



Product, brand, and collateral — when **Fitch** created a high-performance gaming mouse, they designed every element to appeal to the target audience.

Tom Misage of Fitch offers a deceptively simple explanation of his firm's role in developing a high-speed mouse for computer-game enthusiasts: "kärna had the technology. We provided the integrated product management — from market research to market shelf."

The client, kärna LLC, had pioneered a new light-encoding technology — a focused light beam that tracks motion by measuring the rotations of an "encoder" wheel — and the company was eager to incorporate it into a consumer product. They asked Fitch to identify a potential market, design a product to fit that market's needs, and carve out a positioning strategy. Fitch, one of the few global agencies that offers such a comprehensive list of capabilities — from research and product development to corporate identity and retail design — is no stranger to such a challenge. Among its many accomplishments is the development of Iomega's Zip drive.

Key to Fitch's success is the firm's unique practice of developing the brand and the product in tandem, making every aspect of both work together cohesively. "Our approach is revolutionary and powerful, yet so few companies are embracing this philosophy today," says Fitch executive vice-president and COO, Bill Faust. "Consequently, the companies that do [integrate brand and product] have products that stand out in the marketplace."

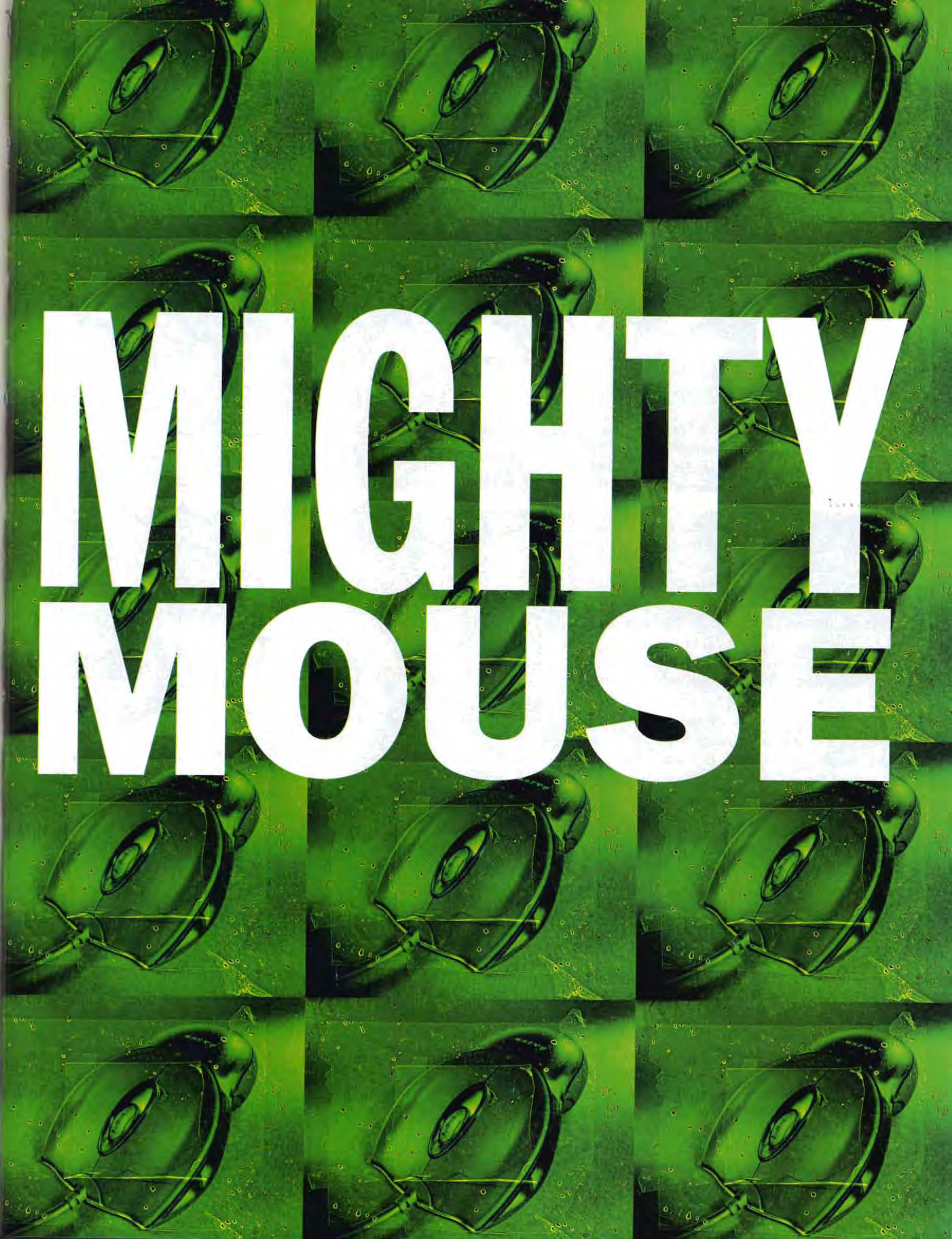
Adidas, Compaq, LEGO, and Smuckers — all Fitch clients — are prime examples: In each case, the company and the product line are one.

FINDING THE MARKET

The client's objective was incorporating their light-encoding technology into a strategic computer-pointing device — in other words, a mouse. "kärna had a concept and a working technology [for a mouse three- to five-times faster than the conventional model], but the question was how to best market this for optimum consumer response," recalls Fitch vice president Vassoula Vasilou. The first step was conducting research to identify potential buyers.

Fitch discovered that the technology offered benefits to a variety of intensive mouse users such as architects, designers, and engineers/CAD users — but dedicated gamers, eager for every competitive edge, seemed to be the best fit. To ensure that their intuition was on target, Fitch launched a study of gamers and, at the same time, began to design a product that would appeal to them. "The market was definitely there," says Mark Ciesko, associate vice president of Fitch. "Our initial research results for acceptance and

by Todd Hays



**MIGHTY
MOUSE**

need for such a device confirmed that. But the product would have to be very targeted and focused. It had to appeal, totally, to the gamer. It had to physically reflect their intensity, and it had to be infinitely better than the present mouse.”

MEETING USER NEEDS

Once they had identified the target audience, the design and marketing teams at Fitch began to acquaint themselves with the burgeoning \$16 billion electronic game market. Since gamers use their PCs differently than other computer users, Fitch determined that one-on-one research in combination with focus groups would be the best method to develop the objectives for the product and, eventually, the product itself.

Gamers were interviewed at home and observed in action at their computers. By seeing how a gamer used a regular mouse, Fitch was able to determine optimal features and functions needed for a new high-performance gaming mouse. Group sessions further defined gamers’ wants and requirements and gave the Fitch team insights into the gaming culture.

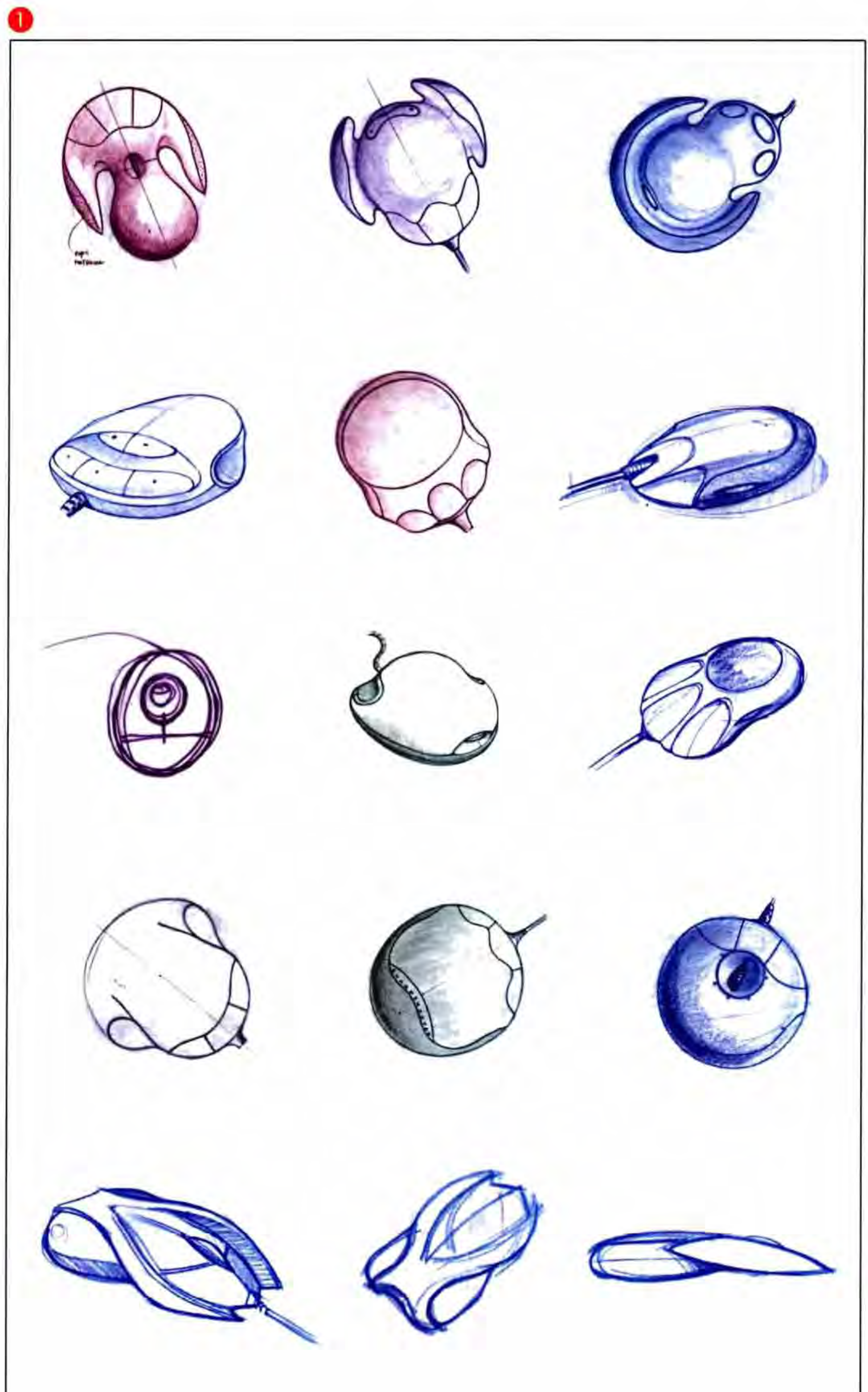
Vasilou notes, “kärna gave us carte blanche and lots of options. They wanted us to be totally immersed. So we became gamers. We not only observed the playing, we joined in. The feedback and participation were invaluable.”

“We have to put ourselves inside the head of the user,” adds Misage. “Without that, our results won’t be grounded in the reality of the end user. If you can identify a few unmet needs, you can better differentiate your product — and differentiation is everything in the marketplace.”

Gamers, Fitch discovered, don’t simply play. They actively participate in a game’s scenario, and they want a “weapon” that offers more manual control than the typical computer mouse. So the Fitch team set about adapting kärna’s technology, engineering a mouse with five tactile buttons and a scroll wheel that can instantly change the speed on the fly.

“We made it ergonomically correct because gamers play for hours at a time and need a device that will not, over time, affect their grip,” notes Vasilou.

Aesthetics were equally important. “We capitalized on the new iconographics — tattoo art, science fiction, and so on — of the games themselves. Our design reflects

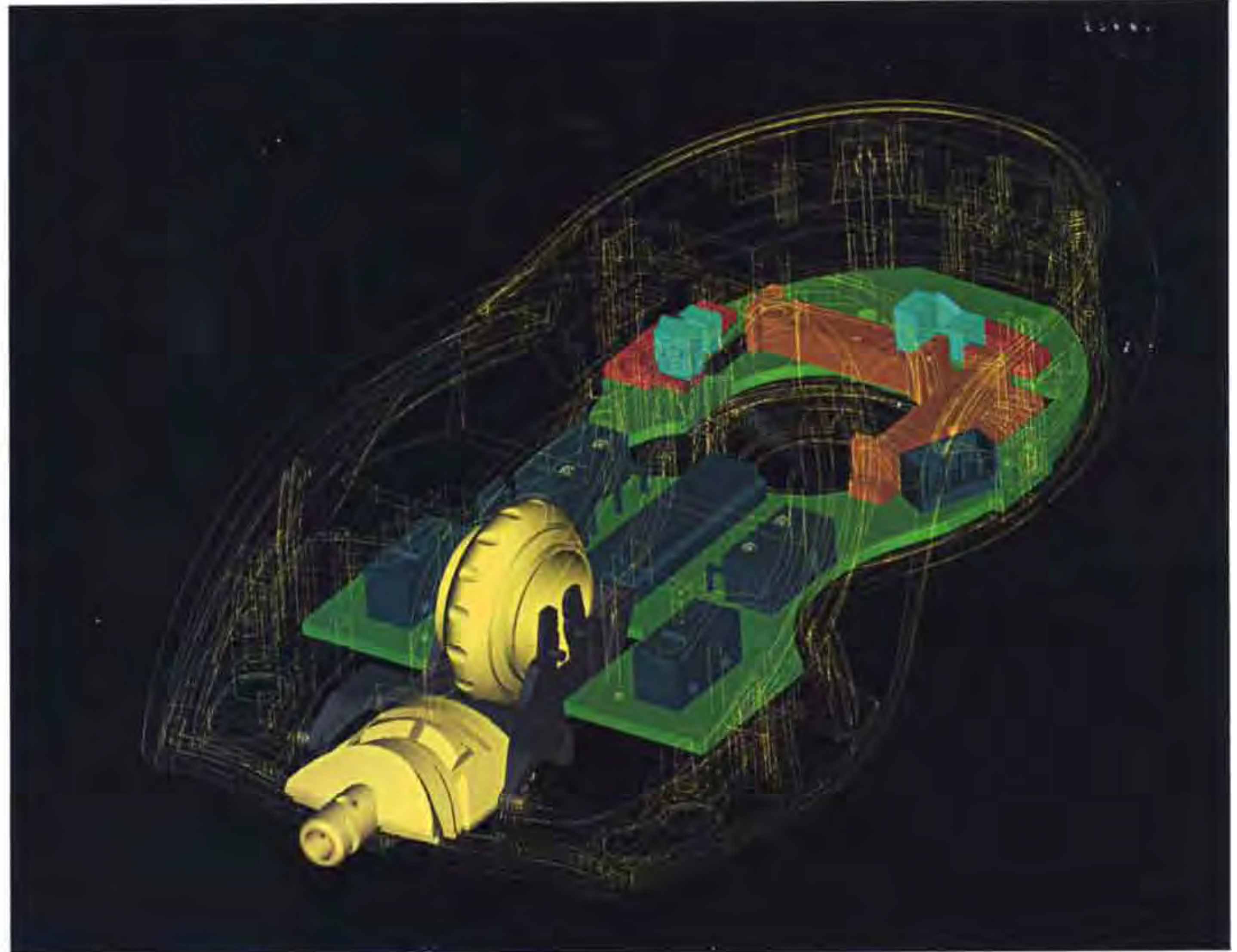
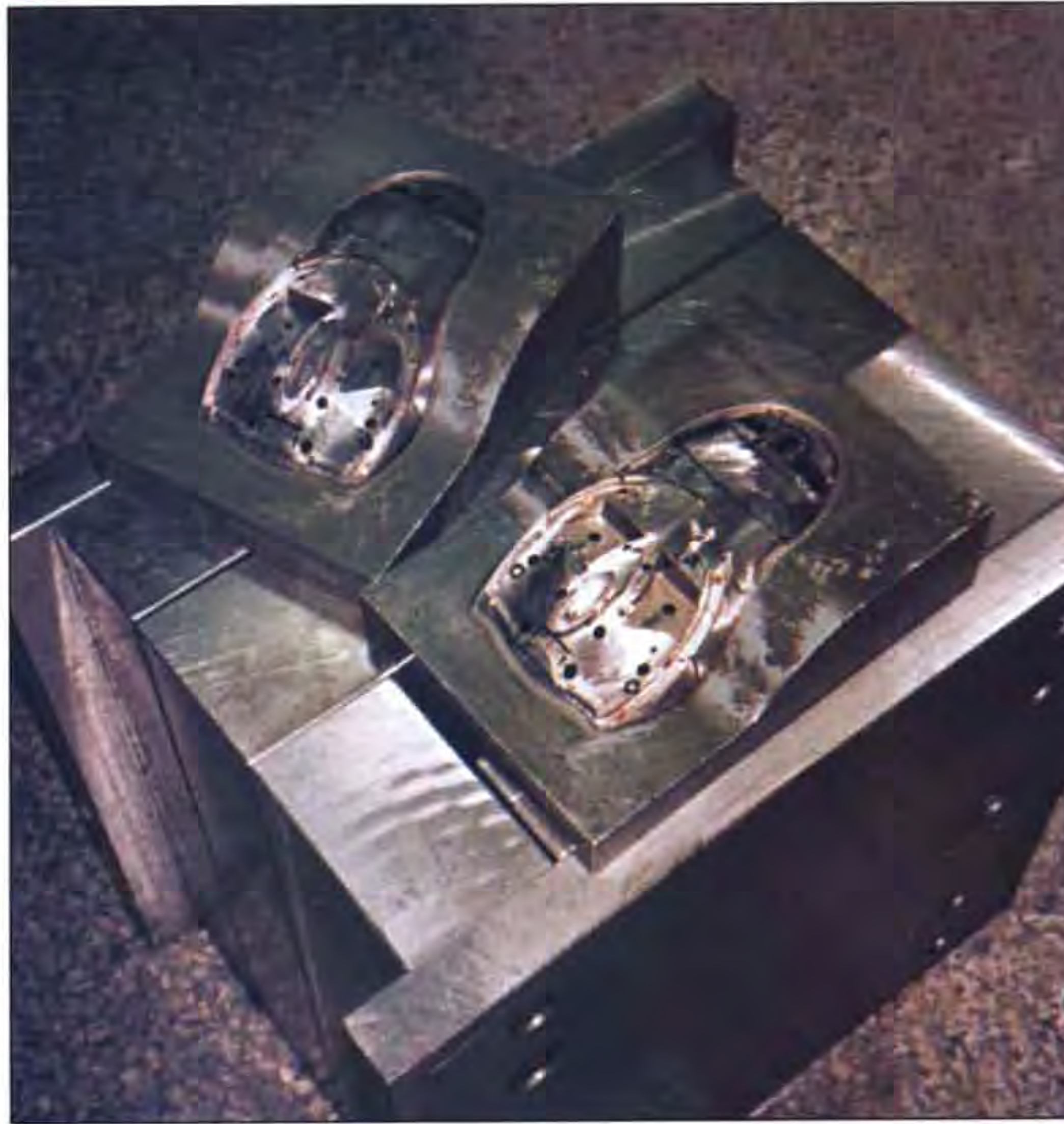


↑ **After interviewing** PC game enthusiasts and observing them at their computers, Fitch developed these concept sketches. The developers went back to gamers throughout the design process so they could evaluate the ergonomics, aesthetics, and functionality of the new mouse.

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◀ **The most** promising sketches were developed further, using Alias Wavefront to create renderings which, in turn, were transformed into foam models and introduced to focus groups. The top rendering is an early iteration that was eventually selected.

▶ **Fitch's** engineering team used ProEngineer to hone the design, then fabricated prototypes to test function, assembly method, and tolerances. The prototypes were also turned over to focus groups to let PC game enthusiasts evaluate performance.

the culture of this computer sport and its participants,” Vasilou adds.

BUILDING A COHESIVE IMAGE

“At Fitch, we’ve learned that a company’s brand image is more than just a name and a logo. It’s the essence of what the company does and goes directly to the product offering. In the new economy, the brand is the product and the product is the brand,” says Faust.

So Fitch designers developed the brand at the same time the firm’s engineers were creating the mouse. The kärna name and logo are intentionally downplayed (packaging and collateral material include a *Powered by kärna precision* tagline that can be applied to future products). Instead, Fitch developed an independent brand — Razer, a name that suggests the power to demolish the competition — and gave it the clout of a company. The mouse was dubbed Boomslang, after a venomous South African snake, and the acid green chosen as the company color was borrowed from the snake’s coloring.

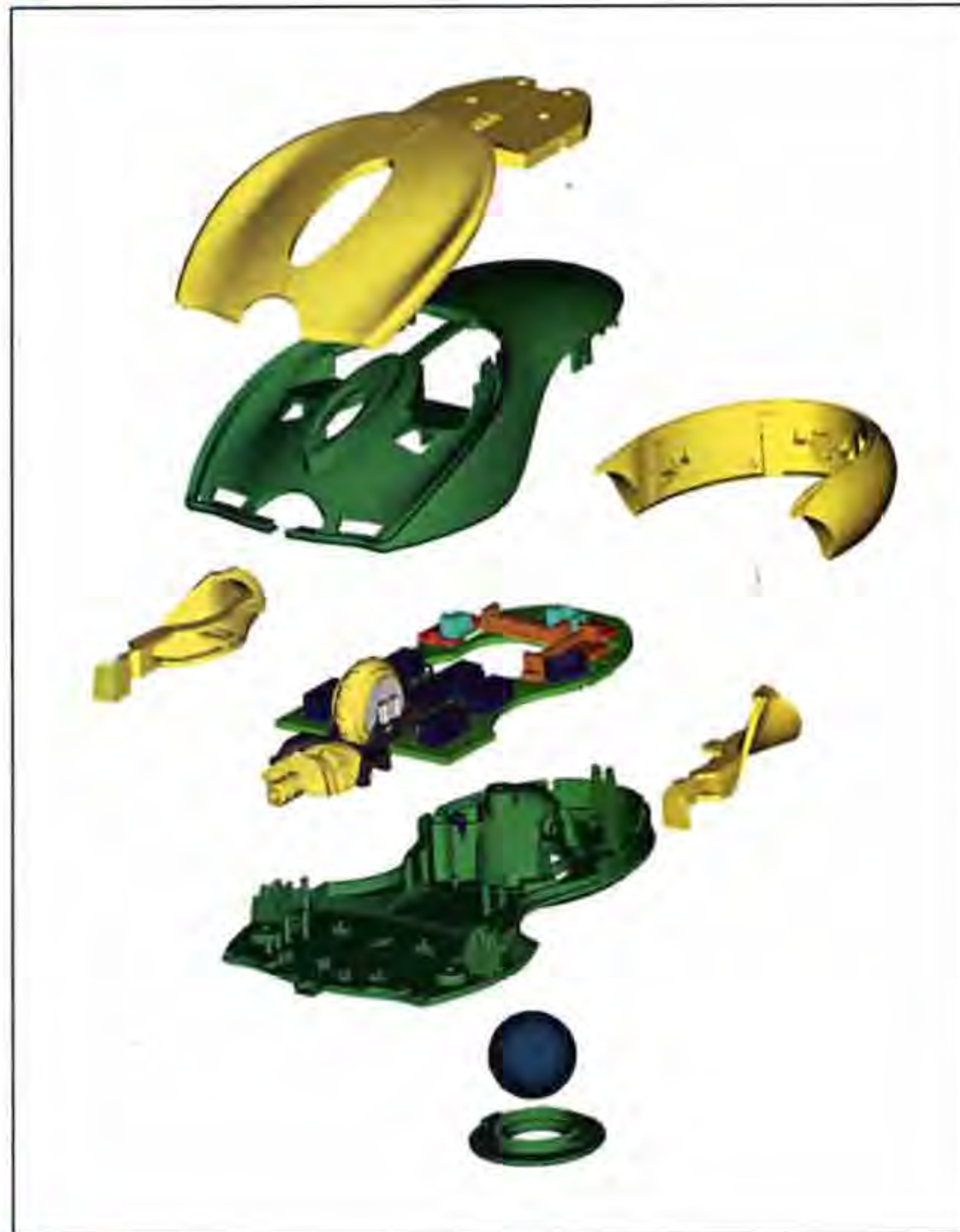
From there, the Fitch team expanded the next-generation look of the mouse and the ferocity of the brand into every element in the promotional system. Everything from the storage-case packaging to the company’s metal business cards to the Razer website, where gamers can test-drive the technology, reflects a “like nothing you’ve seen before” aesthetic.

Initial response proves Fitch was right on target. Gamers like the grip of the new mouse and perceive Razer’s acid green color as warlike (in keeping with their aggressive approach to the games). More important, game enthusiasts recognize the Razer Boomslang as a high-performance mouse, designed exclusively for them. In form and function, it’s an extension of the games themselves.

“The Razer exemplifies the user-focused design experience,” says Fitch vice president Ken Gilliam. “Having the technology was not enough — we knew it had to be integrated and sold with a targeted branding strategy and design that would appeal to the hard-core gamer market.” ■

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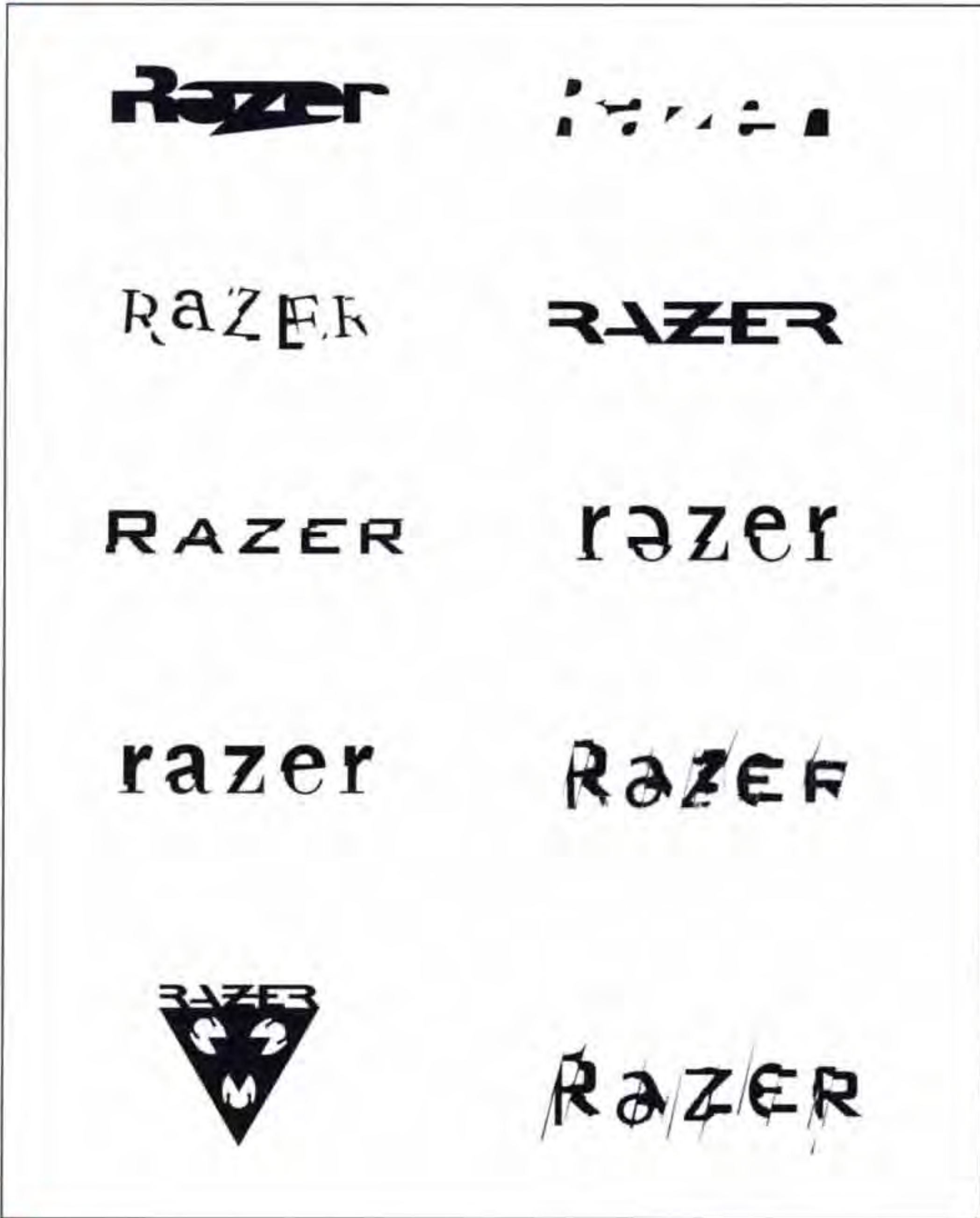
◀ **All aspects** of assembly were addressed during the engineering phase, including molding processes, part break-down, and costs. Using the ProEngineer files, Fitch was able to communicate between molders, toolers, and assemblers in various locations throughout Asia.

▼ **On the** final version of the Razer Boomslang mouse, Fitch specified transparent plastic for some parts of the cover to let users see the “ribs” inside.

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➔ **Early in the** process the Fitch team decided the brand's look should be somewhat sinister. So instead of marketing the mouse under the client's name — kārna LLC — they chose the name Razer. Here they explored several type approaches, looking for an edgy, aggressive effect.

➔ **In the final** logotype, slash marks suggest ferocity, and offsetting the cut letters slightly gives them a fast-action look.

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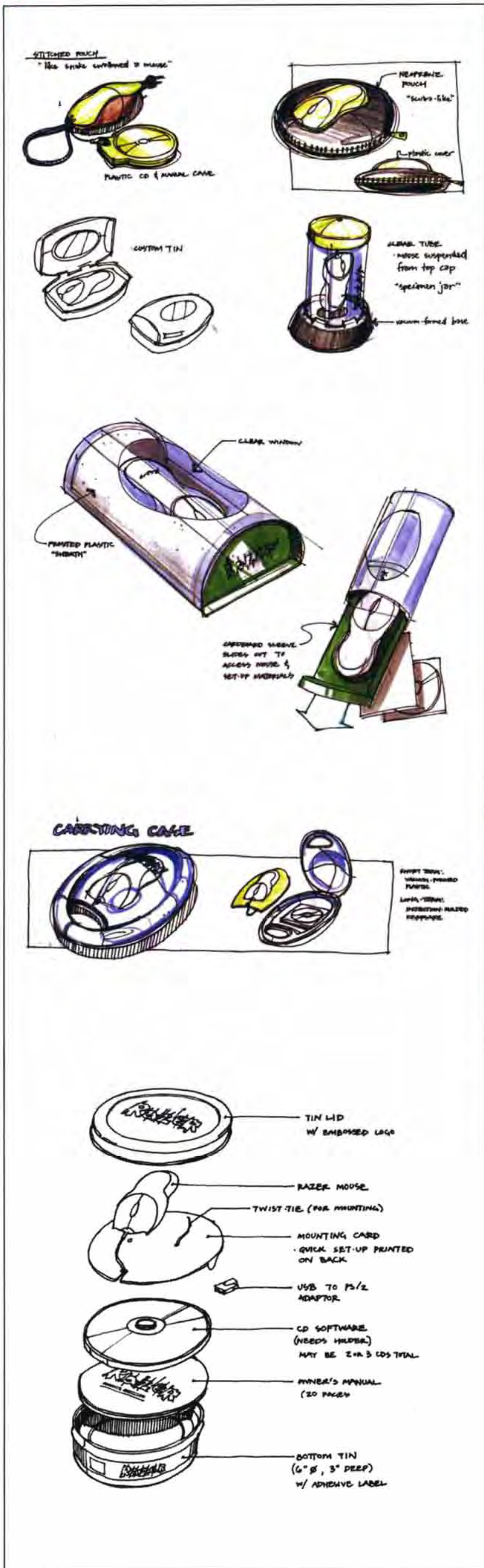


➔ **While the** company is Razer, the product line was named after the boomslang snake, and Fitch developed an interlocking snake logo, influenced by tattoo art.

➔ **To demonstrate** that Razer was unlike any other company in the field, Fitch took an expressive — and expensive — approach to the stationery, embossing the letterhead and designing a distinctive metal business card.

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◀ **With every** element in the identity, Fitch kept the specific needs of the target audience in mind. A tournament-level gamer takes his own mouse to the competition, so in these early sketches, the designers explored packaging that could double as a traveling case.

▶ **The final** package, a sturdy tin, serves a secondary purpose: It works as a product ad when users carry the tin into competition.

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Initially, the mouse was sold only online. When the client expanded into retail outlets, Fitch developed a box that would stand out on store shelves — but the tin was such a successful component of the brand that Fitch included it in the retail package.

Since the Razer website (www.razerzone.com) served as the primary sales tool, the Fitch team created a site that explained the product in-depth and allowed for one-click purchasing.

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The user interface screen demonstrates the mouse's manual controls and explains the speed/sensitivity adjustments. Gamers can link directly to the Razer website from the interface screen as well.