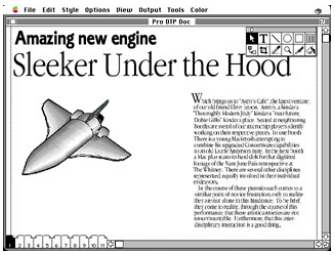
FEATURE: Space Shuttle Launcher

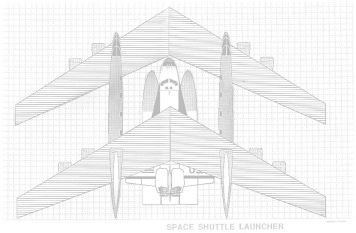
Remember that time in your younger days when you followed a music band, or had a goofy idea, started that fanzine, maybe even dressed for cosplay... then you get on with life? Except… years later you find those stanzas & sketches you shared are firing-up wacky new social movements and taking ideas farther than you ever did, now spawning a growing public agitation and flexing money enough to threaten the Olde Ways with revolution?
That is Richard Branson flying SpaceshipTwo, for me. Let me explain.

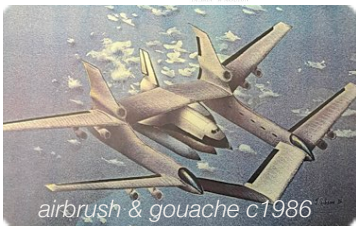
The Challenger space shuttle explosion inspired me to develop & campaign NASA promoting local municipal space-ports via safer, lower-energy, catamaran-lifted, winged space-vehicles: finally manifested later in XXIst century by Virgin Galactic.
While studying architecture at Tulane I found the mentorship of professor William Mouton, a creative engineer with fantastic projects splashed across magazine covers. Tuning the NASA channel I watched space shuttle Columbia explode live and was not surprised when he called later that day for brainstorming. Gathering that Saturday at his French Quarter offices we talked about what might be done differently, better, and listed out notions we collectively understood, political to technical, finance to ecologic, on into a late day... and into this future. I enjoy teams and group dynamics, but rarely enjoyed the creative flow-state of that day. In the gloom of this awful event our days became charged and crackling with potential.

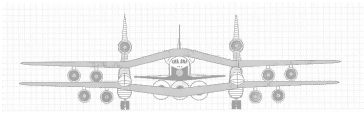


Apple Creative Services wondered at the wealth of exotic Shuttle content brought to the new OS feature simulation. See how flying cars get wings?

The catamaran was Bill's idea pointing at Yeager's X-series flight model of the 1950's eventually focusing on catamaran Lightning-series WWII fighter frames as more load-stable than Yeager's. Starting with the weight distribution, we looked at various stresses and issues, finally deciding a gravity release was simplest fail- safe way to lift & separate volatile gear operating at fantastic speeds. Pre-internet, I conjured an airbrushed concept while Bill did the heavier math basically arguing for a modified Boeing 747 catamaran to lift the original Shuttle. Seeing current industrial sized Statoliner go through it's touch-n-go's shows how close-yet-far we were. Bill was an engineering visionary who showed me how to reduce complexity for clarity and value of perceptive clarity, then ways to scale that essence into a reach for the stars.
In the end, NASA remained dysfunctional and we got nowhere.

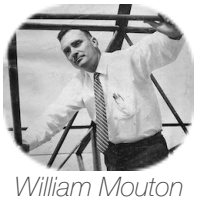






Success has a Thousand Fathers while Failure is an Orphan.
Bill was often on covers of Popular Mechanics and Science magazines and this opened doors for two years pitching our great plan to a demoralized catatonic NASA. This is why driven visionaries like Burt Rutan left NASA to chase X-Prizes. I would never take away what Rutan and his Scalar crews built and thrill with every run down the tarmac. Likewise, the glad-handing pitchman & relentless sales-dog, Richard Branson, deserves kudos for convincing enough people to mash-up enough money to manifest our wacky dream.

William Mouton was a music loving cajun who would cheer hurling red convertibles across our system, love these new rockets with wings, and our growing budgets for lunar bases. I was just part of the first torch pass, talking about municipal space ports and public access architecture. I still thrill seeing Astrolaunch and Virgin touch-n-go's and feel my hand moving humanity a little further along a sane pathway to the stars.



William Mouton