

SHOWCASE by Apple Mandy

# Life in the fast lane

## Marek Djordjevic's drive for perfection

**Y**ou may not have heard of luxury car designer Marek Djordjevic (or be able to pronounce his name), but you no doubt know of the Rolls-Royce Phantom, the brand's centenary model he designed in 2003. *Washington Post* car columnist Warren Brown called the distinguished four-door sedan "an old-money car, representing the motorized equivalent of rebuilding a castle". Although it is priced at a royal USD 320,000 there are currently 150 cruising Chinese roads.

Rolls-Royce started building ties with China three years ago. Within the first 12 months, sales had nearly equaled Japan, where it has a 40-year market presence. China has now become the number one market for the company in Asia and number three in the world. "The Chinese have the appetite for driving the world's best car," says Djordjevic. "They are in pursuit of the best market." And so the statuesque ex-Yugoslav designer with dramatic green eyes finds himself in Shanghai for a second time, aiming to build relationships with local manufacturers as well as private customers.

Djordjevic's passion for car design started in the ninth grade, when he saw drawings by students – including Grant Larson, who now designs for Porsche – at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. He pursued a degree in Transportation Design at the same school and, upon graduation, got an internship at BMW.

For 15 years, he worked closely with the BMW Group, including seven years at Rolls Royce, when it became an exclusive brand under BMW. He was formerly the head of exterior design at Rolls-Royce and the creative director of BMW's DesignWorks USA automotive studio; now he has branched out with his own company, Marek Djordjevic Inc., which focuses on premium land, air and sea design.

Browsing his portfolio, Djordjevic's focus is on the fundamental use of color, materials, quality and proportion. Generally he starts with the side-view design because it speaks of the direction of motion and speed. His inspiration comes from a wide variety of sources because to him, "design is communicating" – a matter of telling a story that speaks of a brand.



Marek Djordjevic Inc

When the Phantom project came to him he knew there was a lot riding on this model: not only was it to be the first for Rolls-Royce under the stewardship of the BMW Group, but also the only model to be available for sale at the time of the 100-year anniversary of the marque, not to mention the first Rolls-Royce of the 21st century. "This design couldn't be just a compilation of the greatest hits. It had to symbolize all that Rolls-Royce stood for throughout the last 100 years. It also had to take the brand into the future. It had to be a modern statement, with the freshest expression of the values of the marque,

and 100 per cent Rolls-Royce authenticity."

Looking to the future of the automobile industry in general, with today's terrible congestion in big cities, Djordjevic foresees the need for the next generation of vehicles – small, yet sophisticated cars that are easily maneuvered and luxuriously produced. He'd also like to see a sports car that actually looks elegant, not like the tougher urban models.

And for the inevitable question: Does he drive a Rolls-Royce? Djordjevic smiles and says, "I like to pretend that I have one but, unfortunately, I don't." ■