

# SAME SAME BUT DIFFERENT

Katharina Schlager for Cazal

photo HILDE VAN MAS



Iconic eyewear brand CAZAL has appointed a new creative director: Katharina Schlager is taking over the wheel. The designer hailing from the Austrian city of Graz is well-known in the eyewear industry after spending years in charge of *Andy Wolf's* brand DNA. While the move may have surprised some eyewear insiders, it makes sense from CAZAL's perspective. With her progressive edge, Schlager is predestined to continue the innovative and high-profile aesthetic cultivated by CAZAL founder Cari Zalloni in the here and now. SPECTR talked to Katharina Schlager about her motivation and future plans for CAZAL.

*A different kind of interview portrait shot: Katharina Schlager is now the Creative Head at iconic brand CAZAL.*

FIND & TRY-ON  
CAZAL  
AT FAVRSPECS.COM

**Hello Katharina, seeing you wearing CAZAL glasses is a welcome surprise. What exactly does your new role entail?**

A few weeks ago, I was appointed CEO and Creative Director working next to Klaus Lippert who is in charge of finances and operations.

**So you're also responsible for all things eyewear design?**

Yes, this will be my main focus next to many other aspects. Leading a brand like CAZAL into the future presents countless opportunities and challenges all at the same time. You need to proceed with care, as the brand has been around for some time now. That goes for designs just as much as the values engrained in our company culture.

**Previously, you have exerted a strong influence on the designs at *Andy Wolf*. Is it even possible to replicate this kind of commitment at a new brand?**

It's a little bit like falling in love for the second time. The passion is just the same as the first time around, but you are more aware about the entire experience. You're ready to fully commit to the whole thing. It's a wonderful feeling and an opportunity for which I'm very grateful. Everyone who knows me will attest that I don't do things halfway and that I thrive on challenges like these. Live is constant development. For myself just as much as CAZAL as a brand.

**The brand's founder, Cari Zalloni, without a doubt ranges among the most influential eyewear designers of all time. Have you ever had the chance to meet him in person?**

Yes, we actually did meet at one time. It was a chance encounter. He lived in the Steiermark region, very close to where I was born. Back then, he commended me on my bravery and consistency. This was during the first years of *Andy Wolf*, so coming from him, these words meant a lot to me.

**On that note, how would you describe his signature design style?**

His designs were uncompromising and far ahead of their time. He always said you need to be able to see a CAZAL from all the way across the street, which he obviously achieved.

**Indeed. Now, how about your own design philosophy compared to Cari's?**

Without sounding aloft, Cari and I are very similar in our approach. I love corners and edges and bold designs. I see eyewear as a statement. As something that makes people more beautiful. Because despite all their functionality, glasses are jewelry. This has remained a constant since Cari Zalloni and his penchant for gold.

**What does CAZAL mean to you?**

I am trying to retain an outside view for as long as possible. From that vantage point, I see a brand with a big past, but just as big of a future. Cari Zalloni has created iconic styles, worn by brave and self-confident people.

**In how far does this 'outside perspective' prove useful in your work?**

The CAZAL myth is kept alive by people who wear our glasses. That's why we need to keep the interior and exterior view of the brand closely aligned. The brand and its wearers are connected by a similar mindset: It's about eyewear made by strong personali-

ties, for strong personalities.

**Viewed from the outside, the *Iconic Styles* are rather prominent, celebrated by a large fan base. What's your take on these coveted collector's items?**

These are icons of design history. There's a reason why they are exhibited in Munich's Pinakothek museum and possibly also in New York soon. What Cari has been able to create is timeless and already way beyond questions of personal taste.

**Will you keep catering to these collector's circles in the future?**

By all means. The world of designs would lose some of its luster without these designs.

**But there is obviously a large discrepancy between regular CAZAL customers and these collectors. At the same time, the brand is able to bridge the gap successfully. How so?**

This without a doubt represents one of the biggest challenges for the brand. Our target group is currently divided into two. But what both groups share is a love for bold designs. This can be the starting point for uniting these two halves at some point.

**How would that be possible?**

CAZAL is a brand with a strong history. It did not emerge from the drawing board, like many other brands. This history needs to be preserved as a fundamental part of our DNA. So for me it's more about adding on that subtracting. It's about moving forward without forgetting the roots.

**What will be the impact on the brand's position?**

Like I said: CAZAL created eyewear for personalities, eyewear with corners and edges. That's not about to change any time soon. Just the opposite. We will continue to emphasize these corners and edges even more strongly, all without forgetting about wearability and the current zeitgeist.

**Do you already have ideas for your first collection?**

Yes, there are actually concrete ideas already. But despite my experience and intuitive sense for design, I'm not looking to move ahead without the help of our customers, retailers, and colleagues.

**In how far do you receive help from them?**

I want to know they're by my side as allies and keep them involved in this creative process. After all, a great job is always the result of a relationship – and not the kind in which one side tells the other, what's good for them. At the end of the day, it boils down to subjective qualities. Taste, as they used to call it back in the day.

**Can you already hint at a direction you're pursuing with your new designs?**

Only this much: It surely will not get boring and never adapted to the status quo.

**Your first great outing in your role at CAZAL in front of a large audience will be at opti in Munich. What can we expect?**

Let's suffice it to say that some folks are going to be surprised. We're not going to reinvent CAZAL. Because we don't have to. But we will provide a preview of what modern-day interpretations of strong designs can look like and where our journey is headed. Taking it gently, but also with the stringent consistency required to live up to a brand like CAZAL.

**Thank you, Katharina.** ▽