

## Creative Creatures

*The ideas and the work of the American and European painters, songwriters, photographers, fiction and non-fiction authors, musicians, film makers, architects, designers, poets, and dreamers I met during my 20 years in America.*

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### # 14 / Marcel Vroom, industrial designer, Rotterdam, Netherlands

On his first visit to the U.S., Marcel Vroom and his then pregnant wife Anneke met us in Williams, Arizona. They had hiked into the Grand Canyon; we were temporarily staying in Matfield Green and had driven west to meet them and take them on a short tour of the Southwest which would end in Albuquerque. A year later—by then we were living in New Mexico—they returned, this time with their first daughter; and eight years later they came to visit again, with two tomboy daughters in tow.

These journeys are not the only ones Marcel and I made together. In the Netherlands, we had worked together from 1977 until the early 1990s. Marcel studied engineering, and more specific industrial design, at Delft University of Technology before becoming an assistant designer at the studio in The Hague where I was one of the owner/partners. Years later, he became a full partner first at a new studio in Amsterdam, then of another new design enterprise in Rotterdam. It was in our Amsterdam period that we experienced one of our strangest journeys. Someone we worked for and with tried to steal a prototype and the drawings of a product Marcel had designed. This person was disturbed enough to get on our tracks as soon as we had started safeguarding the product, and we suspected he would not hesitate at breaking into our studio and homes to reach his goal; therefore we kept the drawings and specifications with us at all times. One day during our “escape” we returned too late to our parking garage in the city and found it closed until the next day. We called a local friend who lent us one of his

cars. It was a formidable Renault road-racer and very expensive, too. So, we decided to parade it in front of a few café terraces to impress the girls before we continued our journey. Later, halfway, we noticed we needed gas. At a freeway gas station, Marcel crawled out to work the pump. I noticed he kept circling the car and I stepped out to ask why. "I can't find the bloody tank," he whispered, because by then a small admiring and envious crowd had assembled. Nonchalantly kicking the tires I, too, circled the "bolide" to find where the gas had to go in. No luck. In the end, we had to sneak out humbly and without gas. We barely made it to the next gas station, from where, in the days before cell phone, we called the owner, who wasn't home. We waited and waited and finally got in touch. "Uh, Ezra, can you, uh, please tell us, uh ..." We learned there was a switch in the dash compartment that would open a box under the hood that would give access to the gas tank. We arrived rather late at our destination.

Nevertheless, acknowledged for his technological insights as well as his future visions, Marcel designs, engineers and develops products, most of which have electronics involved. He became specialized in design for the medical sector but also worked on office furniture; home interior accessories such as remote controls of air-conditioning and heating, stoves and ovens; and a wide range of other "discoveries and inventions for the professional and consumer sectors." He received the 1995 Kho Liang le Award, the most coveted design career award in the Netherlands; and he worked in South-Korea as a guest-designer and as an adviser to producers in China long before the Chinese showed their new might.

Nature is one of his inspirations and 'Biomimicry' is one of his bibles, this extraordinary book written by American science author Janine Benyus in 1996 and finished while she was a writer in residence at The Land Institute in Matfield Green—and, yes, staying in what is now our Kansas home. "I am interested in anything and everything," says Marcel. "I find inspiration in science fiction, too; in the visual arts; in technology history; in fashion, the new media, the 'green' world; in interface and interactions; in user behavior." Sustainable design and production have his attention, of course. And he keeps his eyes open and his mind clear for sensor tech and rare technologies.

"I am playing with, fumbling with, the future," says Marcel, who already 25 years ago designed an image phone, which became installed in "The Home of the Future" project in the Netherlands. It is an energy-saving power box integrated with telephone and computer. Other products from his hands, often created through his networked design office MVAVD in collaboration with other specialists, are, for instance, an integrated control chair for off-shore applications; a bus stop display with dynamic travel information; a modular marine bridge consol with navigation and communication instruments; a ceiling-mounted patient elevator for hospitals; and various laboratory instruments. And not to forget: kitchen appliances; marine and lab furniture; and a fiber optic gyro compass for patrol boats, mega yachts and humbler sea vessels, and much coveted by drug smugglers, I presume.

Marcel's journeys continue, from Venice, Italy to visit its Biennale; to the Alps in Austria to ski with his daughters; to soon, possibly, Turkey where Bürosit has commissioned the design cooperative NWXSE, of which Marcel's MVAVD is an associate, to create a new office furniture series. Nowadays I travel with him via his website [www.mvavd.com](http://www.mvavd.com) (which, luckily, will never run out of gas).