

Media Information
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The creative orchestrator: Sonja Schiefer.

Interview with Sonja Schiefer, director of the Shanghai studio of BMW Group Designworks.



Munich – December, 2019. Sonja Schiefer is director of the Shanghai studio of BMW Group Designworks. A creative orchestrator, Sonja has worked for Designworks in leading positions and several locations since 2001. Vested with a profound design background she has more than two decades of experience in the international design industry combining an interdisciplinary view on design with strategic know how and cross-industrial expertise. Sonja is a strong driving force behind many of Designworks' innovation projects. Since July 2019, she has been leading the Shanghai studio's design vision and daily operations, with an ambitious team of creatives and strategists. Before joining Designworks in Los Angeles Sonja worked for 10 years at frogdesign in both San Francisco as well as New York where she set up and led the studio.

What is the future of mobility and what is Designworks' role in it?

Schiefer: Mobility has become increasingly multi-layered. We need to carefully interweave a number of different solutions to achieve a seamless and joyful experience

Media Information

Date 2019-12-16

Subject The creative orchestrator: Sonja Schiefer.

Page 2

for people. Designworks achieves this by thinking about future mobility as an ecosystem and offers solutions which are strategic, but also exciting and emotional.

With Designworks' studios across the globe, what is the specific focus of the Designworks Shanghai studio you represent?

Schiefer: For the Shanghai studio, providing a solid understanding of the local culture and customer is a priority. It means having a finger on the pulse and bringing observations and stories from the market to the BMW Group. Based on this reality, we develop concepts and solutions which impact experiences, products and services. Our collaborations with partners outside of the automotive field strengthen our insights across multiple industries and broaden our perspectives.

Where do you see Designworks in the future and what sort of things are you keen to encourage as director of the studio?

Schiefer: Designworks is a creative visionary bringing BMW Group together with external partners. In an increasingly complex and challenging world, the ability to bridge is an invaluable quality. Broad, connected thinking is key and allows future visions to drive immediate next steps.

What is your design ethos? What sources of inspiration for the field of design should we use more in the future?

Schiefer: For me, design is an optimistic visionary force. A creative thinker is able to envision a probable future but also find an expression which aligns and excites. The designer should be a holistic problem solver tackling complex challenges and finding solutions which move us forward. Successful design needs strong functional leadership both on a corporate level as well as within design teams. Design leaders and their teams provide the voice of inspiration within the company, motivating everyone else. Key is the ability to collaborate and influence across disciplines, thereby connecting and promoting the design story to other functions. Championing design and driving synergy between disciplines is the goal.

Media Information

Date 2019-12-16

Subject The creative orchestrator: Sonja Schiefer.

Page 3

What makes Designworks unique?

Schiefer: Working for both BMW Group and external industry partners, we are able to become a platform for exchange and rich knowledge transfer. Exposure to external partners results in an open minded attitude in our design team. This enables Designworks to be a challenger for the BMW Group providing inspiration and innovation. We offer a system thinking approach to challenge and create positive impact by carefully orchestrating our creative services. We work with an eye to the future – visionary but with the goal of making a real difference in the world.

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Designworks

Designworks is the design innovation studio for BMW Group. As an independent studio, Designworks stimulates ambitious visions of the future through practical design strategies and explorations. It pushes future experiences that are as relevant and ambitious as possible.

Designworks is 'the architect of future' – designing for BMW Group and other partners holistic systems that impact and improve the world we live in.

With three global studios, Designworks is a powerful tool supporting the BMW Group to be at the very forefront of design, technology and innovation.

The BMW Group

With its four brands BMW, MINI, Rolls-Royce and BMW Motorrad, the BMW Group is the world's leading premium manufacturer of automobiles and motorcycles and also provides premium financial and mobility services. The BMW Group production network comprises 31 production and assembly facilities in 15 countries; the company has a global sales network in more than 140 countries.

In 2018, the BMW Group sold over 2,490,000 passenger vehicles and more than 165,000 motorcycles worldwide. The profit before tax in the financial year 2018 was € 9.815 billion on revenues amounting to € 97.480 billion. As of 31 December 2018, the BMW Group had a workforce of 134,682 employees.



Media Information

Date 2019-12-16

Subject The creative orchestrator: Sonja Schiefer.

Page 4

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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