

CHRIS ROWEN, PH.D.
PRESIDENT AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
TENSILICA, INC.



Dr. Chris Rowen is the founder, president and chief executive officer of Tensilica, Inc., the inventor of a new kind of microprocessor core and design methodology that solves the overwhelming technical and economical challenges associated with Moore's Law. Using Tensilica's approach, customers today are achieving a dramatic return on their investment that would not be possible using traditional semiconductor design approaches. This fulfills the vision Chris had when he founded Tensilica in 1997.

From his early days as a bright and driven physics major at Harvard University, Chris has always had a passion for innovation. Right out of college he plunged into leading-edge technology development at Intel in the late 1970s. There, he learned how semiconductor scaling was starting to drive the electronics universe. His passion drove him to pursue a doctorate degree in electrical engineering from Stanford University in the early 1980s – a decision that would soon change the course of his life and the semiconductor industry.

At Stanford, Chris met a young assistant professor, John Hennessy, who was forming a group to study microprocessor architectures. John went on to become one of the most prominent computer architects of the last two decades and president of Stanford University. As part of his research team, Chris helped co-develop a concept commonly called Reduced Instruction Set Computing (RISC). The project formed the basis for a new company, called MIPS, which Chris helped to found in 1984, and for Chris' early work in the study of automated logic synthesis.

Filling a variety of roles, he soon became vice president of microprocessor development, until MIPS was acquired by Silicon Graphics in 1992. Chris was presented with the opportunity to run MIPS in Europe, becoming a kind of Silicon Graphics European CTO and market development leader for graphics, supercomputing and the Internet in the mid 1990s.

In 1996, Chris moved back to California to become general manager of the Design Reuse Group at Synopsys in the early days of system-on-chip (SOC). He led Synopsys' definition of products and strategies for large-scale intellectual property blocks and design reuse tools. This experience helped him realize the limitations of the current hardware-only oriented EDA mindset and the shortcomings of existing embedded processor cores for SOC design.

Deciding to explore the potential for a new type of processor on his own, he left Synopsys and set up shop in his library at home. Out of this came the realization that a new form of processor – the configurable processor – held the potential to fundamentally change the way complex SOCs are designed. By providing tools that automate and speed the design of configurable processors, he believed he could fundamentally change the way SOCs are designed. This was the genesis for Tensilica.

Today Tensilica's automated processor-generation technology has been successful in driving the trend toward using multiple processors on a chip. Its Xtensa configurable processors are licensed by more than 70 of the industry's leading semiconductor and systems companies. Under Chris' guidance, the company's technology is moving the industry down a path of achieving greater flexibility, value, and ROI in the semiconductor business.