



# Surface tension

*The car interiors of the future will have to offer robust, high-tech-enabled surfaces that are attractive to look at and pleasant to come into contact with. Tanners must prepare to produce leather that can meet these requirements.*



*If your home can be your castle, your car can be your living room.*  
CREDIT: MAYBACH

*SLEM creative director, Nicoline van Enter, speaking in Waalwijk at a 2015 event to celebrate the opening of Stahl's new Centre of Excellence for Automotive.*  
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Used to looking into the future, Nicoline van Enter believes strongly in a future full of autonomous cars. She is the founder and creative director of Waalwijk-based footwear innovation and education institute SLEM and is much in demand as a trends analyst, especially in the footwear industry. On the subject of cars, she has this to say: "We are moving from the automobile to the 'autonomobile'."

That global society is becoming more urbanised is well known. Ms van Enter says that by 2030, the United Nations expects there to be 41 cities in the world with more than 10 million inhabitants (the figure in 2016 is 16). She is interested in how everyone will move around and thinks that cars, including automobiles will be important. Autonomous cars could become a form of public transport in these big cities, one of the ways in which people commute, which will give upholstery materials providers a challenge of how to make interiors attractive but robust enough still to look clean and fresh when the twentieth passenger of the day jumps in (some of those who have gone before may have travelled with their pets; others may have allergies).

### Your car is your living-room

She points out that much of the growth in demand for these vehicles will come from people who live in hotter climates than northern Europe's and says this will make an impact on car interiors. "Lighter colours will become more and more popular,

and there will be more ostentation," she insists. "People in Asia, for example, can be much more decorative in these things than we Europeans are these days. In China recently I was offered a lift by the chief executive of a big company and was amazed to see that, inside his car, he had Swarovski crystals everywhere." She says this reminds her of old-fashioned transportation such as horse-drawn carriages, in which very rich people often liked to show off their wealth, but not on the outside. "If your house is your castle, your car will be your living-room," Nicoline van Enter says, "and it will start to look like it."

She predicts screens everywhere, saying any surface in a car's interior will, potentially, become a space that travellers can use for work or play during the journey, and she agrees with Professor Ferdinand Dudenhöffer about the amount of touching these surfaces will undergo. "Because people will touch it all the time, the material will need to be pleasant to touch," she argues, "and that gets overlooked."

Not only is Ms van Enter convinced that leather will have a big role to play in enabling touchscreen surfaces inside the cars of the future, she says work to develop leather with the technical capabilities required is already under way and that students at SLEM are actively taking part. Efforts to make leather a part of the burgeoning wearable technology scene ought to help tanners prepare for supplying materials for the car interior of tomorrow, she says. ☺