



# Tsutomu "Tom" Matano

OCT 7, 1947 - SEP 21, 2025



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# Table of Contents

<b>Obituary</b> .....	Page 3
<b>Events</b> .....	Page 6



# Tsutomu "Tom" Matano

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## Tsutomu "Tom" Matano

(1947–2025)

It is with profound sorrow that we announce the passing of Tom Matano, Director Emeritus of the School of Industrial Design at Academy of Art University, who passed away peacefully on Sunday, September 21, 2025, at the age of 77.

Tom was more than a designer. He was a mentor, a friend, and an inspiration to countless people around the world. His impact on the global design community is immeasurable, and his legacy lives on in the vehicles he helped create and in the generations of students, colleagues, and friends he guided with wisdom, kindness, and authenticity.

### Early Life and Career

Born in Nagasaki, Japan, on October 7, 1947, Tom studied at Seikei University in Tokyo before moving to the United States in 1970. His career spanned more than five decades at the forefront of industrial and automotive design. He began with roles at General Motors, then moved on to Holden in Australia and BMW in Germany, experiences that shaped his global perspective and enduring design philosophy.

### Mazda Years and Automotive Legacy

In 1983, Tom joined Mazda, where his visionary leadership transformed the brand's identity. Rising to Executive Vice President of Design and Chief Designer, he was instrumental in creating vehicles that became icons. Chief among them was the Mazda MX-5 Miata, a car that redefined the joy of driving and became a cultural phenomenon across continents. He also shaped the



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design of the Mazda RX-7 FD and other landmark vehicles, combining elegance, simplicity, and emotional resonance in ways that set new benchmarks for the industry.

His work earned international recognition, and to this day, enthusiasts and designers alike credit Tom's vision for inspiring a sense of connection between people and machines—cars that were not just transportation, but companions on life's journeys.

### Educator and Mentor

In 2002, Tom brought his unparalleled expertise to Academy of Art University in San Francisco, where he served as Executive Director of the School of Industrial Design for 22 years. At the Academy, he was more than a director. He was a mentor and guide who gave generously of his time and spirit. He built the foundation for the collaborations and industry partnerships that define the program today, and he instilled in his students the values of curiosity, humility, and excellence.

Generations of designers now working at leading companies across the globe carry his influence in their work, a living testament to his commitment to education and his belief that design is both craft and calling.

### A Lasting Legacy

Tom's designs brought smiles to millions, but it was his kindness, authenticity, and ability to connect with people that truly multiplied his legacy. He touched lives not only through his achievements, but through his humanity. He made people feel seen, heard, and inspired.

He is survived by his family, along with a global community of friends, colleagues, and students who were forever enriched by his wisdom and generosity.

### Closing Reflection

We mourn the loss of a colleague, mentor, and friend, even as we celebrate a life of extraordinary achievement. Tom's legacy will live on not only in the vehicles and products he brought into the world, but in the countless people he inspired along the way.

Tom's spirit will continue to live on through all of us.



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Always Inspired




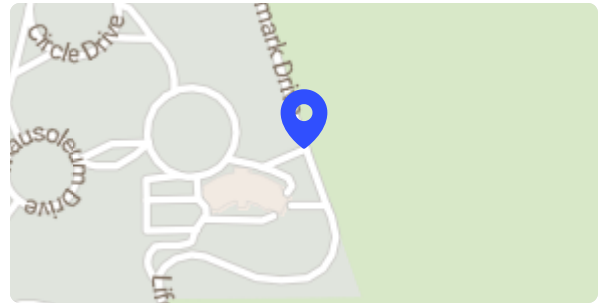
# Events

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## Cemetery Details

 **Skylawn Funeral Home & Memorial Park**  
888 Lifemark Rd, Half Moon Bay CA 94019





## **Memories only last if you share them**

Join us in honoring Tsutomu by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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