

FINEST



RALPH GILLES

Dodge President and CEO and SVP of Design

Ralph Gilles was about 8 years old when he fell in love with the design of the Volkswagen Scirocco. With the help of his aunt, he sent a letter to Lee Iacocca. "I received a letter back with some encouragement and design school [suggestions]. I kept it in my back pocket until I was about 17," says the Haitian American, who grew up in Montreal. In college, Gilles was an unhappy engineering student on the verge of dropping out. His brother encouraged him to find the letter. Afterward, he enrolled at the College for Creative Studies. The 40-year-old designer of the Chrysler 300 now calls Detroit home and is proud that he has "a role in the revitalization of the city through cars." Both an artist and a CEO, Gilles says he loves the tension within himself as "a creative individual sustaining the business mind-set."

WHAT WAS YOUR FIRST CAR? Austin Marina.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CAR? Dodge Viper.

YOUR LEAST FAVORITE? Pontiac Aztek.

WHAT'S YOUR DRIVING STYLE? Controlled and aggressive when I am on the racetrack. I've been racing for about 15 years now.

WHEN WILL YOU STOP DRIVING? When my motor skills become a menace to society.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THE D? The people. The car industry hires people from all over the world; we have such a diverse culture here.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT HAITIANS? We are a very family-oriented and loving people who have a sense of humor. We also have a strong sense of humility and pride.

WHO WILL SIT IN THE PASSENGER SEAT WHEN YOUR TWO DAUGHTERS GO TO DRIVERS ED? I will.

OFF THE CUFF:

His personal style: "Relaxed and casual." Gilles has made it the company dress code since becoming CEO. **His drink:** "A well-made mojito." **Favorite hotel:** The Royal Park in Rochester. **Where he heads for a little culture:** Detroit Institute of Arts. **For food:** Ronin in Royal Oak, Baker's Keyboard Lounge in Detroit, or Union Woodshop in Clarkston. **For clothes:** Made In Detroit. **His watch:** Bell & Ross BR O2. **His favorite neighborhood:** Royal Oak.