



Stanford eCorner

Balancing Form and Functionality

Elon Musk, *SpaceX*

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The renowned entrepreneur Elon Musk talks about how the definition of beauty may vary based on the person, but also how humans consistently agree on some characteristics. In conversation with venture capitalist Steve Jurvetson, Musk also underscores balancing aesthetics and utility, using the Tesla Model S as an example of how to make a spacious family sedan look just as attractive as a sleek sports car.



Transcript

If you want to make something beautiful, you want to trigger whatever fundamental aesthetic algorithms-- like in your brain, you have, I think, some intrinsic elements that represent beauty, and that trigger the emotion of appreciation of beauty in your mind. And I think that these are actually relatively consistent among people-- I mean, not completely. Not everyone likes the same thing, but there's a lot of commonality. But I think it is important to combine aesthetic design with functionality. If you say what was really hard about, say, the Model S or the Model X was to combine aesthetics and utility-- so to balance the two. You can make a car look very good by giving it certain proportions-- like making it sort of low and slim. But if you do that, the utility is significantly affected. So the big challenge with, say, the Model S was trying to figure out how do we get five adults plus two kids-- because we wanted to have a seven-seater. It seems like the Dragon and every Tesla has room for seven. Seven.

Five children, I can see that might be an important design parameter. I think we should take the whole family on the spacecraft. But the big challenge with the S was having a car that had a high utility and looked good. And the same with the X. So to make a sports car look good is relatively easy. But to make a sedan look good, or an SUV look good is quite difficult. And I think another principle is, you want to have it feel bigger on the inside than it looks on the outside. And that's also a really hard thing to do. And then really pay attention to the little details.