Beyond the Paint Wheel: Inside CALTY’s Journey Designing Toyota’s TRD Pro Colors

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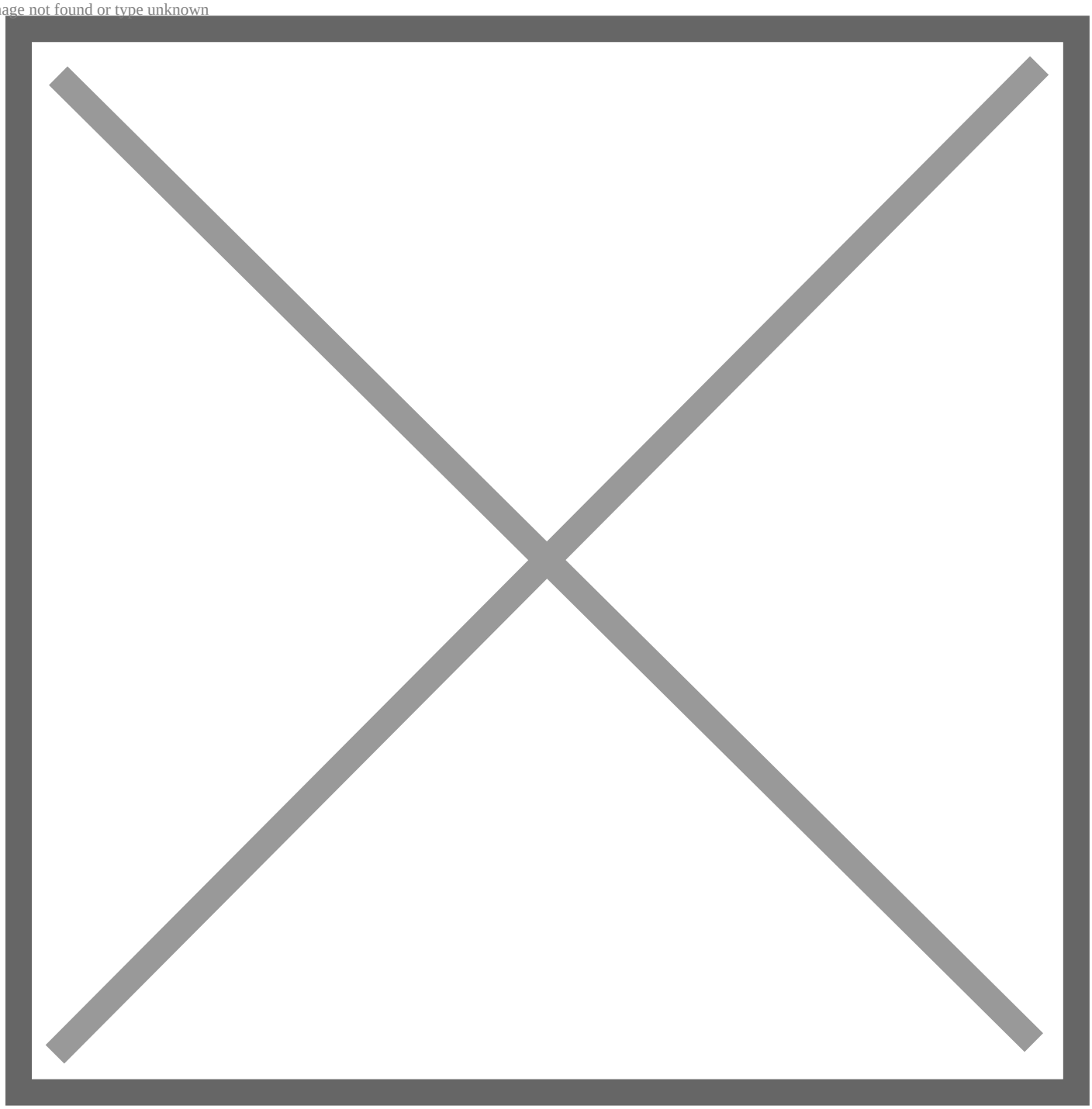
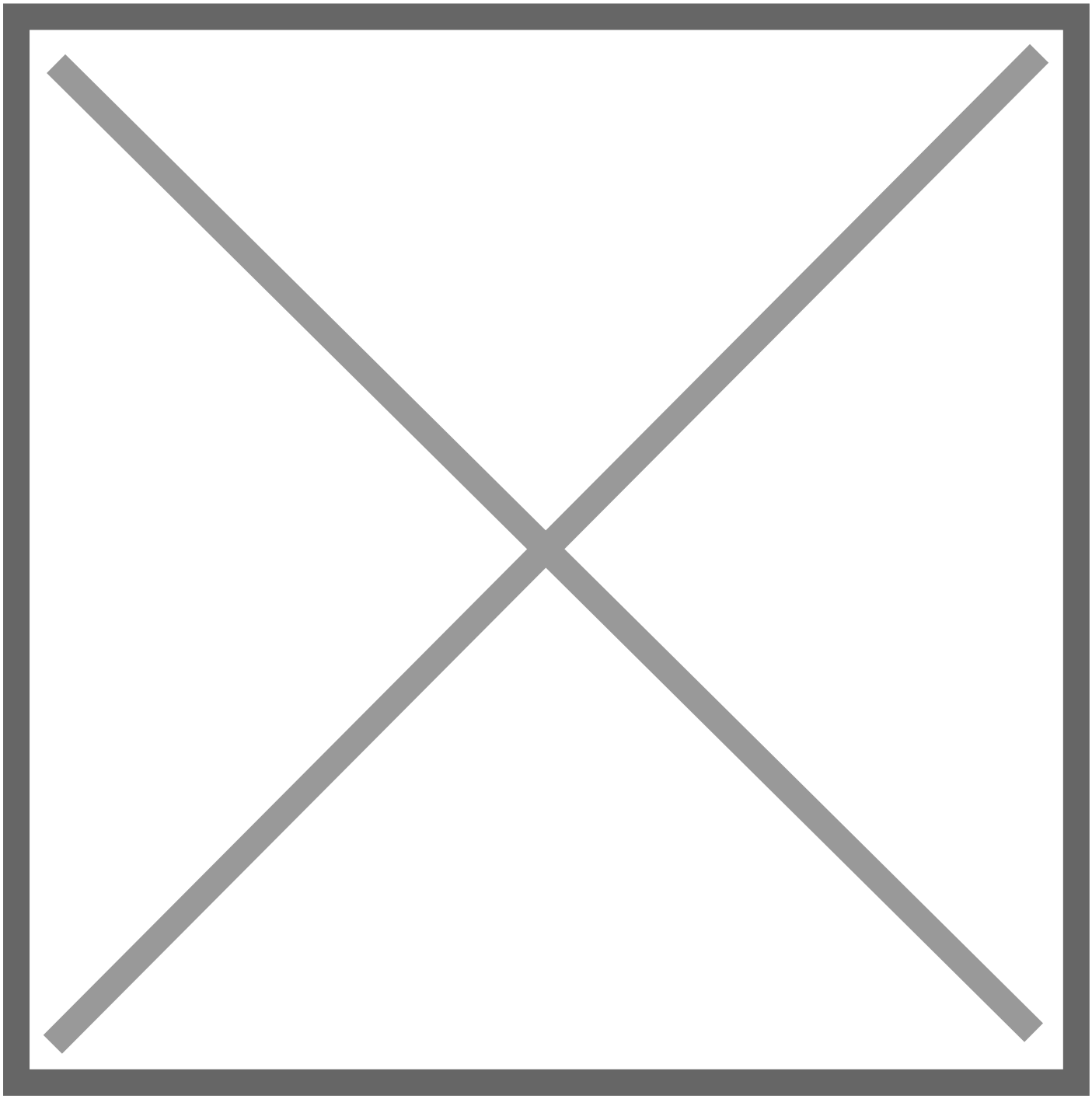


Every year, palpable anticipation builds within the off-road community. Enthusiasts from across the country anxiously await and wonder: What will be the new, exclusive TRD Pro exterior color for the next model year?

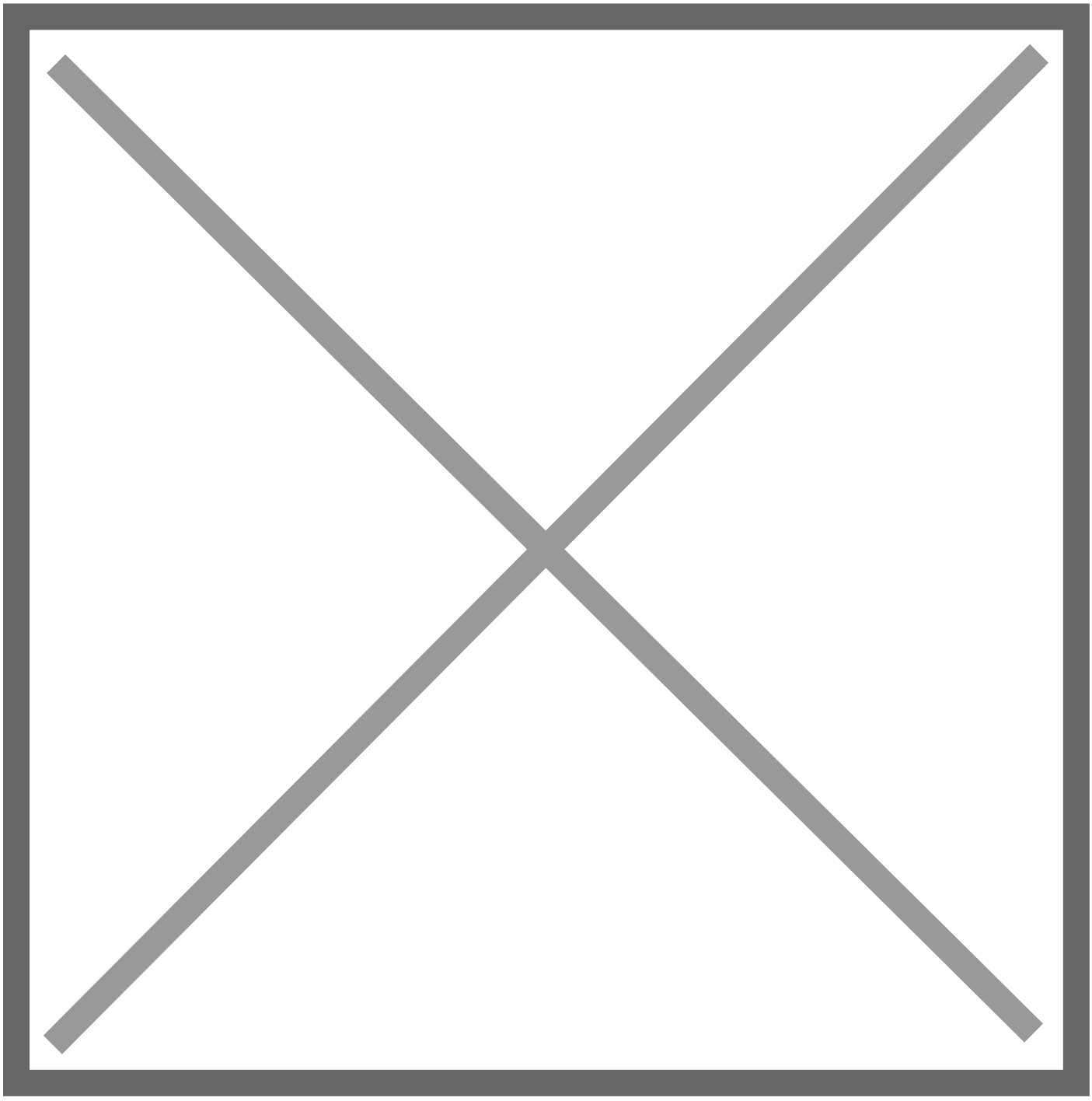
From the inaugural lava orange hue, Inferno, for model year 2015 to the recent announcement of Honeycomb as the exclusive TRD Pro color for model year 2027, Toyota's annual signature paint drop has transcended mere marketing hype to become a coveted badge of honor across Toyota's rugged TRD Pro lineup, including the Tundra, Sequoia, 4Runner and Tacoma.



These striking shades aren’t chosen on a whim; they are the product of a meticulous, multi-year process blending trend forecasting, lifestyle and extensive testing.

“We’re sometimes working on colors up to five years out,” says Benjamin Jimenez, general manager of CALTY in Ann Arbor, Michigan and chief designer, interior & external color, material and finish (CMF). “That doesn’t mean it takes five years to develop a color, but we’re thinking that far ahead and exploring what could be relevant in the future.”

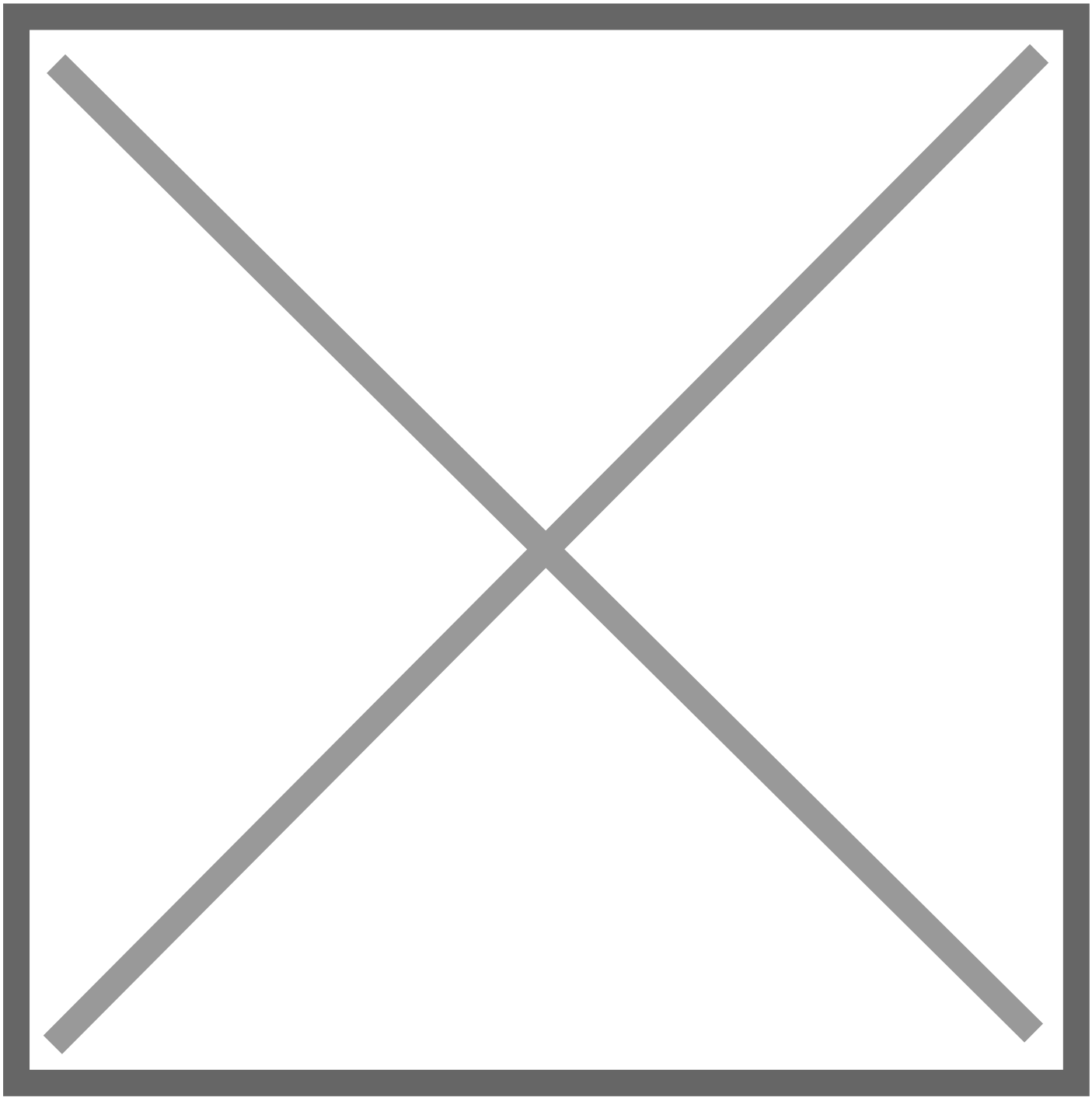
An Artful Beginning



Before the TRD Pro colors became a sensation, Toyota's research identified two distinct midsize truck buyers: pragmatic utility seekers and adventure-loving outdoor enthusiasts.

"In the beginning with Inferno, we were more inspired by those off-roading markets," says Sellene Lee, chief designer responsible for CMF at CALTY in Newport Beach, California. "So, we look at leisure mobility and those kinds of extreme sports. That was our first inspiration and then it evolved into more outdoor market-focused colors."

A Spectrum of Inspiration



Since the first TRD Pro color launched with model year 2015 over 11 years ago, the brand's design direction has matured from a market experiment into a highly creative, trend-setting powerhouse.

"In the beginning, it was kind of an experiment in the marketplace. As it became successful, it gave us more freedom to be creative," says Jimenez. "We've explored a range—from bright oranges and lime greens to blues, like Wave Maker. Because each color is offered for only one year, there's always an opportunity to surprise the customer."

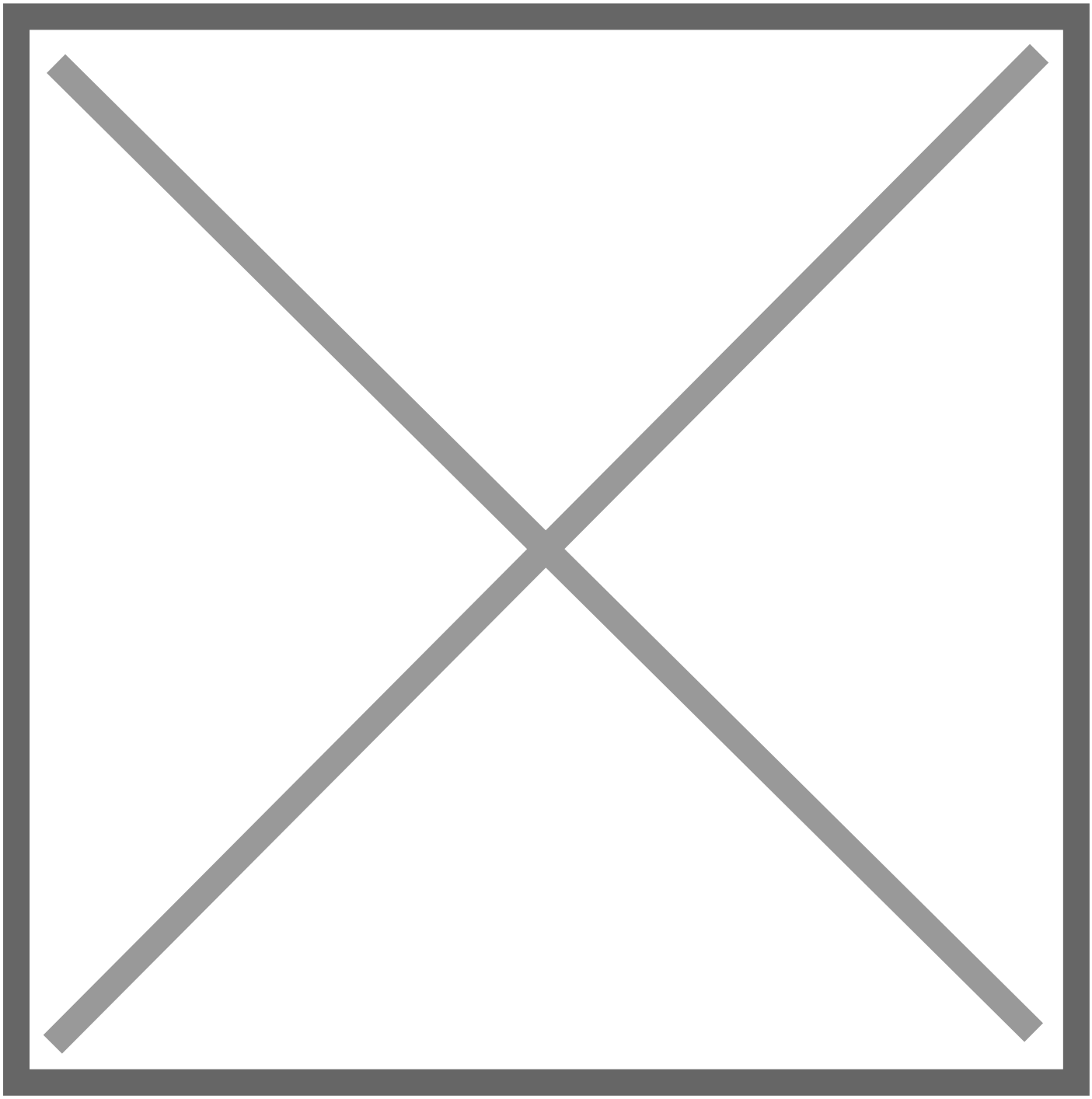
He adds, "Because each one is a one-year offer, it has the ability to surprise the market, to surprise the customer."

For 2027, Toyota is introducing the Honeycomb exterior color for Tundra, Sequoia and Tacoma TRD Pro grades, along with a slightly different shade, Hot Honey, for the 4Runner TRD Pro.

Finding these colors requires a thoughtful, strategic process. The team builds compelling, data-backed narratives by monitoring outdoor gear and lifestyle trends at industry trade shows.

"Our everyday life is searching for inspiration," says Lee. "But the important thing is we don't just arbitrarily pick any color… we have to have a really good story."

A Colorful Collaboration

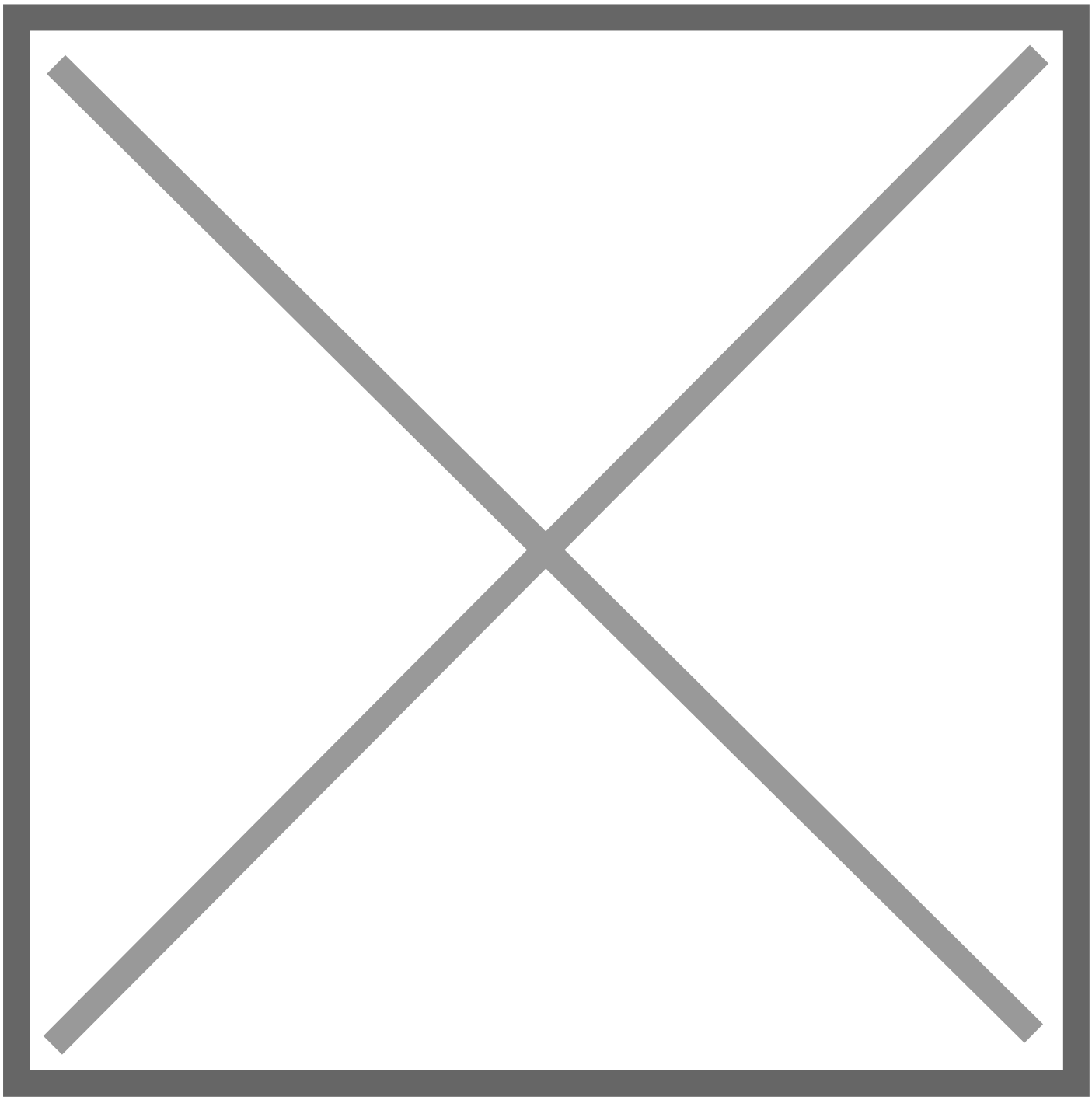


Bringing these colors to life is a collaborative effort. CMF teams in Newport Beach and Ann Arbor pitch concepts based on market trends. After narrowing these down with the planning group, the final concepts are developed into physical paint prototypes to test different finishes like metallics and pearlescence.

“We usually paint half a vehicle to evaluate the color at full scale,” says Jimenez. “A color can look great on a small panel, but when you see it on something as large as a Sequoia, your reaction can be completely different. Sometimes it doesn’t feel right—and sometimes it looks even better than you expected.”

The ultimate choice is made only after painting a full-size vehicle, allowing marketing, planning and engineering teams to evaluate the color and its story in person before committing to the release.

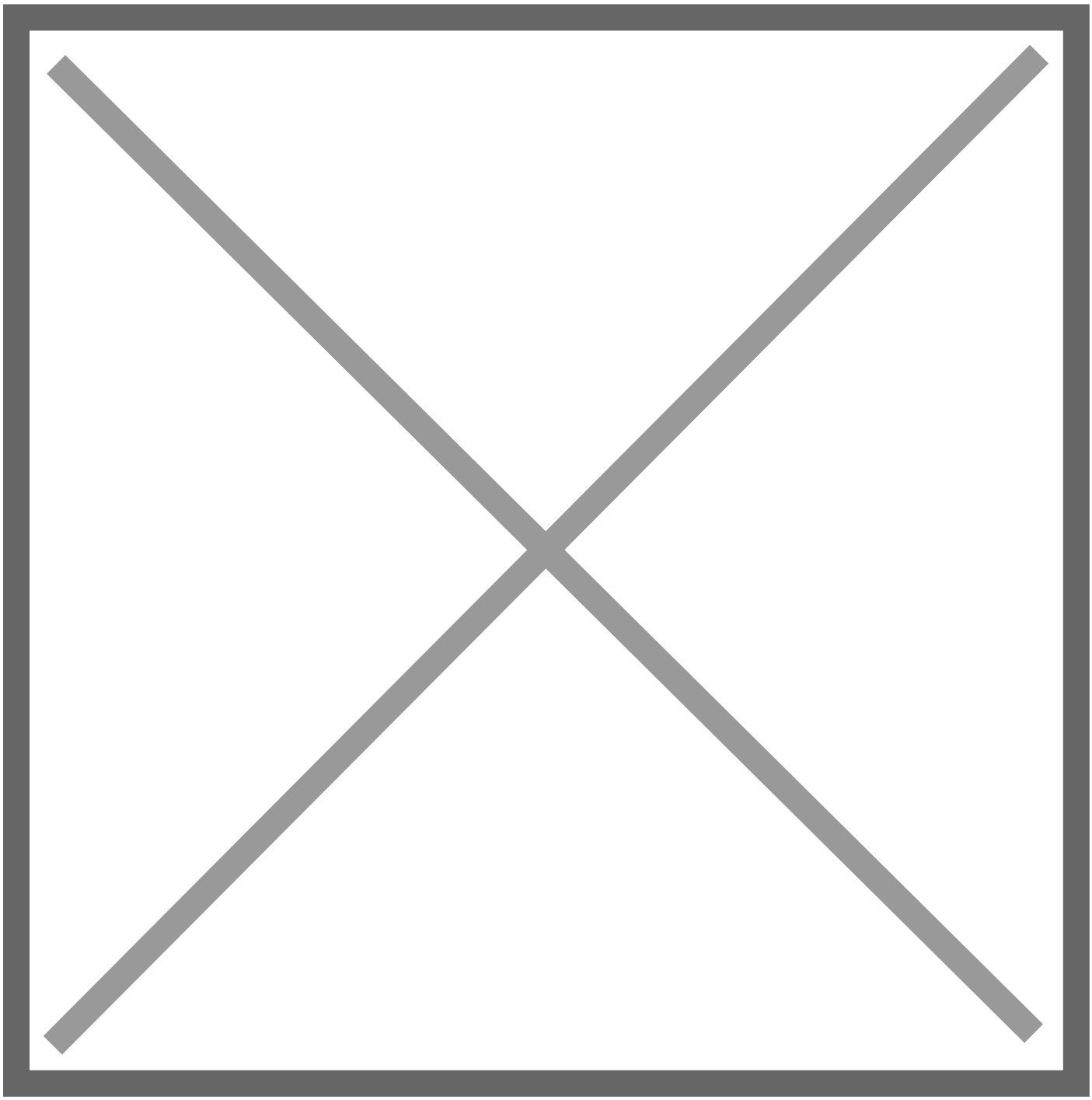
In the Paint



Once released, the impact of these colors extends far beyond the off-road community.

“If a color makes a strong impression as a TRD Pro color, it can find its way onto other products,” says Jimenez. “Cement is a great example. It started with TRD Pro and became popular across the broader Toyota lineup.”

Colorful Impact



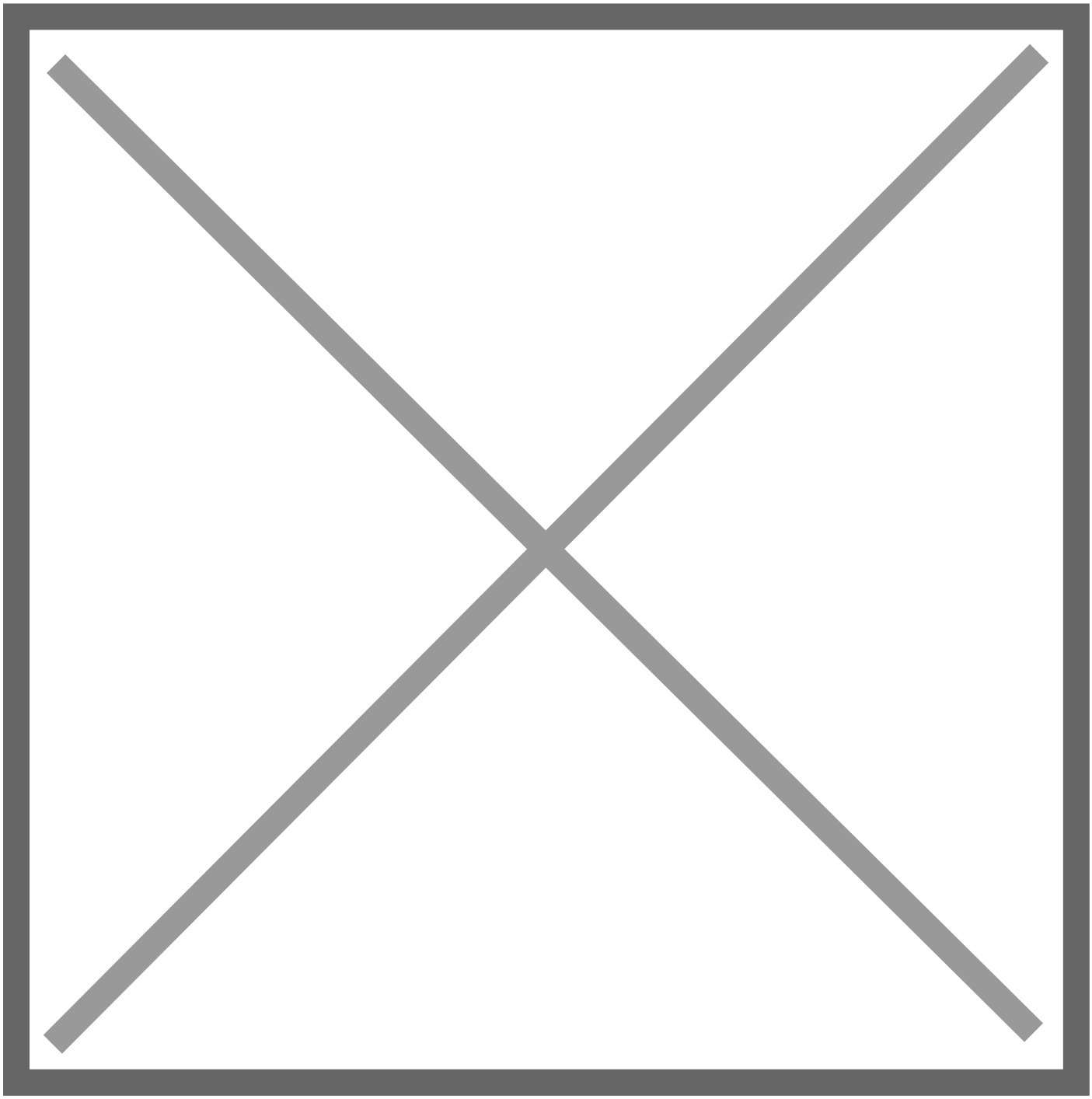
The impact of TRD Pro colors is measured by the real-world reactions they trigger. When Jimenez bought a Voodoo Blue 4Runner (model year 2019), he said it immediately turned heads.

“My son’s friends ran over to see the truck, and then their parents did too,” he recalls. “That’s when I realized what a powerful statement the color made. I continued getting compliments on that truck the entire time I owned it.”

For Lee, her standout colors are Mudbath (model year 2025) and Terra (model year 2024).

“Mudbath and Terra are the first ones that we initiated based on our trend research and our inspiration and then initiated them for the first time,” she said.

Rewarding Excellence



Ultimately, bringing these colors to life is deeply rewarding, especially when those automotive designs cross over to influence trends in fashion and home décor, Lee says.

“That is the most rewarding part of my job when my intuition as a designer translates into our product in the automotive industry and then it influences other trends as well,” she said. “Those influences that I can possibly create for the industry and outside of the industry, that is very interesting and exciting.”

For Jimenez, nothing beats the thrill of bringing a head-turning design to fruition.

“The first thing you notice when you see a Wave Maker truck driving down the street is the color,” he says. “It has an incredible ability to draw attention, and it’s rewarding to see how strongly people respond to it.”