

Q&A

Off the Cuff: A Q&A with Bentley's Chris Cooke

June 21, 2024



Chris Cooke joined Bentley's product design team in 2017. Image courtesy of Bentley Motors

By AMIRAH KEATON

Introducing "Off the Cuff," a new Q&A series from Luxury Daily exploring the career paths, current projects and next steps of those shaping the world's best luxury brands.

The interviews feature a Proust-style twist, allowing readers to get to know industry leaders on a personal level. The second edition features Chris Cooke, head of design collaborations at British automaker Bentley Motors.

In this Q&A, Mr. Cooke discusses the origins of his creative ethos, profiles the future luxury consumer and more. Here is the dialogue:



The limited-edition Ducati Diavel for Bentley series. Image courtesy of Bentley Motors

What was your first job ever? What did it teach you?

One of my first jobs outside the automotive industry certainly left a lasting impression.

I worked on a production line assembling chip and pin machines. My role was to screw four tiny screws into the back of a circuit panel and pass the unit along.

After about 20 minutes, I realized this task greatly conflicted with my restless creative nature, but I forced myself to continue the

role for an entire summer (I needed the money as a poor student). This experience taught me the importance of pursuing a career that challenges and excites me, ultimately leading me to the dynamic and creative field of automotive design at Bentley Motors.

Which skills have been critical to your success? Did you gain these skills within or outside of the workplace?

My success has been driven by a blend of creativity, perseverance and collaboration.

I have always wanted to create, to draw, to paint, to build and not be limited by restraints. This innate desire to innovate and push boundaries has been essential. I cultivated these skills both inside and outside the workplace through formal education, professional experiences, and personal projects.

This holistic approach has enabled me to bring a unique and expansive perspective to design collaborations at Bentley Motors.



Bentley Home entered the office furnishings market this year, presenting a six-piece collection during Milan Design Week. Image courtesy of Bentley Home

What is the best piece of advice you've ever received?

I've been fortunate to receive a wealth of insightful advice over the years, but one piece that has always resonated with me came from Romulus Rost, a former Bentley designer and creator of the original Audi TT. He advised me to "only design objects that you yourself would want to buy."

If, at the end of the process, I wouldn't spend my own money on an item, I can't expect someone else to. This principle has guided my approach to design, ensuring that every creation is something I would personally value and desire.

How has your field changed since you started out in luxury, and what do you think the industry will look like in a decade?

The world of luxury and the ecosystem that surrounds it is going to grow exponentially, especially around luxury brands that hold a provenance that resonates with customers, a provenance not linked to what they sell but rather what they stand for.

The future consumer will buy brands, not products, and brands like Bentley, that are trusted to offer craft, quality and innovation will be able to deliver them to other touchpoints within their lives.

We are leveraging the trust that has taken hundreds of years to build and offer new products and experiences that work together harmoniously with our current products to deliver a consistent luxury brand experience. This model of trust between consumer and brand will only grow and brands that have never entered markets beyond their own will be able to develop products they were never previously known for.

What recent Bentley projects have ignited your passion for working in luxury?

Two recent projects that have truly ignited my passion are the Bentley Miami Residences and our collaboration with The Macallan. The Bentley Miami Residences project is a groundbreaking endeavor where we are translating our automotive design language into high-end residential living.



The Bentley Miami Residences building. Image courtesy of Bentley Motors

It's an exciting challenge to infuse the craftsmanship, elegance, and innovation Bentley is known for into a completely new environment, creating an unparalleled luxury living experience. Similarly, our collaboration with The Macallan has been immensely inspiring.

Bringing together two brands that epitomize legacy, quality, and craftsmanship, we've created a unique synergy that elevates both the automotive and spirits industries. These projects exemplify how Bentley can extend its brand ethos beyond cars, reinforcing our commitment to delivering exceptional luxury experiences across different facets of life.

Who, in any industry or sphere, would you most like to share a long lunch with and where would you take them?

I would have most liked to share a long lunch with Virgil Abloh. His innovative approach to fashion and design, seamlessly blending streetwear with high fashion, has always been captivating.

I would take him to the Bentley Residences in Miami, a space that embodies luxury and sophistication. There, we could delve into a conversation about the intersection of design disciplines, exploring how to continually push the boundaries of creativity and craftsmanship in our respective industries.

How do you get into the right mindset before a big meeting or presentation?

I find that quiet contemplation is key. I often retreat to a quiet location to mentally run through scenarios and key points, distilling them down to their simplest forms.

If I can crystallize an idea clearly in my mind then I can pitch it effectively to someone who has never heard it before. Essentially bringing them along on the journey.

A good designer is part artist, part salesman they need to be able to sell an idea to stakeholders. Without that ability, even the best ideas are doomed to remain just that ideas.

On your days off, what can you be found doing to relax or have some fun?

I love to hike and ride and generally spend as much time as I can in the great outdoors.

If the weather doesn't allow this (which is often the case in England) I also love spending time restoring bikes, there's something very peaceful in the completion of mechanical tasks that takes me away from the world for a few moments.

What does luxury mean to you?

Passion. Luxury is and has always been the product of passion.

It's the culmination of a person or group of people who believe in the creation of something better and dedicate their lives to delivering it, often for another person they may never meet. The foundation of this is passion.

Whether a product or experience, what is your favorite luxury indulgence?

The perfect combination of travel and food. If I can visit a different culture that has a new approach to food or architecture, something I've never tried before or that can open my mind to a new way of doing things, then I'm ready to indulge.