

AUTOMOTIVE

## Mercedes-Benz reveals Virgil Abloh G-Class creation

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*Virgil Abloh collaborated with Mercedes-Benz to create new artwork for the G-Class. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

German automaker Mercedes-Benz has unveiled a unique take on its G-Class through a collaboration with creative director and fashion designer Virgil Abloh.

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Project Gelndewagen is the result of a partnership between Mr. Abloh, men's artistic director at French fashion label Louis Vuitton and founder of streetwear brand Off-White, Mercedes' chief design officer Gorden Wagener. Collaborations are often valuable opportunities for luxury brands to reach untapped audiences, or present a different side of their persona.

"This collaboration is a departure from the traditional German approach to design," said Rebecca Miller, founder/principal of **Miller&company**, New York. "It embraces more informed visual elements that are often not addressed in such vibrant colors, forms or textures.

"Architects are closely aligned in discipline with engineers who focus on structure and performance," she said. "Fashion designers and interior share a similar ethos.

"Mercedes and Virgil are combining all four disciplines into this collaboration."

Mercedes-Benz x Virgil Abloh

Mercedes-Benz began teasing the new partnership on social media in late July. The project was described as a "new vision of luxury, defined by the sharing of ideas and disciplines" ([see story](#)).

Project Gelndewagen was revealed through a livestream on Mercedes-Benz social channels, including YouTube and Twitter.

The film begins with a closeup of the G-Wagon's ignition, followed by the wheels of a car racing on a track. A bright flash of light then turns into a bird's eye view of snowy and forest landscapes before the scene settles on the Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart.

*Mercedes-Benz unveils Project Gelndewagen*

Mercedes' vice president of marketing, Bettina Fetzer, appears in a holographic-like video to introduce the project.

"This collaboration is redefining creative exchange and cultural enrichment in the digital space to inspire you to envision new possibilities," Ms. Fetzer tells the audience.

As she speaks, archival images of the SUV are shown alongside digital renderings of a white G-Class. The camera shifts to a computer-generated white hall, with picture-in-picture showing footage of traditional G-Class vehicles.

Mr. Wagener begins speaking, sharing his design philosophy during his time at Mercedes-Benz. He is soon joined by his collaborator, Mr. Abloh.

"My design career has been equally informed by formal training just as much as life experience," Mr. Abloh says.

"Mercedes-Benz for me is a brand that embodies emotion I don't look at it as simply a transportation company."

The men explain that they began the project by deconstructing the classic G-Class design, even stripping the interior.

"This is a very progressive step towards the future of luxury," Mr. Wagener explains.

Finally the camera comes to a large set of doors that open into an empty, digital hall, with the exception of the G-Class covered by a sheet. Dramatically, the sheet is sign gliding off to reveal the new G-Class design.



*Revealing Virgil Abloh's interpretation of the G-Class. Image credit: Mercedes-Benz*

Through Project Gelndewagen, the G-Class has been reimagined as a race car. The body has been lowered to the ground, complemented with racing tires.

Inside, the G-Class has the steering wheel from the automaker's Formula 1 car and seats from Mercedes' DTM racers. Safety elements are red, which pop against the stark white interior and blue accents.

"Mercedes has opened up its design structure to collaborate with a fashion designer who has cross-pollinated details of race cars, fashion and sculpture into a one-of-a-kind off-road car design," Ms. Miller said. "The lens from which Virgil Abloh creates is one that focuses on the future which aligns with his designs for fashion."

A replica of the G-Class will be auctioned off in October during a Sotheby's online event. The winning bidder will also have access to Mr. Wagener and Mr. Abloh.

Interested fans can also explore the reinvented G-Class through an augmented reality mobile experience.

#### Luxury collaborations

Creative collaborations can be a major draw for younger affluents.

According to new research from BCG and Altagamma, one of the key emerging trends in the luxury business is partnerships, as brands seek to bring a sense of newness to consumers.

These collaborations are particularly finding favor with younger generations and Chinese shoppers. Across age groups and nationalities, luxury buyers show a heavy awareness of tie-ups and 50 percent have invested in special-edition merchandise, a figure that is likely to grow as Gen Z and millennial buyers grow their influence and purchasing power ([see story](#)).

"Collaborations between luxury brands or leaders feed innovation and thus market share," Ms. Miller said.

"Innovation has the ability to showcase creativity beyond a brand's standard offerings providing the consumer with exposure to the brand's evolution, an eye to the future, feeding opportunity for business."

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