

2020 Vision

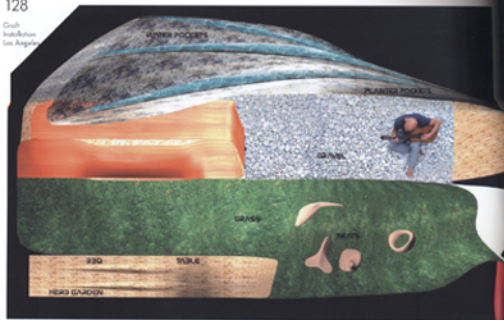
Graft gazes into the future and forecasts four family scenarios that aid Volkswagen designers in anticipating what American car consumers will want next.

by Michael Webb
from Jeff Grunberg



Pictured is the surface of the steering kiosk in Set 3, with the honeycomb walls of Set 4 in the background.

GAMING GADGET



Set 1: Environmental Community Awareness

The car-crazy metropolis of LA is a huge Petri dish for the world's automotive companies, and about 25 of them maintain design studios there to pick up on trends and to develop a better understanding of what the fickle American consumer may want tomorrow. For the Japanese, the strategy of engaging the US market has been spectacularly successful, with Toyota overtaking Daimler-Chrysler in sales and now challenging the domain name of Ford and General Motors. The Germans focus more on the buoyant luxury sector, but Volkswagen's popular models sell as well as the consumer's upscale Audi.

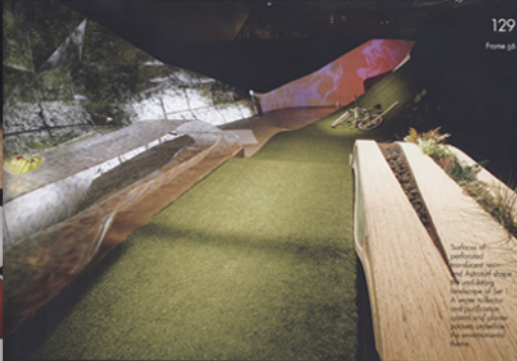
“The goal was to flesh out themes like safety or gentrification as a basis for vehicle concepts”
Alex Earl

To deepen its understanding of America and future needs, VW organized Moonraker, an 18-month-long, multi-industry marketing. Representatives of every major department in the Wolfsburg headquarters, joined members of the Santa Monica design studio in a house

in the Malibu Hills, where they embarked on a dozen research and development projects. One of the more ambitious was a quartet of futuristic living environments located in a warehouse and commissioned from Graft, a German design cooperative with offices in LA, Berlin and Beijing (Praxis 47). “It was a dream assignment in more ways than one,” says Stefan Beebe, who led the project team and collaborated closely with the partners of Graft and a core group from Moonraker. “This was our first future-gazing project, though we had done model sets, exhibitions and other temporary structures before.”

Alex Earl, an American member of the VW studio, likened the visionary sets to a cinematic sound stage, a place where actors could play roles that embodied the needs and tastes of consumers in the year 2020. “We incorporated some of the latest technology and products, but the goal was to flesh out themes like safety or gentrification – people moving back into urban areas – as a basis for vehicle concepts.” One of the initial goals was to develop a business plan for a lightweight, three-wheel concept car. The G33 was designed for the American market, where it would be regulated as though it were a motorcycle. Eventually, the corporation decided that the lack of physical protection, though legal, might incur criticism and compromise its brand image.

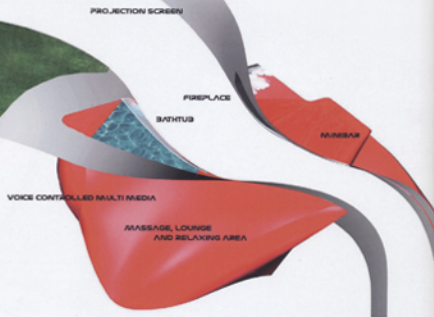
The sets took eight months to conceive and construct. Prolonged discussions among the Graft and



Surfaces of perforated aluminum and Aluclad shape the enclosure. Introduction of Set A water collector and purification system and planter system, including a 3D environmental scene.



Detail of watered rain wall.



Set 2: Dynamic Comfort

Moonraker teams bottled 20 scenarios down to four, and the private worlds each individual or family inhabited. Team leaders solicited sponsors to flesh out each environment with innovative ideas and projects. They visited the Microsoft future home in Seattle; a conventional suburban house embedded with the latest technology. Royal Elastic contributed radical footwear, and Belkin added lamps powered by self-charging batteries. Each space flowed into the next in a linear progression, but each had a distinct character.

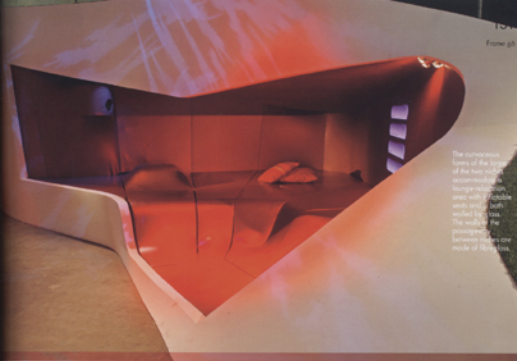
VW organized Moonraker to deepen its understanding of America and future needs

The challenge for Graft, as for every science-fiction writer or filmmaker, was how far to reach beyond the familiar. When making 2001: A Space Odyssey, just a year before the first manned moon landing, Stanley Kubrick sought the best advice in imagining how technology and lifestyles would change over the next three decades. He created a potent vision of manned space exploration

that we haven't begun to catch up with and a portrait of everyday living that is now as dated as a 1960s time capsule. The boxy uniforms of the space-flight attendants, the logo of long-vanished Pan Am, Olivier Mosquieu's amoeba-like furniture upholstered in stretch fabric, and Arne Jacobsen's SAS cutlery compose a moment of the past rather than a glimpse of things to come.

In contrast, Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, a 1982 spin on Fritz Lang's 1927 *Metropolis*, seems increasingly prescient. The urban dystopia of hazy, congested streets, mile-high luxury towers, ubiquitous imagery and armored vehicles anticipates present trends; only the notion of off-world living seems fanciful. Scott relied on the concept sketches of futurist Syd Mead, who has served as a consultant to major automobile corporations — though we can't blame him for the Hummer. Since then, Steven Spielberg's *AI* and *Minority Report* have added more tantalizing speculations, and all of these provided the Graft team with inspiration.

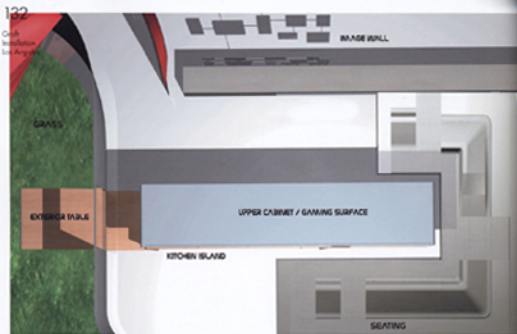
Moonraker was looking off only 15 years ahead, and if the world is still habitable by then we can be reasonably sure that most of what we see today will be commonplace. It's likely that we'll still be wearing cotton tees and denim jeans, riding bicycles, and driving in cars that outwardly resemble this year's models. Beneath the surface, change will be accelerating. Energy conservation will become an increasingly urgent preoccupation as



The minimalist lines of the lounge area will provide a subtle and useful depth of field. The walls of the projection screen are made of fiberoptic



The smaller of the two niches contains a seat in soft gel and fabric, maintains heat to a fireplace.



Set 3: Hearth & Home

global warming gallops apace, regardless of the rise or decline in fuel costs, more people will be working from home and relying on integrated electronic networks for communication, information and entertainment. These global shifts are likely to change the way we think about our bodies, our personal space, and the communities in which we live, but slowly and in unpredictable ways.

The future is like an ancient manuscript in an unfamiliar language, so be deciphered a word at a time and by guesswork as well as deduction. The full meaning may remain elusive. The only thing certain about the future is that, for better or worse, we will eventually be living in it.

That was Graft's primary goal: to create plausible habitats. The first was conceived as a domestic biosphere for an environmentally conscious couple in their early thirties who were about to have children. Sheets of recycled resin embedded with dead leaves were folded and moulded to create a low table, benches and a wrap-around canopy – a seamless interior that obliterated the divide between structure and furniture. The overarching theme of sustainability employed every element to conserve and recycle water and energy, and the architecture was haptic, drawing on plastics and biohang to stimulate all the senses. It was assumed that the owners shared these values with their community.

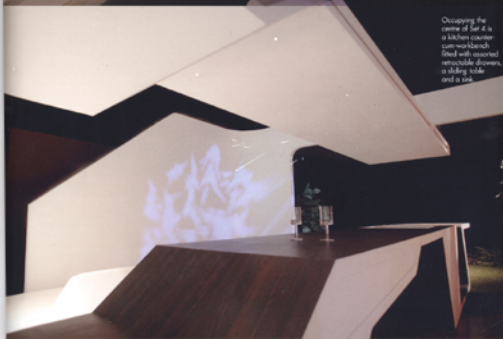
The second space was conceived as a warm, nurturing

haven for a young, single woman, a womb in which to retreat from an uncertain world. It was a wrap-around environment with solid walls for protection and soft surfaces for relaxation and stimulation – half spa, half cocoon. The designers proposed an impervious membrane that would hold water and serve as a tub, with hidden elements for heat and massage. Colour and lighting were combined to impart a sense of warmth and elevation, and to define thresholds and entrances. It's easy to translate this yearning for security and escape into a vehicle, and the mental attitude is already on display in every female car seen perched high in her SUV with tightly shut tinted windows, self-absorbed in her stereo and mobile phone, oblivious to everything but the car she's trying to overturn.

Hearth and home were the focus of an interior for a family with children. A high-tech kitchen table that floats, rises and folds provided the centre for every kind of activity, from dinner to homework and games. The surface, an LED touch screen, summoned words and images that could be projected on a wall screen. Graft supposed that home electronics would be so ubiquitous in 2020 as to become invisible, and furniture would move in response to our bodies or to voice commands. Like the cocoon, this utopian space has its sinister side. Do we want the cooker to read the bar code on packaged food and tell us how to prepare it? And do we like



An overhead lighting fixture featuring a smart surface and embedded lighting is lowered to cover the counter.



Occupying the centre of Set 4 is a kitchen counter-cum-workbench lined with assorted retractable drawers, a sliding table and a seat.



Set 4: Adaptive Complexity

the idea of having our lives on display as though we're participants in a reality show?

The fourth space was the most extreme: a technology-driven loft for a young man who has lived with digital all his life and has turned into a kind of cyborg. He has ordered customized cabinetry from Ikea, and shelves of every width can be pulled out like drawers and accessed from a chair that rolls from one station to user interface to the next. A motorbike is parked next to his bed. Poster and screens via fire space; there are no books or other printed materials.

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Exaggerated as these visions of the near future may have been, they laid the discussions that led up to them: fulfilled their role for Moseraker. "They helped distill our thoughts on what we were forecasting as important

to our customers," says East. "Before, I would just sit down and fill a wall with renderings now, I have fresh insights, and a more holistic approach." To impress the corporate chiefdom who came to inspect, a Hollywood lighting company was called in to light the sets, and the project was officially judged to be a good investment. However, plans to keep the sets in place and rotate in designers from Wolfburg founded on the high cost of maintenance, and the structures were dismantled and will probably not be reinstalled.

For Graft, the project was a learning experience that is sure to enrich the team's future work. Already, a version of the cyborg's custom shelving has been installed in the company's new Berlin offices. The firm is designing a hotel room of the future for a trade association of German textile manufacturers, drawing, perhaps, on ideas they first explored in their blousaker environments. In fact, radical innovation may prove closer to hand in design hotels than in all but a handful of private living spaces. Alluring as the future may seem in small doses, most of us are comfortably ensconced in the private realm we have created for ourselves from familiar and inherited elements.



Shelving units made of honeycomb board define the look of Set 4, which features a smart surface design, sliding glass and other technological innovations.



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