at dinners and events and they are becoming friends. I need to understand their world and often because of who they are, they are on the cusp of new technology and trends.

NB: How would you describe your customers?

MR: The lines are blurred between a traditional Aston Martin customer and our newer clients. This is where, as a designer, I need to sit on the cusp to see what we could and should incorporate into our cars; to never assume what the typical customer wants.

NB: What is modern luxury for Aston Martin – after all yours is a brand with a pretty impressive heritage?

MR: Luxury, I feel, is knowledge. I can go and buy a bottle of say 1974 Château Lafite from a shop, or I can go and listen to the producer tell me how the bottle was made, how the grapes were picked from a small patch, crushed in a special way and what the weather was like that year. That knowledge is my luxury experience. This is what we are doing with our customers. The knowledge they gain and the tiny insights through our meetings and conversations is a really important element of luxury.

NB: You are offering a program of experiences through Aston Martin Art of Living - exotic road trips and challenging drives. Your customers are well travelled and can always go off to say Norway on an ice drive independently. Tell me what makes the Aston Martin experiences to rarefied?

MR: They are not going there with people who are simply enthusiasts but with us, so they are able to talk to us, to me or our chief executive Andy Palmer, tell us how they feel an Aston Martin should be and perhaps influence what we do. These clients become part of the brand. Many tell me they will not buy anything else. That's not advertising – it is a personal relationship and the total experience of product, people, place.

NB: How do you see Aston Martin responding to the next life of the motor car – the sustainable, driverless vehicle?

MR: The world is changing and if we stand still we become dinosaurs. Who would you rather be though: a 104-year-old start up or a start up without 104 years of history? This is where Aston Martin is in a great position for we have a start-up mentality that says the nature of how you buy is changing, the nature of how we drive is changing, autonomy is here, electrification is here. We are going forward, but we are also talking to customers who want a manual drive, a car that is naturally aspirated. We are not a huge organization; we are small and nimble enough to shift and change. It is such an exciting time to be a car designer.