



Finding Aid for

**VIRGIL M. EXNER PAPERS, 1913-1986  
(bulk 1931-1973)**

**Accession 1741**

Finding Aid Published: April 2011



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## OVERVIEW

**REPOSITORY:** Benson Ford Research Center  
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**ACCESSION NUMBER:** 1741

**CREATOR:** Exner, Virgil M. (Virgil Max), 1909-1973

**TITLE:** Virgil M. Exner papers, 1913-1986

**INCLUSIVE DATES:** 1913-1986

**BULK DATES:** 1931-1973

**QUANTITY:** 6 cubic feet and 23 oversize boxes.

**LANGUAGE:** The materials are in English.

**ABSTRACT:** Virgil Exner was an automobile designer who worked for General Motors, Studebaker, Chrysler, and his own company Virgil Exner, Inc. The collection consists of concept and engineering drawings, renderings, photographs, correspondence and art work.

## **ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION**

- ACCESS RESTRICTIONS:** The papers are open for research.
- COPYRIGHT:** Copyright has been transferred to the Henry Ford by the donor. Copyright for some items in the collection may still be held by their respective creator(s).
- ACQUISITION:** Donation, 1990.
- RELATED MATERIAL:** Related material within The Henry Ford:  
- See also the Automotive Design Oral History Collection, Accession 1673, Virgil M. Exner and Virgil M. Exner Jr.
- PREFERRED CITATION:** Item, folder, box, accession 1741, Virgil M. Exner papers, Benson Ford Research Center, The Henry Ford.
- PROCESSING INFORMATION:** Collection processed by Terry Hoover, March 2011.
- DESCRIPTION INFORMATION:** Finding aid prepared by Terry Hoover, March, 2011, using DACS, LOC EAD, and local guidelines.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Born in 1909 in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Virgil Max Exner exhibited artistic talent and an interest in automobile design early in life. He studied art at the University of Notre Dame in Indiana (1927-1928) but left before completing a degree to take employment as a layout artist and illustrator with a South Bend, Indiana firm, Advertising Artists. It was while at Advertising Artists, that Exner began his association with Studebaker Corporation, who held an account with the agency. Exner's illustrations for Studebaker catalogs are among his finest work in this period.

In 1934, Exner moved to Harley Earl's Art and Colour Section at General Motors Corporation, where he was quickly promoted to the position of Chief Designer for Pontiac Studios. After only four years at GM, however, Exner was lured away to join Raymond Loewy's industrial design firm and was placed in charge of the Studebaker Corporation account. Now, as chief styling engineer for Studebaker, Exner was responsible for developing several new lines of automobiles: the first Champion in 1939, a new line of Champion, Commander, and President models in 1941, and the 1947 post-war model, the Starlight coupe.

In 1949, Exner joined Chrysler Corporation as head of the newly established Advanced Design Studio. By 1953, Exner was put in charge of all corporation styling, and in 1957, he was named Vice-president of Styling, a post he held until his retirement from Chrysler in 1961. While at Chrysler, Exner was responsible for the development of sixteen "idea" cars, built by the Ghia firm of Italy. These cars were used by Chrysler as styling survey and sales promotion products. In the area of production vehicles, Exner was responsible for the "Forward Look" lines of 1955 and 1956. His revolutionary line of 1957 "wedge theme" cars were the culmination of the Forward Look line and epitomize Exner's contribution to Chrysler Corporation, to the automobile industry, and to the art of automotive styling.

Exner resigned from Chrysler in 1961 to begin his own design and development firm, Virgil Exner Inc., with his son Virgil, Jr., also an automotive designer. Most notable was Virgil Exner Sr. series of "classic revivals" (redesigning classic cars for a modern market) such as his design of the 1963 Mercer-Cobra, the 1966 Duesenberg, and his late-1960s Stutz Blackhawk. Until his death in 1973, Exner and his son were also involved in a variety of automotive and pleasure boat design initiatives.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT

The materials comprising the collection were received from Virgil Exner Jr. in 1990. Prior to donating the collection to the Henry Ford Museum & Greenfield Village Research Center, Exner Jr. had organized the materials into numerous groups and prepared detailed labels identifying the specific design project or period in his father's career which they documented. This original arrangement was retained as the basis for the collection's arrangement; only obvious mistakes in filing were corrected.

The collection has been divided into four series. The **Student Work series**, 1909-1928 (.2 cubic feet and oversize) is comprised of adolescent drawings, student sketches and early

design work; **Design Projects series**, 1928-1973 consists of five subseries arranged by company. The **Advertising Artists subseries**, 1928-1934 (.2 cubic ft. and oversize), contains concept drawings, renderings, and product literature detailing Exner's design work, particularly with Studebaker. The **General Motors subseries**, 1934-1938 (.2 cubic ft. and oversize) 1934-1938 contains concept drawings, renderings, photographs and product literature relating to GM design work and includes an early Exner patent for a bumper. The **Raymond Loewy subseries**, 1938-1972 (.4 cubic ft. and oversize) documents Exner's work for Raymond Loewy and Studebaker and includes concept drawings of automobiles and race cars, photographs of automobiles and design facilities and personal, a midget racing engineering notebook. The **Chrysler subseries**, 1949-1961 (1.4 cubic ft. and oversize), is arranged by date and project and is made up of concept and engineering drawings, renderings, product literature, photographs, and periodical articles (some by Virgil Exner). The **Virgil Exner Inc. subseries**, 1961-1973 (2 cubic ft. and oversize), is organized by project and contains concept and engineering drawings, renderings, product literature, photographs, and transparencies and deals with Exner's work on both automobile and boat design. The **Art Work series**, 1930-1973 (oversize) contains actual art work created by Virgil Exner and consists of watercolors, acrylics, paint on canvas and numerous charcoal and pencil sketches of non automotive subjects. The **Virgil Exner Jr. series**, 1940-1959 (.1 cubic ft. and 1 oversize folder) collects together artistic and biographical materials related to Virgil Jr. It should be noted, however, that much of the design work completed by Virgil Exner Inc. represents collaboration between Virgil Sr. and Jr., and that often the principal design responsibility was not recorded.

Additional biographical information on Virgil M. Exner Sr. and Jr. can be obtained in the bound Automotive Design Oral History *Virgil M. Exner Sr. and Jr.*

## ARRANGEMENT

The collection is arranged in four series, and several subseries:

- I. Student Work
- II. Design Projects
  - II a. Advertising Artists
  - II b. General Motors
  - II c. Raymond Loewy
  - II d. Chrysler
  - II e. Virgil Exner Inc.
- III. Art Work
- IV. Virgil Exner Jr.

## SUBJECT TERMS

### Names, Personal and Corporate

Exner, Virgil M. (Virgil Max), 1909-1973

Exner, Virgil M. (Virgil Max) Jr.

Loewy, Raymond, 1893-1986

Virgil Exner, Inc.

### Subjects

Automobile industry and trade.

Automobiles--Design and construction.

Industrial designers.

Chrysler automobile.

General Motors automobiles.

Bugatti automobile.

Duesenberg automobile.

Advertising--Automobiles.

Boats and boating--Design and construction.

### Genre and Form

Design drawings.

Sketches.

Photographs.

## BOX AND FOLDER LISTING

**Box no.**                      **Description**

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### Box 1

#### STUDENT WORK

##### Childhood (1909-1924)

- Art Work, 1913-1924
- Printed Materials, undated
- Buchanan High School (1925-1926)
- Art Work, 1925-1926
- Yearbook, 1925
- Yearbook, 1926

##### Notre Dame University (1927-1928)

- Art Work, 1927-1928

#### DESIGN PROJECTS

##### Advertising Artists (SEE ALSO OVERSIZE BOXES 11, 12, 23)

- Printed Materials, 1931
- Product Literature, Studebaker, 1932

##### General Motors

- Photographs, 1934-1938 (Personnel and Facilities)
- Printed Materials, 1937 and undated
- Patent, 1940

##### Loewy/Studebaker

- Correspondence, 1937-1948
- Midget Race Car Engineering Notebook, 1947
- Photographs
  - General, CA. 1937-1948
  - Personnel and Facilities, CA. 1937-1948
- Periodicals and Clippings, 1937-1948 and 1972

### Box 2

#### Chrysler (1949-1961)

- Printed Materials, 1949-1961 (Career Articles)

1951

- Chrysler K-310
  - Photographs
  - Printed Material
  - Tail Light Patent
- General Correspondence
- Miscellaneous Design Drawings
  - Concept Drawings

1952

- Chrysler C-200 (Photographs)
- Chrysler Special
  - Photographs

Periodicals and Clippings  
Crown Impera (Photographs)  
Chrysler Imperial (Photographs)  
1953-1958  
Chrysler Idea Cars (Photographs)

**Box 3**

1953  
Desoto Adventurer I  
Photographs  
Printed Material  
D'elegance (Photographs)

1954  
Dodge Firearrow I Roadster (Photographs)  
Dodge Firearrow II (Photographs)  
Dodge Firearrow III (Photographs)  
Correspondence  
Ghia Program  
Chrysler Design Speech  
Photographs (Preview Show of the 1955 Line)

1955  
Falcon Roadster (Photographs)  
Flight Sweep I Roadster (Photographs)  
K Series Limo (Concept Drawings)  
Special Plymouth (Owned by Mrs. Virgil Exner Sr.)  
Order Specifications and Trim Samples  
Photographs (some color)  
Photographs (Personal of Virgil Exner Sr.)  
Periodicals and Clippings

1956  
Chrysler 300 (Photographs)  
Dual Ghia I (Photographs)  
Falcon (Proposal)  
Photographs  
Exner Family  
Proposals For Future Lines  
Periodicals and Clippings

1957  
Dodge Dart (Photographs)  
Correspondence  
Design Drawings  
Photographs  
Chrysler Product Line for 1957  
Design Studio Personal  
Proposals for Future Lines  
Periodicals and Clippings



1958-1959

Design Drawings (Sketches of Ford & GM Proposed Automobiles)  
Photographs  
Printed Materials  
    Product Literature for Chrysler Presentation Show  
    Press Releases

1960

Plymouth Valiant (Photographs (some color))  
Printed Materials (Presentation Paper by Virgil Exner Sr. at SAA Meeting)  
XNR  
    Photographs  
        Chrysler Showroom  
        Clay Model In Progress  
        Detail of Headlight Design  
        Finished Clay Model  
        Work at Ghia  
        Proving Grounds and Philadelphia Auto Show  
        Color Transparencies  
Dual Ghia L 6.4 (Photographs (some color))  
Photographs (Designers Virgil Exner, Bill Mitchell, George Walker)

1961

Plymouth Asimmetrica (Photographs)

**Box 5**

Chrysler 250 (Photographs)  
Ghia Turboflite (Gas/Turbine Show Car) (Product Literature)  
Flitewing (Photographs)  
Photographs  
    Unidentified Clay Models  
    Proposals for 1962 "S" Line  
    Torino Auto Show  
    Chrysler Executives  
    Virgil Exner  
Periodical Article about 1962 "S" Line

**Virgil Exner, Inc (SEE ALSO OVERSIZE BOXES)**

Esquire Magazine Article, 1963  
    Concept Design Drawings (pencil on paper)  
    Photographs (some color)  
    *Esquire* article and Clippings  
Renwal Model Cars, 1964-1967  
    Concept Drawings  
    Photographs, 1964-1967  
        Concept Drawings  
        Clay Model and Color Transparencies  
Product Literature

Cooper Development Assoc. Mercer-Cobra  
Correspondence, 1963-1965 an undated  
Concept Drawings, 1963 (Full Body Layout)  
Photographs, 1963-1965  
    Black & white and color (5 folders)  
    Color Transparencies  
Printer Materials, 1964-1965 and 1977  
    Periodical Articles  
    Product Literature

**Box 7**

Duesenberg  
Correspondence, 1964-1968 and undated  
Blueprints  
    Chassis Lay-out, 1964  
    Product Logo, 1964-1965  
Photographs  
    Clay Models, 1964-1965  
    Concept Drawings 1964-1965  
    Mannequin in process at Ghia ca.1965  
    Finished Car, 1964  
    Color Photographs and Transparencies, 1964-1968  
    Negatives (see Box 31)  
Printed Materials  
    Periodicals and Clippings, 1965-1966  
    Press Releases, 1966  
    Product Literature, 1966

**Box 8**

Stutz Blackhawk  
    Concept Drawings, 1968-1969 (2 folders)  
    Correspondence, 1968-1972 and undated  
    Photographs, 1968-1972 (some Color)  
        Clay Models  
        Color Transparencies  
        Negatives (see Box 31)  
    Product Literature  
ST/E (concept car)  
    Photographs, 1962  
        Clay Models  
        Color Transparencies  
    Periodical Articles, 1963  
International Grand Prix Replica (Correspondence, 1964)  
Pinin-Farina (Correspondence, 1963)  
Bugatti  
    Correspondence and Invoices, 1965

- Concept Drawings, ca. 1964-1965
  - Photographs, 1965-1965 (some color)
    - Clay Model
    - Finished
    - Color Transparencies
    - Negatives (see Box 31)
  - Printed Materials
    - Periodicals and Clippings, 1965-1966 and 1984
    - Body Specifications and Brochures, 1965
  - Bugatti-Taylor Variations
    - Photographs, ca. 1965
    - Clay Models
    - Color Transparencies
    - Concept Drawings
    - Negatives (see Box 31)
  - Sports Suburban
    - Photographs, ca. 1968
    - Concept Drawings
    - Clay Models
    - Color Transparencies
  - Circus Velvet
    - Correspondence, 1966-1971 and Undated
    - Photographs, 1966 (Concept Drawings)
  - Dow Chemical Car Model
    - Photographs, ca. 1966 (some color)
    - Concept Drawings
    - Color Transparencies
  - Cooper Development Assoc. (CDA)
    - Concept Drawings, ca. 1963
    - Photographs, ca 1963-1965
    - Design Drawings
    - Models
    - Color Transparencies
  - Miscellaneous Automobile Design Projects
    - Correspondence, 1973
    - Printed Materials
      - Clippings, 1966
      - Article on Styling by Virgil Exner, 1967
      - Testimony Before Senate Committee on Commerce, 1966
- Box 10**
- Photographs
    - Ghia and Fiat, 1962-1965
    - Exner Design Team, 1962-1965
    - Unidentified Clay Models, 1962-1964
    - Unidentified Automobile Renderings, ca. 1960s
    - Color Transparencies, ca. 1960s

- Negatives (see Box 31)
- Boat Design
  - Exner-Hobbs
    - Photographs
      - Virgil Exner Jr. & Sr. and Robert Hobbs, 1962
      - Color Rendering, ca. 1962 (unidentified)
    - Printer Material
      - Company Prospectus, 1962
      - Periodical and Clippings, 1962-1963
  - Buehler-Turbocraft
    - Photographs
      - Boat Model, ca. 1962
      - Color Transparency, ca. 1962
    - Printed Material
      - Periodical and Product Literature, 1963 and 1966-1967
  - Stutz, ca. 1970 (Sport Fishing Boat)
    - Correspondence, 1971
    - Patent, 1971
    - Boat Model Photographs, ca 1971-1972 (2 folders)
  - Miscellaneous Boat Designs
    - Photographs
      - Crombex, Clay Model, ca 1970s
      - Brunswick/Dinoc, Clay Model, ca. 1970s
      - Riva, Clay Model, ca. 1970s
      - Color Transparencies, 1965

**Virgil Exner, Jr.**

- Printed Materials
  - Newspaper and Clippings, 1947, 1954
  - Periodical and Clippings, 1959

**Box 11 (oversize)**

**DESIGN PROJECTS**

**Advertising Artists**

- Miscellaneous Consumer Products, undated
- Studebaker
  - Advertising Art, 1932 (2 folders)
  - Concept Drawings, undated (Automobiles and Race Cars) (2 folders)
  - Product Literature, 1932-1934

**Chrysler**

- Society of Illustrators Awards, 1955 and 1961
- Photograph, 1961 (Portrait Virgil Exner)

**Virgil Exner, Inc (1961-1973)**

- Esquire Magazine Article, 1963
- Concept Drawings (2 folders)
- Rendering

Cooper Development Association (CDA) Mercer-Cobra, 1962-1966  
    Photograph, undated (Rendering)  
Duesenberg, 1964 (Clippings)

Bugatti, undated (Clay Model Photographs)  
Bugatti-Taylor Variations, undated Photographs (Concept Drawings and  
    Renderings)  
Dow Chemical Car Model, 1972 (Newspaper Article)

**Box 12 (oversize)**

**STUDENT WORK**

**Notre Dame University (1927-1928)**

    Art Work, 1927-1928 (Watercolor Scene)

**DESIGN PROJECTS**

**Advertising Artists, 1931-1932 (Advertising Art)**

**General Motors**

    Concept Drawing, 1937 (Race Car)  
    Correspondence, 1938 (Farewell Note from Pontiac Staff)  
    Photographs, undated (Rendering, Pontiac Grill)

**Loewy/Studebaker (1938-1949)**

    Photographs, 1940-1948 (Studebaker Automobiles)

**Chrysler (1949-1966)**

    1951 Unidentified Concept Drawings, undated  
    1952  
        Chrysler C-200 (Concept Drawings)  
        Chrysler Special (Presentation Piece)  
    1953  
        D'elegance (Photographs)  
        Chrysler Corporation (Product Literature for Chrysler, Imperial, Dodge)  
    1955  
        Imperial (Product Literature)  
        Voss and Gitch (Concept Drawings)  
    1957  
        Chrysler Corporation (Clippings)

**Box 13 (oversize)**

    1960  
        XNR  
            Concept Drawings  
            Photograph (Virgil Exner in XNR)  
            Printed Materials  
    1961 Chrysler 250 (Concept Drawings)  
**Virgil Exner, Inc (1961-1973)**  
    Esquire Magazine Article, 1963  
    Concept Drawings, 1963

Photographs, 1963 (Renderings)  
Magazine Layout Drawing  
Renwal Model Cars, undated (Concept Drawings)  
Cooper Development Association (CDA) Mercer-Cobra, 1962-1966  
(Concept Drawings)  
Duesenberg, 1964-1968  
Concept Drawings  
Renderings  
Photographs  
Models  
Renderings

**Box 14 (oversize)**

Stutz Blackhawk, 1968-1972  
Concept Drawings  
Photographs  
Concept Drawings  
Models  
Renderings  
Renderings  
ST/E  
Renderings, 1962  
Photographs, 1962 (Clay Models)  
International Vintage Grand Prix Replica, 1964 (Concept Drawings)

**Box 15 (oversize)**

Pinin-Farina, 1968  
Concept Drawings  
Photographs  
Models  
Renderings

**Box 15 (continued)**

Bugatti, 1965 (Renderings)  
Sports Suburban, undated (Concept Drawings)  
Photographs  
Concept Drawings  
Models  
Circus Velvet, 1966-1971 (Concept Drawings )  
Photographs, undated (Renderings)  
Renderings, undated

**Box 16 (oversize)**

Dow Chemical Car Model, 1967  
Concept Drawings, undated  
Renderings, undated

Cooper Development Association (CDA) Mercer-Cobra, 1962-1966

Concept Drawings, undated

Renderings, undated

Miscellaneous Automobile Design Projects

Concept Drawings, 1962-1964

Renderings, 1962-1964

Printed Material

Advertising Tear Sheets, 1964

Designer of the Year Award, 1965

**Box 17 (oversize)**

Miscellaneous Automobile Design Projects

Concept Drawings, 1965-1969 and undated

Automobiles (9 folders)

Race Cars

Scrapbook Pages, ca 1949-1963

**Box 18 (oversize)**

Boat Design

Buehler-Turbocraft, 1965-1966 and undated (Concept Drawings)

Miscellaneous Boat Drawings

Concept Drawings, 1962-1967, 1969-1971 and undated

Photographs, 1964-1965, 1969-1972

**Box 19 (oversize)**

Concept Drawings, 1972

Photographs, 1972 and undated

**Box 20 (oversize)**

Rolled Concept and Engineering Drawings

Chrysler 200-C, 1952

XNR, 1960

Duel Ghia L 6.4, 1960

Chrysler 250, 1961

Esquire Magazine Layout, 1963

Mercer-Cobra, 1963

International Vintage Grand Prix Replica, 1964

Pinin-Farina, 1963

Bugatti, 1965

Miscellaneous Drawings, 1962-1968

**Box 21 (oversize)**

Rolled Concept and Engineering Drawings, 1961-1971

**Box 22 (oversize)**

**ART WORKS**

["River Scene"], Transparent Watercolor, 1935

["Alpine Snow Scene"], Transparent Watercolor, 1957  
"Canyon Wash," 1960  
Sketches and Drawings  
    Ballet Scenes (pencil on paper)  
    Castles (pencil on paper)  
    Figures (some color)  
    Landscapes (pencil on paper)  
Miscellaneous Drawings and Sketches, undated

**Box 23 (oversize)**

**DESIGN PROJECTS**

**Advertising Artists (1928-1934)**

Advertising Drawings  
Renderings (2 folders)

**Virgil Exner, Inc (1961-1973)**

Esquire Magazine Article, 1963 (Automobile Renderings)  
Duesenberg, undated (Automobile Renderings)

**Box 24 (oversize)**

Dusenbergs  
    Automobile Renderings, 1964  
Bugatti, (Concept Drawings)  
Sports Suburban, (Automobile Renderings)

**Box 25 (oversize)**

**VIRGIL EXNER, INC (1961-1973 (continued))**

Boats, 1962-1965, 1972, and undated (Concept Drawings and Renderings)

**Box 26 (oversize)**

Rolled Engineering Drawings  
    Buehler-Turbocraft, undated  
    Circus Velvet, undated  
    Dusenbergs, undated  
    Renwal, undated  
    Stutz, undated  
    Unidentified Yacht, 1972

**Box 27 (oversize)**

**ART WORKS**

["Woodland Scene"], 1930 (watercolor)  
["Harbor Scene"], 1959 (acrylic)  
["French Village Scene"], Watercolor, 1959 (acrylic)  
"Winslow to Gallup," Acrylic, ca. 1971 (acrylic)  
Sketches and Drawings  
    Ballet Scenes



Figures (color)  
Landscapes (some color)

**Box 28 (oversize)**

["Southwestern Scene"], ca. 1959 (oil on canvas)  
["Winter Farm Scene"], undated  
["Western Scene with Train"], undated

**Box 29 (oversize)**

Ballerina on Stage  
Ballerina in Dressing Room, 1957 (color pastel)

**Oversize Folders - Size G**

Folder 3 [Alpine Snow Scene], 1958 (watercolor)  
Folder 4 Afternoon Sun, 1960 (watercolor)  
Folder 5 California Scene--1884, 1970 (acrylic)  
Folder 6 Light Snow in the Pass, 1970 (acrylic)