Driven by Personality: Exploring the Relationship between Custom Cars and Self-expression

Tharwa Dalansi

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Tharwa Dalansi
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Custom Car Culture (CCC) is a form of creativity that emerges from personal identities and passions. It involves the restoration, modification and personal adornment of commercially manufactured cars. This process creates a journey, where the enthusiast goes through multiple phases of self-reflection. But due to a lack of local resources, Qatar-based CCC enthusiasts often have to send their cars abroad to Dubai or Japan in order to customize them, relinquishing creative control in the process. In response to these challenges, based on observations and interviews conducted among actual CCC enthusiasts, I develop a platform for engagement between these enthusiasts and Qatar-based makers. To illustrate the potential of this platform, I present a series of locally customized car grills and seat covers that reflect both the personality and narratives of Qatar-based CCC enthusiasts, providing them with more freedom, control, and ownership over the modification of their cars, a highly personal and creative process.
It wasn’t long after Henry Ford started mass producing the Model-T that customers determined that the standard cars produced by the booming automobile industry were simply insufficient. Based on the famous Ford quote “you can get it in any color as long as it is black,” mass production meant mass conformity and customers started to customize as a way to reclaim a sense of individual expression and identity.

The most common customizations during the early time included alterations such as suspension or engine modifications. By 1950, custom car builders began to incorporate body modifications (grills, fenders, windshields etc.) into their work along with new paint styles varying from drawings, textures, metallic and flake paint applications. Car customization is now a fully mature industry of aftermarket personalization. Car customization provides a way for people to realize the dream images they have in mind for their cars.

Cars serve many symbolic purposes besides transportation. They are often seen as a status symbol, people express themselves through their cars as driving becomes thrilling and enjoyable, and they provide a sense of individual freedom. Ultimately, cars are a symbol of freedom. Stradling et al. (1999) examined the relationship between willingness to reduce car use and two affective benefits of driving: being independent and getting a sense of personal identity from driving a car. They become an extension and enlargement of the human body.

Multiple subcultures have emerged from this custom culture such as Lowriders, Stance, JDM Tuned Japanese cars and Hot Rods. Hot rods may be one of the most well-known communities, exemplified by their extreme visual and mechanical modifications such as decorative paint jobs that included flames, scallops and hand-painted pinstripes of contrasting colors.

Cars serve many symbolic purposes besides transportation. They are often seen as a status symbol, people express themselves through their cars as driving becomes thrilling and enjoyable, and they provide a sense of individual freedom. Ultimately, cars are a symbol of freedom.

Figure 1: Lowriders
Figure 2: Form + Fun: Kenji Masahiro’s Nissan Silvia S13
Figure 3: Most Iconic JDM Ever
Figure 4: Hot Rod, Flame Job: Reminiscent of chapporis’ California Kid
Many car enthusiasts claim that the time spent bonding with and working on their cars is as valuable as spending time with their own families. Moreover, the vehicle is also part of their daily life and how they present themselves to their communities. Although car culture is a part of daily life in Qatar, car customization is not as prominent. People in Qatar tend to link cars with wealth and luxury and dismiss the efforts and time put into the making and creation of these custom vehicles. This is due to a lack of understanding of how car customization works and the effect it has on the vehicle and the enthusiast. The CCC community has expanded throughout the MENA region yet there is little to no literature and documentation on it specifically in this area.

On the contrary, these communities are receiving more recognition in other areas. In his article “Blue collar creativity”, Andrew Warren talked about the features that custom car designers possess: “Far from being victims, custom-car designers possess unique skills, motivations, techniques, and visions. Practical skills in fabrication, mechanics, spray painting, sound design, and use of automotive parts and materials combine with being adaptive, creative, resourceful, and social in ways poorly acknowledged in mainstream policy discourses.”

The custom car speaks about its owner, it reflects their identity and personality, as a form of self-expression and reflection. A high proportion of the enthusiasts in Qatar are expats (Italians, Filipinos, Pakistanis, North Africans etc.) Despite their different nationalities and cultural backgrounds, these people share the same interest and lifestyle – one that is often not looked upon favorably by Qatari authorities.

In researching Custom Car Culture here in Qatar, I found that the community was facing multiple issues in terms of the legalization of this practice, such as illegal forms of modifications, road rules etc. these were mentioned in their responses to the surveys I conducted. Additionally, others mentioned how their creativity is restricted because of the quality of work or the service of local car shops and garages.

My design focus intends to shed the light upon this community and explore different methodologies to present this vernacular creativity; My research places emphasis on the resourcefulness, imagination, and inventiveness, that this community brings the rest of society. Ultimately, the goal of any car modifier is to leave some unique aesthetic impression – a memory of a slick custom paint job, the smell of burning rubber, the thunder of an engine. My research explores these aspects using different mediums to further examine this topic.
Custom Car Culture’s influence on society is prevalent in Qatar and worldwide. It is getting increasingly addressed in traditional academic and creative disciplines, due to its effect on the community and individuals. Moreover, it adopts different perspectives and reflects one’s behavior and self-expression. Therefore, it is imperative to explore the ways personal experiences contribute to custom culture, including the ways it adapts to historical and technological evolutions.

Although Custom Car Culture relies heavily on the car owner, it is still driven by multiple elements such as time, space, and limitations in terms of national rules and product restrictions.
As this culture of self-expression grew, so did interest in introducing it to a bigger audience, by the media, to educate non-custom car enthusiasts about the good sides of this global expression. TV Shows such as “West Coast Customs,” “Pimp My Ride,” and “Top Gear” were an inspiration and the starting point for many custom car lovers. They played a role in informing the audience about the finished product and its production. However, despite all the recognition that the custom car culture gained, the popular media still portrayed these enthusiasts as rebels and criticized their behaviors.

Andrew Warren addressed this issue in his article Blue-collar Creativity where he wrote, “the mainstream media young drivers are commonly demonized because of illegal street racing and noisy ‘hoon’ behavior.” He also discussed the behavior of young car enthusiasts and how custom cars are a unique form of vernacular creativity. He explains how individuals express themselves through implementing design on their vehicles, and how they are perceived by their communities. For instance, this form of creativity emerges from personal identities and passions. It involves the restoration, modification and personal adornment of commercially manufactured cars usually by owners and professional workshops. Moreover, this culture reflects how they are connected to their environment, time and space; as young enthusiasts build their cars to fit in a specific criteria, they tend to use the space around them for various activities such as, racing, drifting, driving off road. This creates new traces and sounds and a link between the car and the space around it. The modification process can bring out a variety of personal traits. Jane Moeckli and John D. Lee addressed in their article “The making of driving cultures,” discussed how culture is also inherently material, accounting for how groups identify themselves and interact with their environment through developing.
Cars are very much the focus of my social life, as is the case with most of my friends. Yet for all our common interests, we do vary wildly in our approaches to modifying the variety of style and taste in the car scene is so vast that it’s almost impossible to keep track of it all, even if people do like to paint us with the same brush.”

Societies usually describe these enthusiasts and practices as people who seek attention by their loud engines and the extravagant car color and paint jobs. Yet they dismiss the pleasure behind all the effort and work put into achieving these outcomes.

During his visit to Qatar, the Irish photographer, Paddy McGrath published a Blog called the unexplored Car Culture of Qatar where he mentioned Qatar’s Racing Club and Mawater and described the community “I found a country full of genuine car enthusiasts who welcomed me with open arms. Some of his most interesting statements were: “there is always a common theme whenever we get together.

And every one of them was willing and ready to show me every last detail and facet of Qatar’s car culture, regardless of the inconvenience or hassle it might cause them.” He added “Cars and Karak is probably the epitome of the Speedhunters spirit in Qatar”.

The purpose of these meets is to bring all kinds of cars and owners together in one place, so that people can learn more about each other’s cars, make friends and enjoy a karak.”

building, and using artifacts. “A car’s design is as much a response to drivers’ fantasies of power, control, and speed as it is to the utilitarian components of travel.”

Through car modification, the desire for freedom and self-expression emerges and gives the driver control over his vehicle.

Personal experience helped contribute to the Custom Car Culture, either by developing new terms, or by generating new styles and personal statements. Car enthusiasts tend to share their experiences and exchange ideas with their community members. Mario Christou, a Psychodynamic counselor, who is also a freelance writer, published an article with the name “What does car culture mean to you?” on the Speedhunters Blog website where he talked about his journey with fellow car people in the heart of London.

Some of his most interesting statements were: “There is always a common theme whenever we get together.
Here in Qatar, Custom Car communities are very diverse, there’s the local community, the expats (Italians, Filipino…) and the supercars fanatics.

Although it was written regarding enthusiasts in the UAE, Tim Edensor’s, an author and a geography professor, “Automobility and national identity” article would probably apply to Qatar as well. In it he stated: “it is common to see associations between nationality and specific brands in the UAE. British expatriates, for example, end-up buying expensive British cars, and Italians buy Italian cars, etc.” 17

A car group is formed by different nationalities from diverse backgrounds and cultures, yet they share the same passion. Their diversity can be seen and reflected through their designs and custom work.

It is evident, in Qatar and GCC countries, that a specific car brand identifies one’s belonging and roots, according to a research project entitled Cars and Car Culture in Contemporary Qatar, conducted by Momina Zakzouk, the article gave a brief on this topic: “We discerned how cars mark social class and a citizenship-infused notion of belonging in Qatar: some cars mark you as a foreign resident, while others clearly indicate Qatari citizenship.” 18

A similar study was conducted by Khalil: “Specific car models have been instrumental in promoting car-culture, especially within the Emirati youth; The Nissan Patrol. This specific model has etched itself into the local cultural memory for its mythical power, quality, and desert driving capabilities. This vehicle and similar others have a cult-like following, especially among the younger generations.” 19

Custom Car Culture plays an important role in expanding social creativity and providing new opportunities for individuals to emerge within their communities. It is apparent that this form of creativity doesn’t only affect the custom car owners, but also the space where they practice this passion, time and the new design methods that they bring to the culture.
Ted Noten is a Dutch jewelry designer and conceptual artist, most of his design projects relied on casting strange objects in acrylic blocks. In 2001 he became interested in the Mercedes car brand and the way it symbolized success and social status, stating “these qualities attracted me to the Mercedes as an area for serious research.” He collaborated with Daimler Benz Company on a project where they created a robot performance for one of the company’s annual car shows. They hosted a live performance where a high-tech laser cutter was slicing brooches from the bodywork of the car. The outcome was then delivered to the audience within seven minutes. The concept of this design project was to engage the visitors with the design.
he reasons that each person would receive a piece from the car “every visitor would be able to call him or herself the owner of a piece of Mercedes.”

Ted expressed how he felt about the project: “I am still convinced that the concept of the project is valid. The image is sound, the robot performance exciting and relevant as to the connection between branding and audience.” Ted focused on designing unfamiliar jewelry and the relevance this collection could have with the actual car. One of the most distinguishable elements was the paint; after the cutting process, the pieces were treated with a thin lacquer layer to get rid of the cut edges, much like how a car is treated.

The “Driven by German Design” exhibition, Curated by Martin Roth, took place in the gallery at Qatar Museums where it highlighted the past and the present of German design by means of objects ranging from automotive, product, fashion and graphic design. It illuminated the close ties between design thinking, cultural foundation, engineering and design.

The exhibition was dynamic and pragmatic, this collection of interactive designs and installations set of a multisensory experience that allowed the visitors to be immersed in the space. One of the most interesting exhibits was “Driving Sound”, a cooperation between a music company “Klangerfinder” and “Jangled Nerves,” an interdisciplinary team. It included a set of controllers and sound mixers where each switch generated different car sounds.
This project caught my attention because it created a diverse environment in which people could explore their senses and how they interact with elements related to cars and automotive design. As it also offered the opportunity to experience the process of designing: it shows the intermediates along the way and presents interactive exhibits.

Erwin Wurm is an Austrian artist; he is considered one of the most important and famous contemporary sculptors in Austria. His work focuses on manipulating volume, fixing forms and gravity. The concept behind his Fat Car design was to create inflated chubby versions of cars. To achieve this fat sculpture series, he used a chassis of a real car as a base and for the body he used polyurethane foam and Styrofoam framed with lacquer. Wurm takes away the mobility feature of cars and focuses more on the general shape and finishing of the vehicle. Moreover, it criticizes the value system as the advertising world demands us to stay thin but to consume more. I was drawn to this project through the quality these sculptors; the outer body of the car was heavily shifted whereas the paint maintained its characteristics and held its identity.
In this design project, Virgil Abloh who was a fashion designer and a creative director teamed up with Mercedes Benz to design a conceptual version of the G Class car. They explored the methods of disrupting future perceptions of luxury. The car turned into a race car inspired from Nascar. It was heavily customized and driven away from its luxurious and classy image. They considered how to generate new perspectives for the G class and augmented the AMG attitude.

For the exterior, the iconic G-Class silhouette was preserved; however, the body of the car is widened and lowered for a more sports car effect. Abloh also fitted much larger tires to the car, embossed with bright yellow Nascar style lettering on the sidewall. Virgil’s inspiration from racing cars is clear in the interior.

It was stripped of Mercedes' luxury interior elements and replaced with a roll cage that conveys safety. The key racing elements are highlighted and painted with blue and red, which helps generate contrast with the bare exterior paint.

“My ultimate goal in this project with Mercedes-Benz is inspiring young artists, engineers, designers to question the status quo, in addition to experimenting with my own design abilities,” said Virgil in one of the interviews. This collaboration helped me understand how different design perspectives can be merged to create new concepts and identities for an existing object while also preserving some of its characteristics.
Munich-based industrial designer Konstantin Grcic is famous for his mass-manufactured designs. He designed a collection of limited-edition tables for Galerie Kreo. This collection consisted of a set of tables inspired by the sports and racing industry. The shape, paint and graphics link us directly to racing cars. The recognizable paint job finishing makes it almost hard to believe these tables weren’t manufactured along with the cars.

Konstantin focused on the graphics and how they could convey different meanings and references: “I am interested in the psychology of graphics in relation to products and more specifically how the semantics of certain colours, words and symbols can change our perception of them.” He applied to his set of tables a very refined finishing using multiple layers of paint to achieve an inlaid aesthetic between the two materials. I was drawn to his approach because I believe visual language illustrates peoples’ personalities, identities and style.

Von Dutch was a mechanic and car detailer. He was raised in an artistic environment where his father was a sign painter. Dutch was able to paint and letter professionally by the age of ten. His first striping paint job was on a motorcycle which left a big impression on the people around him.

For years, the art of pinstriping has been used to accent multiple products, like the motorbike. It was a form of framing or following a specific outline. The use of this art expression changed since Dutch introduce his freestyle pinstriping to the hot rod culture. In the book “Kustom Kulture”, in which a chapter was dedicated for Von Dutch and his journey and attributes to the CCC, He describes the execution of his art in humanistic terms.
“Modern automobiles need some human element on them. Without it they look like they’ve been ground out by a mechanical monster which— they have! I treat striping brushes like a musical instrument and whatever I stripe becomes a melody.”  32  Sometimes, his paint jobs were driven by observing the owners of the cars. He mentioned “Sometimes it is the car owner himself who suggests the scene. I don’t mean he tells me what to paint, but he reminds me of something. Like maybe the guy looks like a spider...”  35
This investigation explores the custom car culture in Qatar and its impact on the local community. It also examines the various design elements and techniques that make custom cars unique and special to their owners. The research is of particular importance because it uncovers the stories of those involved in the CCC and develops an understanding of the relation between enthusiasts and the cars they design. A combination of research, case studies and interviews were conducted to gain deeper insights into the personal, cultural meanings attached to custom cars and how they relate to individuals’ identities and self-expression.

My research started with a personal attraction to this culture and the bond formed between humans and their cars. This study was an opportunity to understand the behavior and the activities the CCC communities here are involved in.

I. Observations.

Being observant of this culture and attending different car meets, shows and events related to automobiles, raised my interest and curiosity to learn more about it.

Through observation, I came to understand the important aspects of CCC. People from different nationalities and backgrounds bond over their shared passion for car modification and exchange knowledge they learned from their experiences. As a result, Custom Car Culture becomes more powerful through the sense of community that helps foster a shared interest and passion. This love of cars and modification transcends differences and builds a home for people to get together and connect.

Additionally, attending car meets helped me understand the meanings behind these custom builds and how they reflect the personality and identity of their owners.

For instance, some individuals prefer enhancing the performance and mods of their cars which makes them appear as thrill-seeking and challenging. Others tend to focus on the appearance of their vehicles, from seeking a special paint/wrap color, to adding graphics, decals and stickers and even installing custom body parts. These show more attention to details and value creativity. Overall, the practice of customization boosts the enthusiasts’ confidence, pride and ownership in their cars.
II. Survey

This survey was conducted to collect information and learn more about the enthusiasts in Qatar. It targeted people who share the same passion about modification. It was conducted online and shared through social media with car communities and profiles. I tried to keep this form as diverse as possible and not focus on a specific car group/community.

The questions were generated to learn about the personal information and reflections of the enthusiasts.

1. How did you learn about custom culture?
2. What was one thing that made you interested in Custom Car Culture? and how it affected your lifestyle?
3. What type of car do you own and how often do you drive it?
4. What was the first part you customized in your car?
5. What type of modification are you interested in the most?
6. Do you work on your own modifications or take your car to a garage?
7. What do you think is missing in the CCC in Qatar?
8. If there is something that could be contributed to the CCC, what would it be? And why?

Key findings:

It appears that most of the respondents learned about CCC when they were kids, through their dad's or tv shows, movies they grew up watching and video games such as "Midnight Club 3." The answers to the second question were what shaped my design direction.

These individuals value the process of modification and uniqueness of their vehicles. The research also revealed that most of them prefer to perform customization themselves rather than hiring specialists. For instance, this decision is driven by the desire to control the creative process of modification and the sense of ownership. Quoting one respondent’s answer to question 3, “My own Modifications, so I get to spend time working on my car and 'bonding' with it. This also allows me to see the perspective of the people that designed the car to appreciate and understand it.”
The survey also helped shed light on the needs of these enthusiasts. They addressed the challenges and difficulties they face while trying to practice their passion. Some respondents expressed how they’d wish there was more knowledge about car customization within the society and car shops.

“Garages that understand the importance of a custom car and how to treat it rather than current garages that are just chasing after money” - answer to question 9.

“Proper Car Culture education” - answer to question 9.

“Variety of customization, availability of custom parts to everyone. Modification is expensive so is the law against modifications” - answer to question 8.

In conclusion, this research gave me a proper insight into the preferences and the concerns of local enthusiasts. This community is highly passionate and dedicated, by understanding their needs providers and specialists could tailor their services and flexibility to meet the enthusiasts’ creativity.

Figure 16
III. Interviews

To further unpack the personalities and stories of enthusiasts, interviews were conducted with individuals from different car communities to maintain the element of inclusivity. This section provides more detailed research that helped collect data for further investigations.

Enthusiast 1 (Qatari), Jeep owner, Part of the jeep community in Qatar:

“I crossed borders to paint my car this specific color of blue I loved”

This statement stood out the most to me. The determination to personalize his car to fully meet his vision was a very special trait. He described the joy after the struggle he goes through in car shops as the most rewarding part of the journey. Every part of his car reflected his identity. Salem also talked about how important it was for him to represent the community and introduce car modification to non-enthusiasts.

Jamal (Tunisian), Jeep owner, Part of the Jeep community in Qatar and Tunisia.

“Customizing my car is a passion I’ll never get bored of”

My father was the person who introduced me to Custom Car Culture; watching car tv shows, automotive podcasts, attending car related events and even giving me tasks while he’s working on his car. Owning a modified Jeep was his childhood dream that he was finally able to achieve in his 50’s. The excitement and joy he felt when he started his customization journey were reflected through his work. The first thing he added to the car were decals; he claimed that adding stickers reflected his joyful yet strong personality. Even though the car’s journey in Qatar was cut short he was still able to continue his passion back home, in Tunisia. From that point his sense of belonging became stronger, and he reflected on how important it was for him to add details of home and origin on his car.
Nizar (Tunisian), Mustang owner, Part of the mustang community in Qatar and Tunisia.

“The car is still the same, its shadow is what represents us”

Nizar’s love for modification grew from driving. The time spent in his car and the feeling of freedom ignited his passion for Custom Car Culture. As he became more experienced behind the wheel, he started to look for ways to push his car to its limit; opens new opportunities and unlocks the car's capabilities. He also mentioned, as a mechanic, he never noticed or thought about cars as an expression medium until driving and speed became his hobby.

Following the previous investigations, I started to analyze the different aspects and elements of CCC.

The first phase of my research consisted of a deeper exploration in the latest trends in car parts and materials such as paints, fabrics and lights, which are commonly used in the modification field and. Additionally, visiting car shops/garages played a huge role in my research, it allowed me to understand the process and steps of customizing a car part and the motives behind each design. It also gave me the opportunity to witness the requests of the clients and how the communication between enthusiasts and modification specialists happens. Throughout this journey, I collected data and images that served as references for the design process.

In the second phase I deconstructed customization into two sub-topics: sound – the link between the car and personality

Sub-Topic 1: Sound:

Based on the survey I conducted, it appears that some of the enthusiasts in Qatar prefer or started their customization journey with upgrading their car’s performance. As a result, this creates a challenge of who owns the fastest, loudest or strongest car. When asked about their favorite element of their vehicles, most individuals would choose sound.

For instance, the loud exhaust sounds give the owners a sense of pride and boosts their confidence. I was intrigued to learn more about it and express this type of self-expression through design.
I started with searching for the relevance of sound to the enthusiasts’ and how they express themselves within their community. By attending car shows, I approached individuals and asked them why they preferred their car’s to be loud. Some of them said that it was a result of the process of upgrading their vehicles’ performance. While others expressed how they enjoy the attention it brings whenever they show up in a car meet or when they’re simply driving. The feeling of being noticed makes them feel seen and heard. After collecting the answers, I asked them to rev (the act of pressing the accelerator) and recorded the sound emitted from the exhaust. The sounds belonged to these following cars: Jeep, Trans am, Mustang and a Range Rover.

Next, I generated sound waves from the recordings I collected, and then proceeded to 3D model them.
After working on the models, I 3D printed them to use as molds for the making of the final pieces. The material I worked with was aluminum, due to its metallic characteristics and the chrome finishing. The outcome of this experimentation was intended to physically represent the sound of the car. For instance, my goal was to illustrate the sense of pride they would feel by owning it and installing it to their cars. It could work as an addition to the dashboard or a replacement for the car’s emblem.

Sub-Topic 2: the link between the car and personality

After working on the first sub-topic and conducting more interviews, I realized that personalities are reflected on the car in many ways other than sound. For instance, that drove my design decision into making custom car parts based on the narratives and personalities of individuals I interviewed. At first, I did research about the practicality of customization and its availability in Qatar. Most of the enthusiasts expressed the difficulties they face throughout the process. The lack of access to the creative process behind custom jobs, creates limitations and narrows their options.

Figure 23: Aluminum sound wave

Figure 24: Aluminum sound wave

Figure 25: Aluminum sound wave

Figure 26: Aluminum sound wave

Figure 27: Sound wave rendering
One car part that always appealed to me was the grill. Since I was a kid, I used to look at cars and judge their mood based on the shape of its front bumper, they almost appear as manufactured characters. Also, while researching about this culture, I was trying to find which car parts the person interacts with the most. That helped me decide and choose the car seat.

Grills:
1. My father, Jeep Owner
   Inspiration: Sense of belonging, Tunisian coat of arm.
2. Salem, Jeep owner
   Inspiration: Sense of community, Jeepers group in Qatar.
3. Wael, Mustang owner
   Inspiration: Personal preferences, thriving for a unique modification style.

The design process for both jeep grills was similar in terms of the design and making process.

I used the coat of arms as a reference and started to create patterns for the center part of the grill. While working on the patterns, I had to take into consideration the making process and not make it complex. Through the design process, it was important to get feedback from the enthusiasts themselves. As their feedback would make the outcome more personal.

After finalizing the pattern, I started with the making. Working with a steel factory to cnc the stainless-steel sheet.

Figure 26: Tunisian Coat of Arms
Figure 27: Patterns exploration
Figure 28: Final pattern for grill 1
Once the sheet was ready, I started preparing for the installation (Figure 28). I had to drill holes in both stainless sheet and the grill. The concept was to have the metal sheet on top of the grill, fixed with custom screws.

Next part was the vinyl design and application. I was inspired by calligraphy and the type used on the coat of arms. It is a reference to the national Tunisian motto “Liberty, Order, Justice”. I created a drawing of the headlight’s space and used it to frame the design.

The choice of color for the type is a reference to my father’s car: all the accessories he added are in the same color.
I applied the same process for grill number 2. I started with learning about the enthusiasts’ preferences, which helped me identify the elements and features that should be incorporated into the design. Inspired from the Jeepers local group’s logo, I replaced the original plastic design with a metal one that consisted of a pattern from a simplified “soul jeepers” logo.

The making process consisted of measuring and calculating the fitting of the new grill sheet in its designated place.

In order to get the best fitment, I made a technical drawing for the maker to use as reference for the cutting machine.

After getting done with the production of the stainless grill, I got it powder coated in black to ensure a better paint finishing and quality.
For the installation of the new grill sheet, I had to remove the existing plastic one and apply it in its place (figure 36).

The final step was to design the vinyl and send it over to the vinyl shop for application. I tried to emphasize on the group’s logo and make it the essential element of this grill concept. I also added reference to Qatar’s flag on the middle part of the grill.
The third grill, which was inspired from the movie the Punisher, was fully custom made from fiber glass using an old grill as a mold to achieve the right frame dimensions.

After deciding on the final design, it was the makers turn to work on finishing the grill. The process consisted of a lot of site visits and negotiating the process.
The makers started with first creating a two part foam mold, to use as the new design's canvas. Then they used it to create the fiber glass mold which also consisted of a frame and an inner design.
The seat covers designs were inspired, mostly from the aesthetic of the car. I used the modifications that were already implemented on these enthusiast’s cars as a reference for the designs.

I started with designing the illustrations that were gonna be printed on the resin leather. Each design consists of an element or reference that already exists on the car to create a connection and link between the object and the narrative.

Seat Covers:
1- Al-Hajri, Nissan Laurel owner
Inspiration: Japanese Car Culture. Design of his own car

2- Mohammad, Nissan GTR owner
Inspiration: JDM Stickers

3- Nizar, Mustang owner
Inspiration: Outlines and silhouettes.

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in order to achieve those custom seat covers, I worked with an upholstery shop and a printing & embroidery shop. The work had to be done at the same time in both shops in order to keep up with the production time.
Jamal, Jeep owner:

“Customizing my car is a passion I’ll never get bored of!”

Owning a modified jeep was my father’s childhood dream, he was finally able to achieve in his 50’s. Even though the car’s journey in Qatar was cut short he was still able to continue his passion back home, in Tunisia. From that point his sense of belonging became stronger, and he reflected on how important for him to add details on his car that remind him of home and origin. The grill design is inspired from the Tunisian coat of arms. The calligraphy means “Liberty, Order, Justice”, representing our national motto.
Wael, Mustang owner:

“It doesn’t need colors to be attractive, black will do the job”

Wael has a minimalistic yet sophisticated approach to modifications. Using the movie “The Punisher” as a theme for his car, he replaced the Mustang’s branding with the Punisher’s logo. This grill was custom made from scratch using fiber glass as a base material. The inner design, I used the movie’s logo as a reference relying on specific details such as the mouth partlines. The 3D punisher in the middle was included to reinforce the enthusiast’s preference and style.

Enthusiast 3, Jeep owner:

“I’d cross borders just to get my car painted a specific color”

This enthusiast is a risk taker, he goes overboard with his modifications. He is part of the Jeep community in Qatar. The determination to personalize his car to fully meet his vision was a very special trait of his. This grill reflects his sense of community. The design of the inner grill and vinyl, was inspired from the “Soul Jeepers” logo, the details on the bars represents Qatar’s flag. It is a reflection of how important it is for him to represent his community.
Mohamad, Nissan ‘GTR’ owner:
“This car is a treasure”

Mohamad is JDM enthusiast. He owns multiple japanese cars and is very keen on modifying and treasuring them. This seat is custom made to match with his car’s aesthetics, it was inspired from stickers placed on each side of the back windows. The blue piping of the seat matches the color of his car.
Al-Hajeri, Nissan Laurel owner:

"I don’t drive my car often, I treat it like a sculpture"

Al-Hajri values his cars and handles them like an art piece. He is a JDM (Japanese Domestic Market) enthusiast. His car looks like a canvas with the decals and stickers he mounted. This seat cover is custom made for this Nissan, the design is inspired from the Japanese custom car culture and it blends with the theme of his car.

Nizar, Mustang owner:

"The car is still the same, its shadow represents us"

Nizar’s love for modification grew from driving. The time spent in his car and the feeling of freedom ignited his passion for Custom Car Culture. He is part of the Mustang community in Qatar and Tunisia. He never considered cars as a self-expression medium until driving and speed became his passion. This custom seat cover reflects his love for performance through the embroidery design. It also includes Tunisia’s and Qatar’s flags as a reference to his engagement in both communities.
This design research allowed me to learn more about the CCC community in Qatar, and provided a deeper insight about how enthusiasts behave and represent themselves within the local society. This design approach to custom car culture is meant to shed light on those individuals and their creativity. It is of importance as it provide a new customization method through working with local makers and creating a connection between them and enthusiasts, to give them more freedom over the creative process and help them achieve the dream images they have of their cars.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This thesis has been possible by the help of the CCC community in Qatar and their willingness to help and share their stories. Interacting and being accepted by them helped me push through and believe more in my project and my capabilities.

My appreciation goes to my committee members for their patience and guidance. Special thanks to Prof. Nathan for helping me realize what I was interested in the most.

I dedicate this thesis for my family and especially my father, the one who taught me everything I know about cars and modifications, and for supporting me through this long journey. Shoutout to my friends who believed in me, hyped and supported me through this year.
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Figure 9: Erwin Wurm – Fat Car, 2001-2004, metallic paint, Styrofoam and polyester, 111 x 65 x 33cm. [https://www.garage-italia.com/en/hub/articles/elementor-20166](https://www.garage-italia.com/en/hub/articles/elementor-20166)


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Figure 14: "Kustom Kulture", Earl Bruce’s 300 SL Mercedes sported Dutch’s most infamous flame job. Photo by Pat Ganabi. [https://books.google.com.qa/](https://books.google.com.qa/)