AN ICON YOU SHOULD KNOW...

Ralph Gilles

Automotive designer and Chief Design Officer of Stellantis, born 1970

Ralph Gilles is an automotive designer, born in New York City in 1970 to Haitian immigrant parents. He joined Chrysler as a designer in 1992 and led the design of the Chrysler 300C, the big sedan that made his name. Today he is Chief Design Officer of Stellantis, the company behind Jeep, Dodge, Chrysler, Ram, Fiat and more. Read this page in about five minutes, then use the links at the end to look deeper.



Ralph Gilles. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0. Full credit on page 3.

FURTHER LOOKING

Stellantis Media: His official company biography, with every role he has held since 1992. media.stellantisnorthamerica.com

"I Owe My Career to a Letter from Chrysler": Gilles tells the story of the letter and his first portfolio in his own words. web.archive.org

Abstract: *The Art of Design*: The episode that follows Gilles from sketch to clay to show floor. Requires a Netflix subscription. netflix.com

Video: Chrysler's Past, Present and Future Design

Instagram: @ralphgilles

Reading: Watson, Thomas. "The Cult of Ralph: Chrysler's Ralph Gilles." *Canadian Business*, 22 Sept. 2006.

01 Fact Sheet

1970	Born January 14 in New York City to Haitian immigrant parents. He grows up in the Montreal area.
1987	His aunt writes to Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca about his car drawings. Neil Walling, a Chrysler design leader, writes back with a list of design schools.
1988	Builds a new portfolio in four nights and gets into the College for Creative Studies in Detroit.
1992	Earns a BFA in industrial design and joins Chrysler as a designer.
2001	Becomes director of the Large Car Studio.
2002	The Jeep Liberty, one of his first production designs, goes on sale.
2003	Receives the Automotive Hall of Fame Young Leadership and Excellence Award.
2005	The Chrysler 300, including the 300C he led, is named Motor Trend Car of the Year.
2009	Becomes senior vice president of product design and president and CEO of the Dodge brand.
2011	Becomes president and CEO of SRT, Chrysler's performance brand.
2015	Becomes head of design for FCA North America.
2017	Featured in "Ralph Gilles: Automotive Design," an episode of the Netflix series *Abstract: The Art of Design*.
2021	Becomes Chief Design Officer as FCA and PSA merge to form Stellantis.
2023	Receives the EyesOn Design Lifetime Achievement Award.
2025	Named Chief Design Officer of Stellantis N.V., leading design around the world.

Life and career Milestones tied to the key works

FIVE KEY WORKS, PAGE 2

2002 Jeep Liberty	**2003** Dodge Viper SRT-10	**2005** Chrysler 300C	**2005** Dodge Magnum	**2013** SRT Viper GTS

02 Five Key Works

The cars below are shown in photos by owners and fans, shared under free licenses. Car design is team work. The final shape of the 2013 Viper, for example, drew on clay models by six designers.

2002: Jeep Liberty

One of his first designs to reach production

Gilles spent his early years at Chrysler on interiors and concept vehicles, such as the interior of the Viper GTS/R race car. The Jeep Liberty was one of the first production vehicles to carry his work. The Liberty keeps the classic Jeep grille but adds round headlights and softer, friendlier shapes.

LOOK FOR Round headlights next to the seven-slot grille | Upright, practical proportions



Jeep Liberty, 2002. Wikimedia Commons, public domain.

2003: Dodge Viper SRT-10

A new generation of a famous sports car

The Automotive Hall of Fame lists the production 2003 Dodge Viper among his early credits, right after the Liberty. Compare it with the 2013 Viper at the end of this list. Both keep the long hood and short tail that make a Viper look like a Viper.

LOOK FOR A long hood with the cabin pushed far back | Sharp creases and vents along the sides



Dodge Viper SRT-10, 2003. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

2005: Chrysler 300C

The big sedan that made his name

Gilles was the lead designer of the Chrysler 300C, working as head of a design studio at DaimlerChrysler. Motor Trend named the Chrysler 300 its 2005 Car of the Year and praised its "bold, expressive and confidently American styling." The car stayed in production for 18 years. When it ended in 2023, Gilles marked the moment on Instagram.

LOOK FOR A tall, upright grille | A high body line under a low roof

Read Motor Trend on the 2005 Car of the Year →



Chrysler 300C, 2005. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

2005: Dodge Magnum

A muscular wagon from the same studio

In 2003 the Automotive Hall of Fame described Gilles as the director of the Dodge Magnum and the new Chrysler 300C. The Magnum was also on Motor Trend's list of contenders for 2005 Car of the Year. A station wagon is usually the sensible choice. The Magnum gave it a chopped, tough look instead.

LOOK FOR A low roof with narrow side windows | A wide crosshair grille



Dodge Magnum, 2005. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY 2.0.

2013: SRT Viper GTS

A design leader rebuilds a legend

When Gilles ran SRT, he fought to bring the Viper back. His team started sketching before the project was even approved. In mid-2010 he showed Chrysler's leaders a full-size model in a dimly lit design dome. For the final shape, six designers made six clay models in a locked room the team called "Area 51." The finished car blends ideas from three of them. It made its debut at the 2012 New York Auto Show.

LOOK FOR A long, stretched nose with the cabin tucked far back | Deep vents behind the front wheels

Read Car and Driver on the team behind the 2013 Viper →



SRT Viper GTS, 2013. Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 4.0.

TRY THIS

Gilles got his start because someone mailed his drawings. Pick a product you use every day, such as a backpack or a bike. Draw it three times, each for a different person. Change only the shapes and details, not the purpose, and see how much character you can add.

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REFLECT

Think About It

Gilles designs products that millions of people sit inside. How should a car's look change when the buyers, the roads and the fuel change? Pick one of the cars above and sketch how it might look 20 years from now.

03 Sources

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