



Lifestyle Fashion and Style

By Bel Jacobs - 12th July, 2012



Ron Arad: I don't want to be labelled, except as a genius

Influential designer Ron Arad talks to Metro about the genesis of his company and how his foray into eyewear has left him able to spot any brand of sunglasses a mile away.



Ron Arad is one of today's most influential designers. His work encompasses large-scale architectural projects such as the Design Museum in Holon, Israel, and the Médiacité Shopping Centre in Liege, Belgium.

It also includes a plethora of smaller iconic pieces: all manner of shifting, moving metal chairs; a stainless steel ping pong table; the Bookworm bookshelf; Lolita, a chandelier made of 1,050 LED lights embedded within 2,100 Swarovski crystals. Now, Arad launches eyewear that reconceives the genre.

So when I arrive at Arad's studio in a dilapidated Kentish Town mews, complete with cobbles and rusting Fiat, it's difficult to marry the place with the invention that has come out of it. Only when you see the extravagant curves peeling out of the second storey and negotiate the wood floor that curls vertiginously upwards do you recognise the master's voice.

Arad comes to greet me, a slightly shambolic figure topped by his now-legendary hat. With its wide brim, it looks a little like a bonnet, something that Jemima Puddleduck might wear - except that it has been sculpted in seamless Italian black felt.





Arad designed it for himself in 2000, when Alessi picked it up and apparently has never taken it off since. Certainly, it looks well worn. The hat now sells exclusively in the gift shop at MoMA, which hosted Arad's 2009 'No Discipline' exhibition.

We sit at his desk, an explosion of objets and technology, of which Arad is very fond, and, curiously, a Sharp End Cat pencil sharpener. Arad speaks slowly, with long, thoughtful pauses. There is a definite twinkle in his eyes. He is lightly, mischievously anarchic - and he famously does not like to be pigeon-holed.

'No, I do not want to be labelled - unless it is genius, fantastic, the best. That kind of label I don't mind,' he grins. 'I don't like to be told what to do and, more than that, what not to do - that, to be taken seriously as an architect, I should not be a successful furniture designer, for example.' Purists will balk then at this latest venture. Apart from the hat, PQ eyewear is Arad's first foray into fashion, with all its trends and seasons. Needless to say, trends and seasons are not important to Arad. 'Of course, you have to show new stuff,' he shrugs. 'Otherwise, it would be boring. We have to feed the machine.'



'But we're not saying "the 80s are back again" or "black is very good this year",' he adds. 'This is not us. I think, sometimes, in the fashion world, there are archetypes everyone plays with, like in jeans. Often, the biggest difference between two pairs of jeans is the label stitched on the bum.' Arad and his team did everything: created the company, invented the name and made the glasses. 'We started from the ground up,' he says. The net, as it always is now, was a big resource - if only to react against. 'You go to the net and you think, "Why didn't anyone think of this before? Is it possible to do?"'

Arad has become a reluctant expert in eyewear and can now identify a make at 40 paces. 'I see someone wearing glasses and, without wanting to, I know what brand he is wearing,' he says, ruefully. 'It is a disease.'

PQ is peppered with touches that will send fans into a spin. The A-frame - an easily adjusted A-shaped wire structure above the nose - is key. Frames are nutless and boltless; the wire that forms the A also forms invisible hinges, so the glasses close effortlessly when they're taken off. Crafted from titanium and aluminium, the eyewear is ridiculously light and comfortable, subtly but breathtakingly modern.

The collection also offers one-piece fram

es with interlinked hinges inspired by vertebrae. Uninterrupted by formal hinges, the arms fold inwards freely but will not open outwards beyond the perfect width for the head. There are hints of cats' eye shapes, breezes of Wayfarers, terminology that eyewear aficionado will recognise, but the end result is all Arad.





In many respects, says Arad, PQ Eyewear was like any other project. 'Whatever you do, you have to imagine how it is going to be used.' The difference lies in the concept of personal wearability: all Arad's work interacts with people in some way, but none as intimately as sunglasses.

'When you sit on a chair, it doesn't reflect anything about your personality,' says Arad. 'But you are sitting on chairs you didn't choose. I can't see a situation where you are wearing eyewear you didn't choose. So, yes, in eyewear, there is the belief that what you do is an extension of what you think your personality is. Very few people choose what they wear by accident. Even the most boring outfit is by choice.'

Is the 'A' in the A-frame for Arad, I ask? 'The "A" is for any association you care to bring to it,' he glints. 'Maybe it is for anarchy or for androgynous. There is a type of building called the "A frame". I spell my last name with an "A". It wasn't intentional.'

Later, Arad asks his assistant to take me down to the showroom. In a low-ceilinged building is one of Arad's most famous works: the Rod Gomli chair, a homage to his friend Antony Gormley, a negative impression of an invisible sleeper, made from individual metal rods.

Anna tells me that Robert de Niro once lay on it. I leap on immediately. And, like the eyewear, it is profoundly comfortable, as if the body it has been sculpted to is mine and mine alone. Of all his products, Arad's smallest may yet have the widest reach.

PQ Eyewear designed by Ron Arad available at Mallon+Taub: www.mallonandtaub.com