

Press release
26 April 2018

“10 questions to...” Kerstin Schmeding.



Kerstin Schmeding has been Head of Colour and Trim Design at MINI since September 2017. In her answers to the following ten questions, she explains how far the reach of colour and material design extends, what we can expect in the future and what we can learn from nature.

1. Why did you become a designer?

I’ve been doing creative stuff, drawing, making things with my hands and designing this and that for as long as I can remember. So unsurprisingly I always wanted to do a creative job. And I was born curious – for anything you care to mention. I’ve always been keen to expand my knowledge of aesthetics and colours, and my understanding of how things work and are made. I set out to understand the whole product and what goes into it, so I have a pretty holistic approach. My move into the automotive industry is largely thanks to my parents’ striking Golf Yellow BMW 3 Series. It soon had me hooked with its use of forms and design.

2. What fascinates and inspires you?

I’m captivated by nature. The rich variety of colours, textures, atmospheres and scents the natural world has to offer create a “full-house” experience. That’s also a

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critical point of design for me – it should appeal to all the senses. Besides its diversity, the other aspect of nature that most excites me is its constant state of change: nothing stays the same. Colours fascinate me as well, of course. Wherever you use them, they create space and depth. I also find inspiration in experiences. I used to do a *lot* of photography and would sometimes take perspectives, moods and compositions to a state of perfection. I eventually put the camera down, in part because I felt so distanced from things by viewing them through a lens. Instead I started going to cities and recording the pulsating scenes I found there. I still like to take photos, but now spend more and more time “living” situations, so I can absorb emotions and experiences.

I got interested in Bauhaus and designers such as Eames and George Nelson at an early age. The simplicity and effectiveness with which they used light, colour and materials still intrigue and inspire me today.

3. What can we learn from nature?

That things change and we embrace those changes as they occur. I’m engrossed by how different generations deal with change. I personally feel the technological revolution is a positive thing. We’re in much better contact with each other, the gap between us is – if anything – getting much smaller. This also opens up new possibilities for older generations when it comes to participation and involvement. Technology is getting increasingly more “human”. I.e. it is helping people to get what they need from life.

4. What elements of this do you take into design?

Inspiration in general – from trends, new directions or other things – is an important element in our creative work. We get excited about stuff that’s happening on our own patch, but also about what’s going on in other industries. For example, we like to check out relatively new events like Dutch Design Week; here they’re doing a lot of experimental, cutting-edge work. There is also a lot of interest value in new manufacturing technologies. As a volume-producing business, the car industry is at the very forefront here and there is a huge amount of potential to work with. We have immense experience in terms of the processes and methods used to mould, adapt and combine complex materials, for example. A lot has happened since the 1970s, and there is room for so much more to be achieved in the future – think Industry 4.0 and additive manufacturing. All of this has a major influence on design. 3D printing is an exciting development, for instance. It allows us to rethink individualisation, eliminate process steps, introduce technologies and react quickly to change. We’re still in the early stages of this process, but in the future it could lead to printing a whole vehicle.

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5. What is MINI for you?

How would I describe what MINI represents? You climb inside – and immediately have a smile on your face. MINI pulls off the trick of making you feel better about yourself. MINI is ageless. MINI is a state of mind, that’s something I notice here every day. The amazing people, the friendly atmosphere; it’s something really special. Together with our customers, we’re a community. We meet on a level and inspire each other, which I think is wonderful. Another thing that thrills me about MINI is the fact the brand is constantly changing, never standing still. The duality between tradition and progressiveness, that balancing act, makes it exciting to see how we approach new themes, such as digitalisation or the new individualisation options opened up by MINI Yours Customised. Here, we’re employing new technologies but also establishing a connection with the brand through the various designs. You’d probably expect to find a houndstooth pattern on cloth rather than a 3D-printed interior trim element, for example. And that’s what sets MINI apart for me: here, innovation is not merely for innovation’s sake, but always has a connection with the brand and its history. And I think that’s incredibly important.

6. What is the job of colour and trim design?

Colours and materials should spark emotions, create space and atmosphere, enhance our individuality and help us meet our needs. We work with the geometrical design guys to create a basic character, a canvas if you like. First and foremost, this is intended to provide a harmonious scene, and at MINI that also comes with an accent, something special that will make the customer smile. We design all of the nuances in this picture and piece them together with great care, quality and precision. We start with the materials (e.g. leather, plastic or film, with graining or texture, soft or hard, degrees of sheen) and then there are the colours and neatly integrated accents – from trendy to heritage – which distil different facets of the car’s character. Here, colour and trim always have a link to the brand’s background. Features like a Union Jack print or Chester design, for example, lend a depth you only really get in a MINI.

7. How exactly will this shape up in years to come?

Colour and trim design used to be primarily about how things looked and felt. The aim was to assist the individual in their style and accentuate their personality. That’s still the case, but now the interaction between people and materials is also taking a front seat, as materials will be capable of a whole lot more, with active functions and the like. It may be possible to conceal speakers, lights, vents and even displays behind – or integrate them into – materials, and so create an entirely new aesthetic. Things are generally moving towards an emphasis on the overall experience, coupled with connectivity-related possibilities, for example. I.e. I’ll be able to “talk” to a car’s

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materials. When it comes to colours, we'll still be using the pigments we have now, of course, but at the same time we'll always be looking to make a connection with the core of our brand and our heritage. After all, colour should showcase exterior design and help define surfaces – but all in a MINI way, with a twist in the tail. This eye for detail is the quality that sets MINI apart.

8. What colour trends can we expect to see?

I'm often asked this question, but increasingly find myself struggling to come up with an answer. There used to be clearly delineated trends that followed one another. But now we're seeing several different colour trends co-existing. They often come in waves and re-occur in a slightly different form. For example, neon has recently experienced a revival. Ditto white, which has evolved and kept itself in the game as an effect finish containing pigments. We're now also seeing warm colours and coloured grey tones, as cool silvers and solid black slip into the shadows.

Architecture is the same. Full, almost opulent colours are increasingly a thing – as is teal, or at least it will be. And you can add to that the metallic elements in copper, brass and gold, which provide a certain flourish. When it comes to colour, though, quality – i.e. the depth and presence of a shade – is always in fashion. At MINI quality also means that the colour makes you smile every time you look at it and surprises you with a particular accent or a touch of the unexpected. Our Emerald Grey is a case in point. With its subtle effect pigments, this warm shade of grey gives extra character and projects modernity at its most cutting-edge.

9. The future of mobility is tied up with autonomous driving and car-sharing. Will this pose different challenges when it comes to colours and materials?

Absolutely. Robust, hard-wearing materials will certainly be something we need to look at. But it goes well beyond that. When I sit in a car, I want to experience something personal and individual. So the cars of the future will adapt to the individual. For example, shared MINIs will recognise the driver when they climb on board and adjust the light mood, fragrancing, and many other things accordingly. Seats could be made from foam and adapt to each driver. And I can also imagine materials being developed which use sensors to alter their properties extremely effectively to meet different needs. All that is still a long way off, but it's very exciting. Perhaps we'll reach a point where we aren't using conventional moulds at all anymore and additive manufacturing has taken over. That would mean interior design, for example, would have next to no limits. The machines in the factory might be capable of doing everything. And perhaps individualisation will also be updatable, materials and components switchable, etc., etc. A whole lot of things will become possible.



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10. What will MINI stand for in the future?

Digitalisation is a major topic for me, as is how we use our natural resources. Because MINI is such an approachable brand, this issue can be made accessible to people in a totally different way. It's not just about materials, but also forms and manufacturing processes. That extends well beyond design – and it's exciting, because we have the task of conserving resources and ensuring the world remains somewhere worth living for the next generation. I'm looking forward to the challenge already.

Thank you very much.

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The BMW Group

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In 2017, the BMW Group sold over 2,463,500 passenger vehicles and more than 164,000 motorcycles worldwide. The profit before tax in the financial year 2017 was € 10.655 billion on revenues amounting to € 98.678 billion. As of 31 December 2017, the BMW Group had a workforce of 129,932 employees.

The success of the BMW Group has always been based on long-term thinking and responsible action. The company has therefore established ecological and social sustainability throughout the value chain, comprehensive product responsibility and a clear commitment to conserving resources as an integral part of its strategy.

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