

Toyota Tech Talks - Kevin Hunter

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“I’m not an engineer, but I love the art of design, and cars are big canvases,” says Kevin Hunter, president of Toyota Motor Corporation’s North American design studio, Caltex Design Research. “They’re big three-dimensional sculptural canvases where you can create something beautiful, something exciting, bold, dramatic.”

A designer who believes customers should fall in love with their cars, Hunter is responsible for overseeing research, advanced design and production design at studios in Newport Beach, San Francisco, and Ann Arbor, Michigan. His team comprises 100 designers who work on future concepts and production vehicles from the Lexus LF-1 Limited concept to the fifth-generation Toyota Avalon.

“I think in the past, our relationship with cars has been rather cold,” says Hunter, a Detroit native who relocated to Southern California 35 years ago to work at Caltex, just as the first Celicas were introduced to the American market. “It’s a machine that sits there, and it only comes to life when you get in to drive it. That’s the only thing we’ve known in automobiles for decades.”

This is what he aims to change. Hoping to transform how people relate to their cars, and looking ahead to 2030, Hunter and his team unveiled a future mobility vehicle, the Concept-i, at CES in Las Vegas last year, demonstrating how the autonomous car’s AI user interface, Yui, learns by communicating and interacting with its driver. Tastes, preferences, moods, physical states – Yui keys into them all and is equipped with sensors to fully monitor the road and traffic environment.

“This is a very different approach,” Hunter says, “and we hope a more emotional and expressive approach to engaging with your car as you go about your life. Oftentimes we’re in cars alone. We do a lot of commuting with nobody in our car, and Yui can be a companion that way, to entertain you, keep you alert for safety, or take over driving when you’re tired or don’t feel like driving.”

Such forward-thinking ideas are pushing the envelope in terms of auto design and solutions for mobility across the industry, and Hunter plans to stay at the forefront of that progress by continuing to develop cars people fall in love with.

“All designers got into design because they love designing cars,” Hunter says. “So this is a great era for us right now with technology exploding in many new directions. We have leadership in our company who wants exciting and innovative design. I couldn’t imagine any better place to be.”

To view full video, click [here](#).