

APRIL 2003

Roundel

**330i: PACKAGED
PERFORMANCE**



The name is Zetta, like Isetta without the "I." But this car has absolutely nothing to do with postwar micro-cars: *Zetta* is how the Italians say "Z," and this car is a BMW roadster, so a Z name is appropriate.

But you've probably never heard of the Zetta. Actually, few have.

Marek Djordjevic, one of BMW's staff designers, is usually based at Designworks/USA in Southern California, but like most BMW designers, he often works out of the Munich studio, too. While a student at Art Center Design in Pasadena, Djordjevic designed a concept with surface language similar to the Zetta. It ended up being used in Art Center's catalog the following year.

Chris Bangle took note of Djordjevic's design and asked him to develop his concept with a BMW 507 flavor—and the Zetta was born. Once the design drawings were done, a 40% scale model was built—which so impressed the management of the design department that a full-sized mock-up was authorized even before the scale model was completed.

The full-sized mock-up was built in Italy, hence the Zetta name. The car is not a runner; it has no drivetrain or other mechanicals. In fact, it was built much like a boat hull; skilled craftsmen at G Studio in Torino, Italy, built a frame from square-section steel. On top of the

steel, wooden splines were attached, and then a layer of "Epowood" was applied over the wooden splines; this material can be worked and shaped like wood. In only six weeks the craftsmen gave form to Djordjevic's design.

Most of this project took place during a four-month period in 1993, when design chief Chris Bangle was fairly new at BMW. BMW had a long tradition of building research vehicles for engineering purposes, but the company had rarely done research vehicles from a design perspective. Under Bangle's leadership, the design department began to explore new concepts in surface development. Other areas of design—architecture, fashion, furniture—had moved forward faster than automotive design. BMW wanted—still wants—to close the gap. Thus the Zetta, which was never considered for production—in fact, it was not even part of Project E52, the Z8, although it was done about the same time. Instead, its entire purpose was internal stimulation, both emotional and intellectual, within the various departments of BMW design.

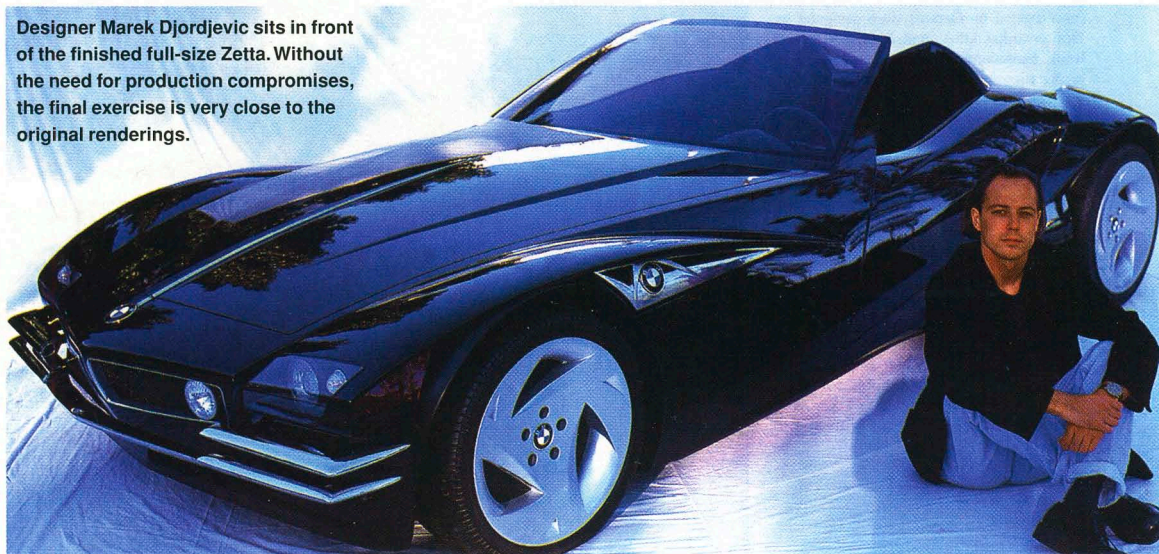
BMW designers had already seen a decade of the stimulating BMW Art Cars tradition, the collection of fifteen mostly production-based cars given to famous artists to use as "canvases." The design department saw the Zetta as a different kind of Art Car—not a canvas but a sculpture, one whose shapes and surfaces were the art.

Fabulous Footnote

Some cars are designed simply for the benefits derived from the design process itself. BY DAVID LIGHTFOOT



Designer Marek Djordjevic sits in front of the finished full-size Zetta. Without the need for production compromises, the final exercise is very close to the original renderings.

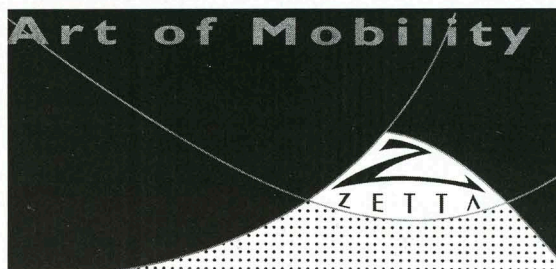


In fact, Zetta is still seen internally as more of an artistic product than a design product.

The Zetta has been used by the design staff for inspiration and as a starting point for discussion. It has also served to help explain to BMW's management and board some of the concepts its designers have been pursuing. The internal response at BMW was so positive that the car has been shown to outsiders on a very limited basis; the Zetta has been displayed at a design show in Los Angeles and at a couple of events at the Petersen Museum.

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the creation of the Zetta, Marek Djordjevic's first full-size model. It has served its purposes and is now a footnote in BMW's design history. And what of its designer? The 34-year

old native of Belgrade continues to work at BMW Group in the design department. And at the Detroit Auto Show in January, his first production design was shown: the new Rolls-Royce. ♦



Marek Djordjevic's final rendering of the Zetta concept car from 1993 shows an aggressive profile.

