

The image is a cover for a Nissan Design News Letter. It features a close-up, low-angle view of the front of a silver Nissan car. The car's body is highly reflective, showing highlights and shadows. The front grille is visible, featuring the Nissan logo (a circle with a horizontal bar) on the left side. The headlights are prominent, with the main headlight on the right and a smaller fog light below it. The background is a soft-focus outdoor scene with green foliage and a bright sky. The overall color palette is dominated by the metallic silver of the car, the green of the plants, and the white and red of the text.

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D e s i g n i n g t h e N e w M u r a n o E x t e r i o r
Crossover Project Yields a Powerful Body and a Powerful Collaboration



Jungkyu Choi

Nissan's Design Division has always embraced designers of different nationalities, experience levels and cultural backgrounds – in the belief that stimulating exchanges among staff members from various backgrounds leads to novel designs that transcend convention, not only in the design field, but across the board.



This philosophy was beautifully demonstrated recently in the creation of the second-generation Murano crossover SUV. The Murano's inspiring exterior design is the product of two key designers, Jungkyu Choi and Toshiyuki Abe, born in two different countries, ten years apart, and with very different design experiences and areas of expertise.

Jungkyu Choi, born and raised in South Korea, was still a college student when the first-generation Murano was introduced. "When I first saw the original Murano, it gave me a strong impression of refined design, quite different from your standard off-road SUV," says Choi. "The design of the Murano, which I saw in a photo, was one of the reasons I was eager to work at Nissan, even though I didn't speak a word of Japanese."

Choi, the Newcomer

Once he joined the company, Choi found himself in meetings with little understanding of what was being discussed. He also had a hard time building relationships with the other people on the project team. "Fortunately, designers have a communication tool called the sketch. So I'd often use sketches to express my thoughts and communicate with the rest of the team," says Choi.

"The original Murano evoked the same feeling I have when I try a new food and find it more wonderful than I could have imagined. I knew, however, that if I were to build the new Murano using the same design language, its flavor would be similar, but without much impact. So I worked to recreate the power of the original design, keeping its positive characteristics, while using a different language," he says.





Abe, the Veteran



Toshiyuki Abe

Experienced Nissan designer Toshiyuki Abe was assigned to lead the Murano exterior design team, with Choi and three other designers contributing their original ideas. Abe recalls his first impression of Choi's work: "To be frank, I noticed many odd lines, which is natural from a new college graduate. But his approach to integrating the fender lines into the entire body was very interesting, and I discovered many details that impressed me. I also remember feeling enormous passion and power coming from his sketches."

Abe, who designed the distinctive face of the second-generation Murano, says he didn't build the shape out of a cohesive intellectual process, but rather an intuitive one. He remembers his hand moving on its own as he was searching for a new, one-of-a-kind expression based on one of Choi's original sketches. Choi developed the front further. "I wanted to express the rhythms of force in the fender line. That's where three strong lines intersect – from the front, the A pillar and the side – so finishing them well in a single surface is extremely difficult. We came close to the limits of current production technology," he says.



Abe and Choi agree that Koreans and Europeans tend to be better at three-dimensional expression, where the Japanese are better at graphic expression. The new Murano embodies both. Abe took charge of the graphics and Choi the three-dimensional rendering of them, and their combined strengths produced a distinctive "Japanese-Korean" crossover.

The Murano Legacy

Nissan introduced the original Murano in North America in 2002 to positive reviews and sales, and it was eventually sold in 80 countries worldwide. The second-generation Murano was set for sale in over 170 countries, though its main market would once again be North America – one reason the designers worked to maintain its iconic design. In the vastness of the American landscape, cars are often seen from long distances, so the designers paid extra attention to drawing character lines that identify the Murano at a glance, especially in the front view of the car as seen in the mirrors of the cars ahead.

Curvaceous beauty is the central element of the new Murano's "premium crossover SUV" concept. If the original Murano was carved from a block, design-wise, the new Murano was extruded from within. By expressing latent power, the new Murano makes an emotional statement for those who see it, in contrast with the "coolness" of the original.

Asked about this curvaceousness, Choi says, "For me, it's a rendering of the female body and ocean waves. The new design features a fender line that evokes the powerful, beautiful movement of waves." Abe adds, "The original Murano was a sculptural design, with surfaces carved from a larger mass. The design also emphasized straight, variously interrupted lines. For the second generation, we created a design that implies continuation beyond the ends of the lines." Based on curves rather than straight lines, the new design suits the latest concepts of modernity, worthy of a world-class, premium SUV.

The Moment the Second Generation Surpassed the Original

The project also involved Choi in the clay model production process for the first time in his career. Designers render two-dimensional images of three-dimensional products, then modelers develop them into three-dimensional forms. While designers and modelers have completely different responsibilities in the design process, they work together to achieve the highest quality clay model. "I was delighted to see the sketches become three-dimensional. Then I struggled with which parts to improve and how. I liked some parts, but others definitely needed change," he explains. The biggest challenge was the grille detail. "We wanted the grille to look good from every angle. To realize this, we needed to adjust the width and angles of each chrome bar, which was certainly not an easy task for the modelers. The modelers and I relied on senses, using our eyes and hands, to arrive at the best proportions. We were frequently batting ideas back and forth, while trying to achieve this perfect harmony of spatial aesthetic." he says.



There was one other problem. Because the original Murano was so well received, Abe says, the designers felt special pressure to excel. "My boss told me he wanted not just a hit, but a home run. I was still worried when we presented our first full-sized clay model. But when I looked at that near-finished model, with the lights, windows and all the body parts in place, I felt confident as a designer that the new Murano surpassed the original and that our design approach was the right one." At first, opinions were split within the company, but Nissan's culture of encouraging new ideas powered the new Murano design into reality.

**Nissan
Design DNA**

Nissan designers are constantly thinking about how to best communicate the concept of a specific car in its form as they work on a project. Drawing inspiration from designs around the world, they rise to the challenge of creating new designs without conforming to the fads of the day. For example, the new Murano is reflective of the attempt by its designers to create things never before seen in a Nissan product. Some previous Murano elements remain, combined with fresh new ones.

In the new Murano, the graphic forms of the side windows carry over from the original. It is very important to understand that uniquely Nissan designs are the product of attempts to create something fresh while carrying on important legacies from older models, not senselessly trying something new.

Nissan's design DNA, passed down through generations of designers, provides a firm foundation for combining new ideas with established ones. The designs of the new Murano, Cube and Nissan GT-R – all highly original – are made possible by this inclusive corporate culture.

Diversity

Choi says he learned a lot in working with Abe, the more seasoned designer. "I used to think a designer only has to make a good sketch. As I've advanced in my career, I've learned how important it is for designers to build experience."

Abe says, "I feel strongly that new things are born in the fresh atmosphere created by non-Japanese on the team and in the studio." The exterior of the new Murano, born of the harmony between Choi and Abe, is a true crossover product.

Jungkyu Choi
Product Design Division. Born in 1976, he was raised in South Korea. Interest in designing moving objects led him to a career as a car designer, and finding it challenging to work abroad, he decided to join Nissan. Within the company he is known as JK.



Toshiyuki Abe
Product Design Division. Born in 1966, he was good at drawing as a child. He still loves to draw, and says he is lucky to have made a career of it. He has taken charge of exterior design for many cars, including the previous Altima, the original Teana and the current Skyline coupe.

