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### EXCLUSIVE 21-PAGE SPECIAL AMAZING NEW ROLLS-ROYCE

Phantom revealed, and we hitch a ride



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# BANK ROLLS

NOBODY AT BMW doubted that the first Rolls-Royce created by its new German owners should be designed in London. BMW could draw on talent from its Californian Designworks and Munich studios, and their colleagues at Rover and Land-Rover in the UK, but they would work together in London.

It was Karl-Heinz Kalbfell who first insisted London should be the location. Kalbfell, already head of brand and product strategy at BMW, was given responsibility for Project Rolls-Royce within days of BMW winning ownership of Rolls-Royce on July 28 1998. His then bosses, Bernd Pischetsrieder and Wolfgang Reitzle, agreed.

Once the BMW board approved Kalbfell's business plan in December '98, the team went looking for suitable premises for a temporary studio. For five months from January 1999, Project Rolls-Royce rented a couple of floors of a former bank building on the corner of Elms Mews and Bayswater Road, opposite Hyde Park – an area of London where you can't help but smell the wealth.

Within the 20-strong design team the studio was known only as The Bank. Chris Bangle, BMW's controversial design boss, chose Brit Ian Cameron, who had led the team responsible for the current 3-series' exterior, to be design director.

"Bangle stayed in the background," says Cameron, "but he was instrumental and effective in giving the group real autonomy. Reitzle and Pischetsrieder were adamant it was not going to run like a BMW project. There was great secrecy, even within BMW."

Under Kalbfell a research team talked to Rolls-Royce owners, dealers and enthusiasts around the world before coming up with a dossier that established the new car's philosophy, and a package that insisted

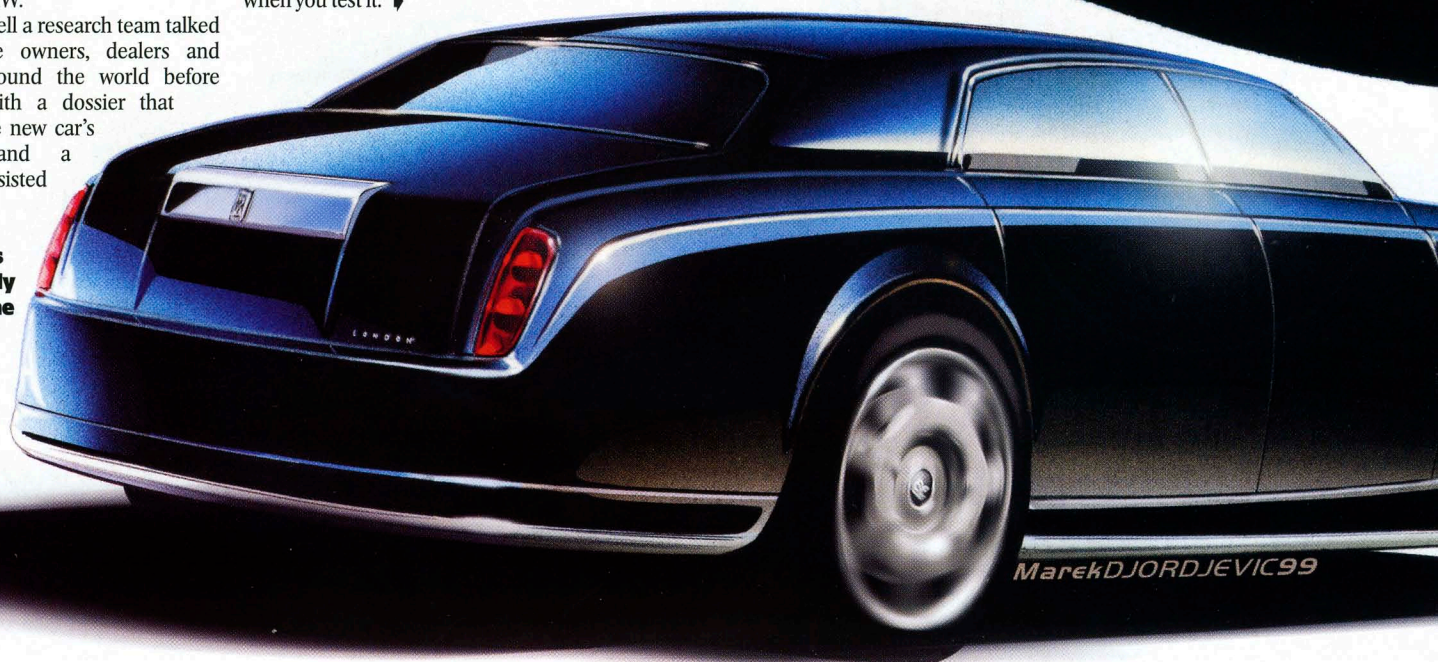
A former London bank was home for the multi-national team given the job of investing the new Rolls with classic lines

STORY PETER ROBINSON

the Phantom would be considerably bigger, everywhere, than the Seraph. BMW owned only the automotive rights to the Rolls-Royce name, effectively the Spirit of Ecstasy flying lady symbol and the famous vertical grille. That was it. Given the significance of the radiator grille, it's not exactly a clean sheet of paper, but close. It meant nothing was carried over from the Silver Seraph, then less than a year old.

Cameron set up three competing teams, each with two designers, and asked each team to come up with two proposals. Another team produced two full-sized interior models. Before any sketching began, the designers went on comparison drives, what Cameron calls "a phase of understanding", to absorb the Rolls-Royce culture.

"Everybody was bitten, if not smitten by Rolls-Royce," he says. "This was a one-off chance and that added tension and excitement to the project. You can still feel it. People wondered if it's going to be a '9-series', that it's not a Rolls-Royce. We wanted to halt a 30-year decline that produced a parody of what a Rolls-Royce should be. You will see we have a jewel when you test it." ♦

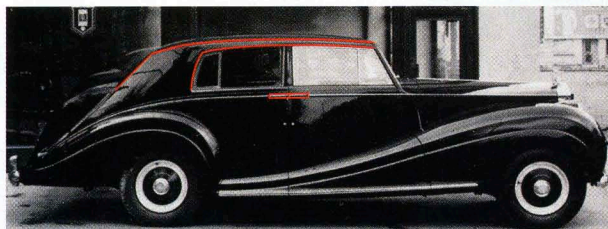
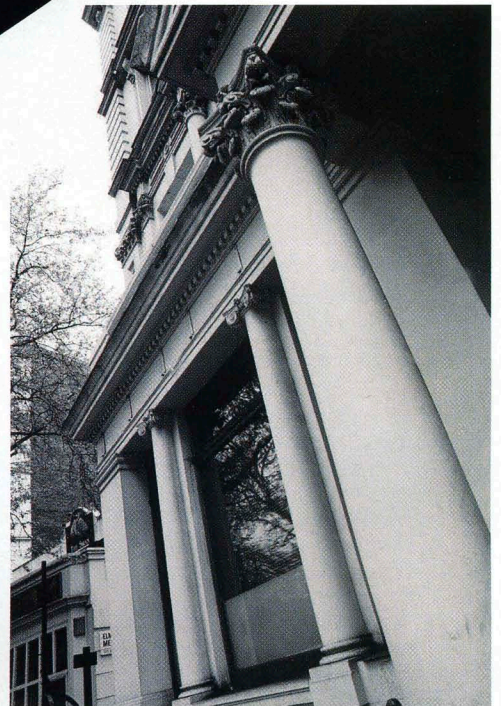


Main images show an early version of the Phantom sketched by exterior designer Marek Djordjevic

MarekJORDJEVIC99



**Design director  
Ian Cameron  
(right), based at  
The Bank,  
insisted the new  
car should echo  
C-pillar and  
coach doors of  
'50s Silver  
Wraith**





They examined in detail the Silver Cloud, "an icon of post-war styling"; the Silver Shadow, "a classic of understatement"; and the coach-built models; and ignored the new Silver Seraph, which traces its restrictive floorpan origins back to the Shadow, launched in 1965.

"Where does the Seraph fit into this?" Cameron asks, before answering his own question. "It doesn't. I have no intention to belittle it, but it was not enough [of a Rolls-Royce]."

Cameron, who graduated from London's Royal College of Art in 1975, continues: "The era that got us on heat was the Phantom II and Phantom III from the '30s, and especially their proportions. No car should be higher than two wheel [and tyre] heights, or it's a Ferrari. There's also a strength, a verticality in the grille, that adds to the buttress effect. These are not horizontal cars.

"What makes a car look good today is what made a car look good then. The position of the front axle needs to be way out in front, so there is a long, powerful bonnet. The distance from the front wheel to the front door shutline should evoke a feeling of power. A high shoulder line gives a feeling of security and the body must sweep. *Autocar* wrote about a 40/50 [Silver Ghost] 'wafting' in 1906, and we wanted the new car to have waftability.

"Quickly there was consensus with the proportions: short overhangs, long bonnet and very big wheels. They've ended up at 19 inch with 60-aspect ratio tyres."

The designers produced six quarter-scale models, before three went to full scale for presentation to the BMW board in December 1999.

"They were different, but close," Kalbfell told *Autocar* in December 1999. "At first I was worried, then I realised it was the natural outcome of following our marketing concept. Our bible didn't leave so many directions left to go."

Cameron says there were no arguments – the board immediately chose the proposal from Marek Djordjevic, a Yugoslavian designer who'd spent 10 years at Designworks. Charles Coldham, an English designer who came from Rover, won the interior competition. His concept was taken to production by Alan Sheppard, another Brit, who played the same role with the new Range Rover.

Unapologetically, the new Phantom is a huge car, a model that draws on the proportions of the '30s Phantom III, rather than the Seraph. See it for the first time at close quarters, as I do, and it looks massive, dominated by a grille four inches higher than the Seraph's. This, and a confusion of lights, certainly make the front distinctive, even ugly to some people. The upper rectangular lights contain daytime running lights and indicators, while the large circular lights are low enough for the car not to need foglights. From too close, it is only about details. The front even looks a little like the nasty Pininfarina-styled Camargue from the mid-'70s.



**Above and below: sketches show near-final version of the Phantom; B-pillars came later. Left: three teams each came up with two scale models. Right: a suggestion from one of the two teams working on the interior**





Later, seeing completed cars in the factory, I realise the styling cliché that you need to see the new car from a distance, at least 20 metres, has never been more true. Only then can you appreciate the basic simplicity of its proportions and forms, especially in profile.

The Phantom's drag co-efficient is 0.383. The aerodynamic problem, of course, is the classical RR grille.

"Because of the grille, the flies that should hit the windscreen hit the car behind it," claims Cameron.

"We wanted to have a bigger lady, but we were at the limits of the sight angles [legal requirements for vision]. Anyway, she drops down at the touch of a button."

A close examination reveals plenty of careful aerodynamic work. A spoiler, low down below the near free-standing front bumper, for example, and a near flat and enclosed underbody certainly helps the engineers achieve the desired lift targets. Cameron says the proportions played a large role in achieving the Phantom's 50/50 weight distribution.

Cameron is walking me around the new Rolls, explaining constantly.

"There is an emphasis on the sheet metal, not ornamentation. It has hard edges. This is where it demonstrates its character. It's not a white design, not a refrigerator. It's the first time in 50 years that the new model doesn't have to be a Bentley as well. They all had to be within a certain envelope. Some were more Bentley, some more Rolls. This is a Rolls-Royce."

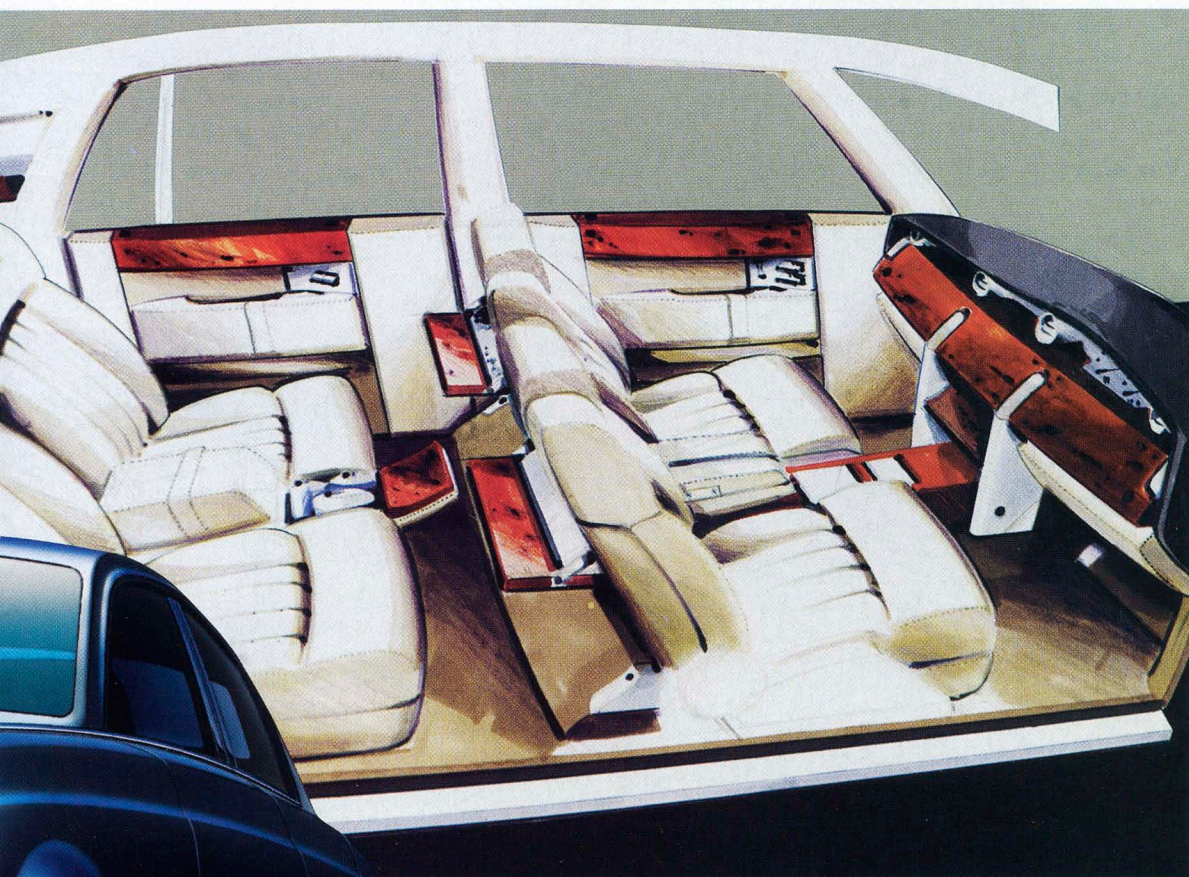
From the beginning, Djordjevic's sketches always featured what Rolls-Royce calls 'coach' doors. To achieve class-leading body stiffness, Rolls decided to retain the B-pillar, but the large back doors are hinged at the rear. BMW applied for and, after a year of demonstrations proving their safety, was granted a concession to use the unique doors, exclusively on Rollers. Their great advantage is to allow passengers to walk naturally, straight into the rear compartment.

But the Phantom is also for drivers, and those up front will enjoy vast space. "Traditional customers will feel at home," says Cameron, who points out that nothing you can see or touch in the interior reveals any association with BMW. The wood looks like wood and they resisted pressure from the BMW test drivers employed at the Nürburgring to increase the diameter of the steering wheel rim beyond RR-thin.

What of the Maybach, the Phantom's closest competitor?

"The biggest difference is that the Maybach is a Mercedes-Benz," says the outspoken Cameron – who then, pointing to the Rolls-Royce, adds: "This car, whatever it is, is not a BMW. I can't imagine people liking both."

"If you want a kitchen – think of those technical German kitchens – buy a Maybach. If you want a car you can thrash every day of the week and drive flat out to Monte Carlo, then buy a Phantom." ●



**Of the six exterior design proposals put forward, the clear winner was the work of Marek Djordjevic (right), who had been with Designworks for 10 years**

