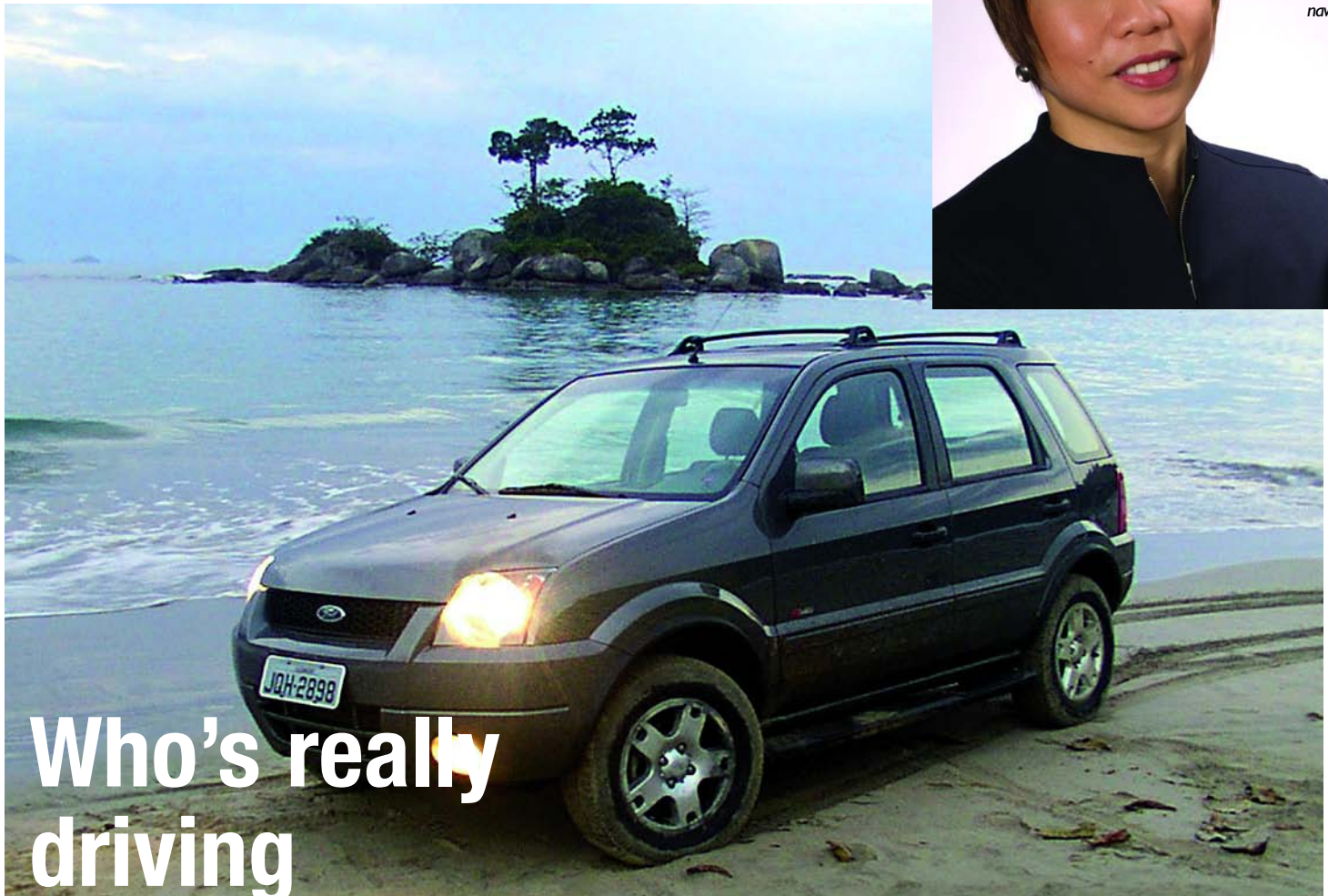


Academix was fortunate enough to catch up with Chelsia Lau earlier this summer to find out more about how this young female car designer found her way into the auto design industry without the use of a GPS navigation system!



# Who's really driving the auto industry?

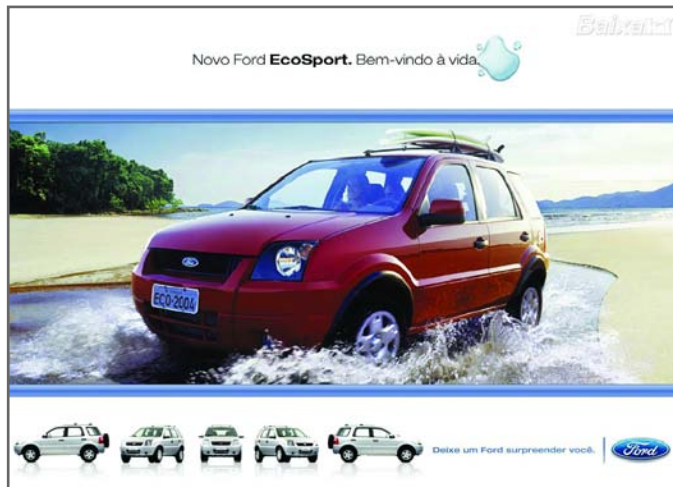
by Lesley Assadourian

According to the Ford Motor Company, “chick auto power” is the major driving force behind many car-buying decisions. A recent survey showed that women influence 85% of all car-buying decisions and purchase 45% of all vehicles. In spite of these very high percentages, women are still the minority in the car design workplace; something that the industry is trying to change.

FORD'S strategy to attract more women to car design includes generous donations to scholarships for high school girls to encourage enrollment in auto design classes. The manufacturer also reaches out to girls through high school programs in which Ford designers are paired with students to teach the basics of sketching and rendering in weekly sessions. General Motors has a similar program, but Ford's program is the only one known to specifically target females.

One of the rising stars at Ford is Chelsia Lau. With 15 years in the automotive industry, Lau is a chief designer at Ford and has been responsible for shaping the design direction of Ford's sport utility vehicles (SUVs).





As a child, Lau spent a lot of her out-of-school time at her parent's restaurant and would spend hours drawing pictures. Noticing her artistic ability, her parents encouraged Lau to pursue her creative flair. It was with their encouragement and support that she graduated from the Lee Wai Technical Institute with a degree in Product Design. She then went on to travel overseas to attend the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California. It was during this time that Lau accepted an internship at Ford and discovered her passion for automotive design – she eventually joined Ford officially in 1992. After completing a rotation through various Ford studios and design disciplines, Lau specialised in SUVs, her first project being the South American Eco Sport.

**Lau was happy to fill us in on what fuels her passion for car design. Read on to hear what she had to say.**

Engaging in auto design enables a person to change a concept into reality. When you see customers appreciate the beauty of your design, nothing will be more exciting and satisfying than this. Moreover, auto design is challenging. You need to stay enthusiastic about inventing beautiful and practical things. You need to be able to capture people's dreams and project the future trend. Simply put, the multi-dimension of the work fuels my passion for auto design.

**It seems that women have been relegated to the back seat of car design, typically working on the interior design of vehicles. However, that trend appears to be changing.**

Traditionally, few females entered the auto design community. The responsibility is challenging, but encouraging and rewarding. In my perspective, a female point of view is important for it can bring an extra dimension to products and create more comprehensive offerings. Therefore, I attach great importance to female recruitment and render support to female potentials.

Also, as I see it, the trend is changing, both for designer and consumer. Females are playing a more and more important role in purchase consideration. Good car designs should be appealing to female customers, while not alienating male customers. Ultimately, design is a universal language. Balance and diversity can help express the language better.

Lau believes that the vision comes first in design and she looks to a variety of outside influences for inspiration; this includes everything from nature to trends in fashion, film and travel with a design style that can be best described as simple, modern and functional.

**Could you give us an insight into what inspires you in your design esthetic?**

I think people are seeking something that is really well beyond their basic transportation needs. I think to really stand out from the crowd, and to be successful, we really need to emphasise the design. Not only does it give you a sharp identity of the brand, but at the same time it gives that feeling of the unique individual.

Lau is enthusiastic about things to come, especially the notion of helping young designers break into the automotive design business. So to all you girls out there with a passion for design, there's only one course of action to take. Get your hands behind the wheel, put your career into gear and head off down the road into the world of auto design.

*\*Academix would like to thank the Hong Kong Design Centre for putting us in contact with Chelsia Lau, who participated in Creative Hong Kong in London this past June, where world-renowned Hong Kong designers came together for a series of events to showcase their influence on creative design and to celebrate the way in which Hong Kong is shaping global creativity.*