

BLOG POST

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**A FIRESIDE TALK WITH THE UX CHIEF ENGINEER CHIKA KAKO**

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| **The amazing new Lexus UX is a tribute to the vision and leadership of Chief Engineer Chika Kako.**  |  |
| **Her goal was to create a new genre of crossover: one that is strong and stable, yet beautifully styled and agile.**  |

* **Designed for people attracted to sharp design rather than boxy SUVs**
* **Inspired by European luxury and Japanese design**
* **Driven by urbanites who appreciate hatchback-like handling**

At the recent UX launch in Stockholm, Lexus Europe spent time with Chika Kako discussing what inspired and motivated her and her team during the development of this amazing new Lexus:

**Q. Alongside Chief Engineer, your visiting card says you are also Executive Vice President of Lexus’ brand division. What will be the UX’s role in growing the Lexus marque?**

A. “In 2017 we launched the LC sports coupé to firmly position Lexus as a visionary and exciting luxury lifestyle brand. The LS flagship sedan and ES executive sedan consolidated this brand positioning. Now, with the first cars arriving early 2019, it’s the turn of the UX to create amazing experiences and welcome a new kind of customer to the Lexus brand.”

**Q. How will the UX deliver these ‘amazing experiences’?**

A. Through emotions. I believe it's a car that really connects with people’s emotions. When potential customers see the UX on the street for the first time, we hope they’ll say: “Wow, what a cool car!” Once attracted by the design, we want them to experience the car’s imaginative technology, Japanese craftsmanship and agile performance.”

**Q. How did market research influence the UX exterior design?**

A. “We began research in the USA in 2013, by conducting an extensive series of focus groups and home visits with the owners of competing vehicles. We learned the interviewees were underwhelmed by conventional SUV looks. They also told us they wanted a crossover that drives like a hatchback. Interestingly, the findings from Europe, Japan and China were all very similar to those in the USA.”

**Q. What inspired your team when designing the UX interior?**

A. “One of my missions was to enhance the emotional appeal of a car’s interior. A vehicle's cabin is composed of components such as the instrument panel, seats, and trim, but it’s the intelligent orchestration of these parts that matters most. We used the principles of a Japanese architectural concept called ‘engawa’ where the boundaries between inside and outside are seamlessly connected and ‘kansei’ engineering which aims to create an emotional bond between the customer and product.”

**Q. How much “Europe” is there in the new UX?**

A. “During my time working in Europe, I developed an appreciation of luxury as not just about materials but also about experiences. In the past we tended to picture luxury in terms of expense and extravagance, “Art de Vivre” is about enjoying values other than material wealth. This was an idea we developed in designing the new UX.”

**Q. What kind of people will buy the UX?**

A. “The UX’s concept keywords—“Creative Urban Explorer” and “Art de Vivre”—give rise to a target customer with an active lifestyle who enjoys vibrant urban environments and embraces pursuits like travel, cycling and DIY. Expressed in more concrete terms, that customer may be a young professional working in a creative job like publishing, but with a keen interest in modern design and sustainable living.”

**Q. Why is the UX not “just another crossover”?**

A. “Right from the beginning we set out to give the UX a unique character: a car that embodies solid crossover appeal, while inheriting the precise and responsive feel of a Lexus. The result is a truly innovative vehicle that handles like a hatchback whilst delivering elegant performance combined with peace of mind.”

**Q. Where does the name “UX” come from?**

A. “The UX vehicle name is derived from the concept keywords - “Urban + X-over (crossover) = UX.” Coincidentally, the first letters of “Creative Urban Explorer” form the word CUE, meaning opportunity. I actually love CUE as a clear and succinct expression of the vehicle concept.”

**Q. How does the UX meet the needs of women drivers?**

A. “Today, it’s very common to see women driving crossovers in the city, many of them allured by the powerful presence and sporty design. At the same time some find the manoeuvrability of a high body crossover off-putting. I wanted to counter this perception by offering a car with exceptionally nimble handling, that is as easy to drive as a hatchback.”

**Q. Finally, how did you motivate your team over the last 5 years?**

A. *(laughing)* “With a plant, would you believe! We faced many changing demands and challenges working on the new UX. I wanted a motif to express this, so I named our team email list after a Japanese plant called the ‘Lantana’. Despite its fragile appearance, the Lantana is actually very hardy and not easily affected by changes in environment. Inspired by this plant, I knew my team would grow stronger and stronger throughout the project.”

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