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Canadian industrial designs both practical and beautiful

How would you like to climb into a taxi without having to bend double, or take rides on a bus that drives on a glacier and on the world's only "sea bridge" passenger ferry?

These are all examples of innovative design in Canadian transportation. Not Canadian style, as you might refer to "Danish furniture". But designed in Canada and picking up international attention.

They are also, according to industrial designer Morley Smith, examples of how industrial designers have avoided "the trap" of being downgraded to cosmeticians. Mr. Smith has designed a taxi that is easy to get into and has room for five in the back. He has also designed VIA Rail's LRC train and Montreal's metro cars. For him, "the trap" is definitely bad for designers' professional well-being.

"If we weren't innovative we'd be copying others, and if we did that we might as well not be designers," said Mr. Smith, a partner in Guillon, Smith and Marquart of Montreal.

Mr. Smith spoke for Canada's 300

industrial designers when he said good design is essential to whatever is being built. It makes the difference between success and failure, whether the product is a space ship or an office stapler. Designers are not artists dreaming improbable dreams. They are not Leonardo da Vinci conceiving the principle of the helicopter 500 years before technology caught up with the vision. Designers are practical people who contribute, along with engineers, manufacturers and others to product development.

"My partners feel strongly that industrial designers are not just window dressers," Mr. Smith continued, "and that's why we put our money into the taxi. We have proved that we are capable of producing a vehicle. The prototype has 20 000 kilometres on it. We've been invited twice to show it in Washington."

The GSM taxi, as it is known, is Mr. Smith's biggest gamble so far. As well as funding from Transport Canada's transportation development centre and the Quebec government, the taxi represents \$500 000 of the design firm's money.



This Canadian-designed taxi cab is a taxi first and not a standard family car. Designers Guillon, Smith and Marquart of Montreal invested \$500 000 in their cab.



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