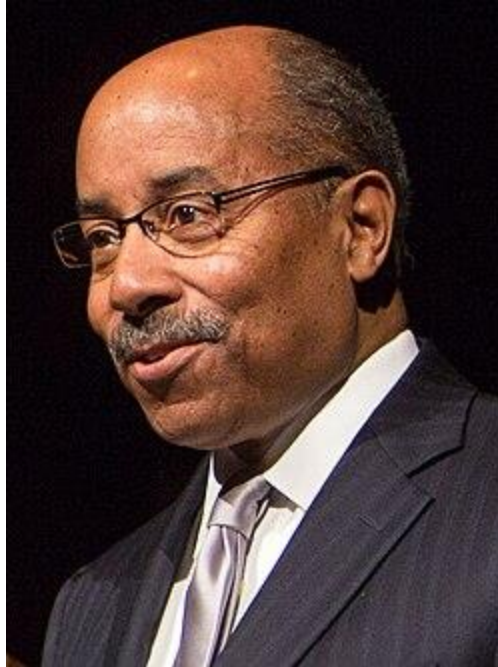




Ed Welburn (b. 1950) is an automotive designer and was the highest-ranking executive in the global automotive industry. Welburn cites his involvement in the design of over 500 different automobiles, “including those by Cadillac, Buick, Chevrolet, GMC, Opel/Vauxhall, Holden, Hummer, Saab, Wuling, Baojun, Oldsmobile, Saturn, and Pontiac.” He holds an Honorary Doctorate from the Center for Creative Studies in Detroit, and multiple Lifetime Achievement Awards.



Scale model of 2010 Chevrolet Camaro GS Racecar Concept, 2010. Designed by Ed Welburn. Created by General Motors Corporation.

Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, Gift of Edward T. Welburn, Jr., © General Motors Corporation.

Edward T. Welburn, Jr. was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1950. As a young boy, his parents took him to the 1958 Philadelphia International Auto Show where the Cadillac Cyclone concept car was being displayed. This experience convinced Welburn he wanted to become an automotive designer. He would later write to General Motors asking what it would take to join their ranks, and the company wrote back advising him to keep sketching cars and to study industrial design.

Welburn enrolled at Howard University in 1969 studying fine arts and focusing on sculpture and product design. Following his graduation in 1972, Welburn realized his childhood dream and began his career at General Motors as an associate designer in the Advanced Design Studios (he had interned at GM in 1971). In his hiring, Welburn was the first African American designer ever at GM. In 1973, he joined the Buick Exterior Studio where he worked on projects like the Buick Riviera and Buick Park Avenue. He was assigned to the Oldsmobile Exterior Studio in 1975, where he managed a number of successful auto designs including the Oldsmobile Aerotech speed-record vehicle, which set two world records for speed, travelling more than 257 miles per hour in 1987. In 1988, Welburn assisted in the development of the Indianapolis 500 Pace Car, an Oldsmobile Cutlass Supreme that received an Industrial Designers Society of America award for Design Excellence.

Welburn was promoted to Chief Designer of the Oldsmobile Studio in 1989. Under his tenure, the studio produced the Oldsmobile Antares concept car and the Oldsmobile Intrigue, both of which received AutoWeek Magazine awards at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit. In 1996, Welburn began an assignment in Germany working on future global design programs at Saturn. Two years later, he was named Director of GM's Advanced Design in Warren, Michigan. Welburn's team was to be responsible for the development of all GM concept vehicles across all GM brands. On trend with his continued promotion, Welburn was named Executive Director of Design and Body-On-Frame Architectures in 2002 overseeing designs for cars like the Hummer H3 and Cadillac Escalade. He would become the Vice President of GM Design North America in 2003, the sixth Design leader in GM's century-long history.

In 2005, Welburn was named to the newly created position of Vice President of GM Global Design, the first person to lead all design at GM. As VP of Global Design, he created ten Design Centers in seven countries around the world, managing a team of 2,500 across the U.S., Germany, Korea, China, Australia, Brazil, and India. As head of GM Design, Welburn notes he also oversaw the design of “the U.S. presidential limousine, known as ‘The Beast’ for presidents Obama, Trump, and Biden” as well as “the update and restoration of 17 historic General Motors concept cars.”

