





Subject N°4  
In the late Seventies  
something unex-  
pected appeared on  
the optician display  
shelves around the  
world. And it was  
asked for by name.

**Cazal**

Essay by Purienne / Interview Meike Mai

„What’s the use of another  
non-provocative range of  
sunglasses that appeals to  
everyone..?“

That’s of absolutely  
no interest to me

**(Ca)ri (Zal)loni**

Head of Design/Cazal



Cari Zalloni (71), born Greek with Italo-Austrian roots. Dropped his chemistry course in favour of Design at the Vienna Academy. Started working independently as a designer in 1962. Launched his first Glasses Collection in 1975. Currently heads up a 5 man design team at his unassuming Munich Studio. Designs mostly at his country estate near Graz, Austria.

It was in 1999 somewhere on the outskirts of London that I first spotted a pair of Cazals nonchalantly sitting amongst a window display of modern rubbish. This was shortly after being fired for co-inventing the Volcano (a 'mountain of ice-cream') at the Empire Ben&Jerry's on Leicester. A slightly retarded sales person mumbles, "£120.." Misconception on my part. Somehow I thought these belong on the faces of young virtually broke struggling artists, such as myself.

"There", said my girlfriend on my birthday in her monotone voice, as she handed me a grey leather box with a silver signature. Instantly recognisable. Oh these. Did I mention them?

At no point did I give it much thought that 'Cazal' is in fact one man: Cari Zalloni. Some supercool nutcase wearing his cap the wrong way round and smoking a pipe while break-dancing? Not quite. A calm and collected fuzzy bear type who likes jazz and walking his dog. A simple, yet provocative man with dedication, ideas and energy - as is often the formula with visionary types.

Long before cool was rule, this guy decided to ignore the market research reports and create a product so unique, 'you can recognise it from the other side of the street'. Sure, these specs are a bit on the weirdo side of the scale in their oversized and angular appearance, but they do make you feel proud to be a member of Team Unrestrained Experimentalism.

# Cari Zalloni on making success visible and scribbling on small pieces of paper before brunch.

Words Purienne/Interview Meike Mai/Translation from German Camen Scholle

**Why are your designs from the 70s still so strongly influential today?** "They were different then; and they are still different now. Expressions such as 'mainstream' were nonexistent when I began working as an industrial designer. Designers spearheaded the development of products, which the avant-garde bought, in order to rise above the masses.

The 60s and 70s weren't as saturated. People were hungry for the new. One was prompted to make one's success visible in one's lifestyle. Designer pieces was one way of doing that. Because Cazal couldn't afford extensive marketing, the products needed to speak for themselves. "We need sunglasses that one can recognise from the other side of the street!" This was our motto."

Celebs (or as I prefer: recognised artistic talent) approved of this strong vision. And as is still the case today, as soon as something is easily recognisable, especially foreign status symbols, and becomes popular with them celebs, the label crazy ghetto kids gotto go all city. Run DMC made the quadrangular Model 607 into a ghetto superstar and soon the "Cazzy" reached cult status in the young HipHop scene.

HipHopsters not exactly coming from old money and some of them rhymes really sucking ass, jealousy was on the menu and some wack shit went down. In Philly two homies had a wrap over a pair of Cazzys in the subway. Death. Another dispute in the Bronx. A pair of Cazzys. A copper. You've guessed it. Blood on the dancefloor.

By now the secret was out and most cool kids growing up in the 80s were onto these. The brand achieved a legendary if not a notorious reputation. Today glitzy HipHop stars such as 50 Cent are well aware of the brands glamour and history when paying up to £1000.50 for a pair.

**Were you surprised by the murders in connection with your sunglasses?** "I was more shocked by the fact that some assumed these occurrences were a kind of marketing trick. The bad boy image of Cazals never really bothered me though. Actually I was quite pleased when a pair of Cazzys appeared in Micheal Jackson's 'Bad' video!"

**So does that make you bad?** I am a Jazz fan. Jazz was the protest of my youth. HipHop is also

an attitude of protest and early Rap often reference Jazz elements. But HipHop somewhat collides with the marketing goals of Cazal. Our target-market has always been "celebrated people". Actors. Hollywood. Cazals as an individualist status symbol".

It seems that at some point in the early 90s, Cazal became a bit of a ghost brand with celebrated elderly German women slicing a greedy slice of the sales pie. Naturally there was the occasional independent discovery by stylistic lone rangers (cough). But it was Gwen Stefani popping up in Cazals that offered the brand a much needed sweet escape from filling prescriptions; reaffirming them as the creators of special worlds once more.

**Where do you get your ideas from?**

"Nature. Architecture. Literature. Design magazines, Interior design, fashion, social science. The magazines are piled high on my desk. And of course my European lifestyle. I have lived in places where an extroverted lifestyle was normal, like Italy and Greece. In Germany this is easily seen as opulent, even though its only a striking form of independence."

**Who inspires you?**

"The silent master of design from Finland, Tapio Wirkkala was one of my most important role models for a long time. I also admired the organic designs of Ross Lovegrove and Luigi Colani. They emulate the shapes of Nature in their work. I feel that the innovative Ora Ito has many parallels to my history of development."

**Could you reveal your working process to us?**

"In the mornings, on the first floor, I scribble my ideas on small bits of paper; this is the actual creative process. Just before brunch I head for my studio on the ground floor where I delegate the individual projects to my designers. The technical drawings are then passed on to the model maker."

**You just turned 71. No Plans for retirement then?** "Being too old for design' is a fallacy based on a misconception, that designers supposedly reached the bottom of their 'ideas-barnel'. But the exact opposite is fact; namely the constant accumulation of experience, which facilitates creativity in the first place. Any kind of occupational or creative standstill is beyond my conception."